PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

(HANSARD)

SIXTH SERIES—VOLUME 327

HOUSE OF COMMONS

OFFICIAL REPORT

SECOND SESSION OF THE FIFTY-SECOND PARLIAMENT
OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN
AND NORTHERN IRELAND
FORTY-SEVENTH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SESSION 1998–99

COMPRISING PERIOD
8 March—19 March 1999

£70

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8 March 1999

THE PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

IN THE SECOND SESSION OF THE FIFTY-SECOND PARLIAMENT OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND
[WHICH OPENED 7 MAY 1997]

FORTY-EIGHTH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SIXTH SERIES **VOLUME 327**

FIFTH VOLUME OF SESSION 1998–99

House of Commons

Monday 8 March 1999

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

SOCIAL SECURITY

The Secretary of State was asked—

Pensioners (Income Support)

1. **Mr. John Grogan** (Selby): If he will make a statement about the pilot study carried out by his Department in York to encourage take-up of income support by pensioners. [73038]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Hugh Bayley): As a Back-Bench Member for the City of York, I welcomed the Government's decision to pilot take-up activity in York. The outcome of a pilot in York, and in the eight other locations, is being analysed. Until the full evaluation is complete, the results will not be meaningful, and it would be premature to comment.

Mr. Grogan: Given that official estimates suggest that at least 500,000 pensioners do not claim the income support to which they are entitled, how many pensioners in York and North Yorkshire does my hon. Friend estimate will be eligible for the Government's new minimum income guarantee when it becomes effective in April, and what plans does he have to use publicity to encourage them to claim their entitlement?

Mr. Bayley: I thank my hon. Friend for that question. When it is introduced, a minimum income guarantee will prove a real boon to the poorest pensioners, providing a minimum of £75 a week for single pensioners and £116.60 for couples. We estimate that approximately 4,000 pensioners will benefit from the minimum income guarantee in the York local authority district, and about 14,500 in North Yorkshire.

Means-tested Benefits

2. **Mr. Peter Viggers** (Gosport): What proportion of total payments made by his Department are means-tested. [73039]

The Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Alistair Darling): The proportion of total social security expenditure going on means-tested benefits was 34 per cent. in 1997–98. In 1979, it was 16 per cent.

Mr. Viggers: Does the Secretary of State agree that means-tested benefits are much more expensive to administer than universal benefits and can be grossly unfair? Is it not a fact that someone who has saved for his or her retirement can actually be worse off than someone who has made no provision and who will get the benefit of the minimum income guarantee, together with housing benefits and council tax benefit? How can he possibly begin to justify that to decent and respectable people who want to remain independent?

Mr. Darling: If means-tested benefits are unfair, they were as unfair in 1979 as they are now. The hon. Gentleman supported the previous Government when they doubled the number of means-tested benefits.

When we came into office, we found that the disparity in income had grown dramatically over 18 years, and we deliberately set about doing far more for poorer people—

by introducing the working families tax credit, the disability income guarantee, the minimum income guarantee for pensioners and other measures. We have also increased universal benefits, such as child benefit, and our pensions proposals are designed to ensure that we end one of the great scandals of today—that more than a third of pensioners are likely to rely on income-related benefits when they retire. We aim to lift those people out of that position.

The Government are taking action across the board, but I do not agree that means-tested benefits are inherently wrong. They do a great deal to help the poorest people in our society.

Mr. Derek Twigg (Halton): Is my right hon. Friend aware that, when the Tories talk about means-tested benefits, my constituents live in fear that they really want to talk about cutting benefits and attacking people in poverty? Is not the difference between the parties that, when the Labour party talks about means-testing, we talk about ensuring that those most in need get the benefits that they deserve?

Mr. Darling: The working families tax credit has a very flat taper; it is designed to help people who would not otherwise receive help, and to make work pay. We are determined to do—as we said that we would in our manifesto—far more to help the poorest pensioners, some of whom did very badly in the previous 18 years. Unlike the Conservative party, we are genuinely anxious to tackle not just the immediate effects of poverty but, above all, the causes of poverty, into which far too many people have fallen.

Mr. Quentin Davies (Grantham and Stamford): Is it not both unreasonable and thoroughly unfair that, according to the Government's proposals, the only pensioners who can look forward to their earnings in retirement being linked to average earnings will be those who qualify for income support—for the Government's so-called minimum income guarantee? Under the Government's proposals, nobody who has earned an occupational pension or a state retirement pension by contributing to the national insurance system for 40 years can dream of that measure of protection. Are not the Government thoroughly ashamed that, after all the rhetoric of the last Parliament and all the promises delivered by hundreds of Labour candidates before the general election, no move at all has been made to deliver on the promise to link the state retirement pension to earnings?

Mr. Darling: It is my recollection that the Conservative Government broke the earnings link with pensions in 1981, and we certainly made it very clear that we were not proposing to restore the earnings link with pensions. Instead, we have done two things. We have made proposals to put the long-term basis of pensions on a proper footing, with a new state second pension that will help those on the lowest earnings and that is designed to ensure that someone who works for a lifetime and saves during that period need not rely on income support at the point at which they retire. Our other proposals are all designed to alleviate the poverty that we inherited among pensioners and others. Across the board, the Government are determined not only to deal with the effects of poverty but to mount a sustained attack on the causes of poverty by making work pay and helping others who are unable to work.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): Would not the best way of achieving my right hon. Friend's aim of fewer pensioners reliant on income support and other means-tested benefits be to raise the level of the basic pension? The Conservative party broke the earnings link in 1980. If it had been maintained, the basic pension next month would be not £66 but £90. Does my right hon. Friend agree that most of the pensioners who will not receive the guaranteed minimum income—between 400,000 and 700,000 of them—are those who say, "For all our lives we have never taken any handouts and we will not start now"? They would accept an increase if it were an entitlement and on the basic pension, but they will not take it if it is on income support because they perceive it as a handout. We have enough money—more than £6 billion—and the cost would be £3 billion. Why do we not go some way towards undoing the damage done by the Conservative Government and raise the basic minimum pension to £75 this year?

Mr. Darling: The cost of increasing the pension to £75 this year would be substantial. I point out to my hon. Friend that more than half of those who do not receive the minimum income guarantee have excess capital of more than £20,000. About 190,000 people have capital of more than £50,000. In our pension proposals, we ensured that we had a new system through the state second pension that would benefit those who are on lower earnings throughout their lifetime. Alongside that is the £2.5 billion package that we announced last summer. We make no bones about it: we decided that, rather than spread the sum available far more thinly—something that would not have helped some of the poorest pensioners about whom my hon. Friend and I are most concerned—we would give far more help to those on lower incomes.

If we increased the basic state pension to £75 a week, that would cost about £3 billion. I believe that it is far better to spend our money helping those pensioners who did least well over the preceding 18 years, as well as putting into law proposals that will ensure that the problem is not so acute in years to come.

Bereavement Benefits

3. **Mr. David Rendel** (Newbury): What steps he is taking to improve the financial position of the bereaved. [73040]

The Minister of State, Department of Social Security (Mr. Stephen Timms): The reforms in the Welfare Reform and Pensions Bill will provide specific help for the first time to widowers as well as widows. The new lump sum bereavement payment at £2,000 will be double the value of the existing widow's payment. Our aim is to concentrate help where and when it is most needed at the time immediately following bereavement and on those with children.

Mr. Rendel: I know that the Department received a letter from Captain Mongor pointing out that, as recently as September 1998, it wrote telling him that his widow would get the full additional pension even if he died after

she was aged 55, something that will not happen until the year 2004. Given that the Government have rightly insisted on the private sector compensating people who have been mis-sold private pensions, what will the Government do to compensate people such as Captain Mongor—there may be millions of them—who have been given false information by the Department about what would happen to their widows and the additional pensions that their widows are due to get?

Mr. Timms: This is another measure inherited from the previous Government. Many people knew about the change and made plans accordingly, but it is the case that Department of Social Security leaflets were not updated until 1996. We are investigating why that was so. I can tell the House that we shall consider a claim for compensation from anyone who can establish that he or she received advice that did not reflect the change from April 2000 and, as a result, acted to their detriment. We shall be announcing further details shortly.

Mr. Frank Field (Birkenhead): One promise in "New Contract for Welfare", is that

"people can have greater confidence that they will get proper protection in return for the contributions they make."

How does my hon. Friend square that with the proposals to strip out coverage for widows benefits, even though many people have paid 30 years' contributions for that cover?

Mr. Timms: The coverage is being extended to widowers. It will be a new contributory benefit for widowers. Those with children will continue to receive non-means-tested help until the youngest child for whom they are responsible ceases full-time education. The income support safety net will be in place for those who are older than 55 when the measures are introduced and who are widowed in the following five years. We are concentrating help—I think that my right hon. Friend will support this—on those who at the time need it most.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): Further to the highly pertinent inquiry from the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field), how does the Minister seriously expect to eradicate the something-for-nothing culture if he continues to pursue his reform of widows pensions in such a way as completely to undermine the contributory principle and to leave worse off no fewer than 250,000 women the length and breadth of the United Kingdom?

Mr. Timms: I have made the point that there is a new contributory benefit for widowers. There has been no such measure before; we are introducing one. It is time-limited, but not means-tested. All widows will receive non-means-tested benefit for six months to help during the transition, and those with children will continue to receive non-means-tested help until the youngest child ceases full-time education. We are modernising the system. Now, seven in 10 married women are in work. When the original system was introduced, the proportion was very much lower. We must change the system to reflect the changing times in which we live.

Mr. Tony McNulty (Harrow, East): Can my hon. Friend confirm that, for the first time, widows and widowers will get comprehensive assistance via the single gateway and special advisers to help them through the maze of the benefit system? Will my hon. Friend comment on a second issue: if it is so crucial to the Liberals that recently bereaved widows are looked after, why is there no provision for that in their Budget, which was issued this morning?

Mr. Timms: My hon. Friend makes an interesting point. I looked carefully through the documents issued this morning by the Liberal Democrats to see whether the matter was dealt with there. My hon. Friend is right—it is not. He is also right about the extra help that we are making available through the single work-focused gateway. That is an extremely important change, which will help many thousands of people. It is important for the House to know, too, that we are doubling the lump sum that will be payable to both widows and widowers on bereavement.

New Deal (Lone Parents)

4. **Mr. Graham Brady** (Altrincham and Sale, West): If he will make a statement on the progress of the new deal for lone parents. [73041]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Angela Eagle): The new deal for lone parents is providing active support to help lone parents to move into work. As of 29 January, more than 163,000 initial letters have been issued; more than 39,000 lone parents have attended interviews and, of those, 32,000 have agreed to participate in the programme; and more than 6,000 jobs have been obtained by lone parents.

Mr. Brady: I thank the Minister for that interesting response. On 29 April last year, when the right hon. Member for Camberwell and Peckham (Ms Harman) appeared before the Select Committee on Education and Employment, some 6 per cent. of those who received letters were finding work. The right hon. Lady told me on that occasion that the number was increasing exponentially. I understand from the latest figures that 3.8 per cent. of those receiving letters are finding work. Perhaps the right hon. Lady meant that the number was decreasing exponentially. In any case, do not the figures demonstrate that the scheme is a £200 million failure that needs urgent review?

Angela Eagle: No. The hon. Gentleman has been doing rather odd mathematics. Why divide the number of letters issued by the number of jobs obtained? That seems a meaningless calculation. The fact is that the Government are doing something to help lone parents to get back into work. The previous Government did nothing but scapegoat them.

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney, North and Stoke Newington): Does the Minister share the concern of a number of organisations that represent single parents about the proposal in the Welfare Reform and Pensions Bill that single parents should be subjected to a series of compulsory interviews? Does she agree that it is no business of a Labour Government to imply or suggest that the only way for mothers with children under five to improve their lot is to go out to work?

Angela Eagle: I do not share that concern, because I think that it is based on a misunderstanding of the single

work focus gateway proposals. No mother of children under five would be made to attend an interview unless she were applying for extra benefits. The idea of the interview is to assist her in getting into work or becoming more employable for when she decides that it is right for her to take up work. There will be no compulsion to act, or to look for a job, as a result of the interview. We hope that the interviews will help the 1.8 million children who are being raised on income support in poverty, and will assist the 1.6 million lone parents to improve their lot, enabling them to look after their children and move off benefit into work, so that they can give their children much better chances in life.

Mr. Eric Pickles (Brentwood and Ongar): If the calculation is as meaningless as the Minister suggests, she should understand that it is the Government's calculation. What is meaningless is the amount of wasted money that has gone on the scheme—£200 million, which is a cost of £15,000 a job. The simple truth is that those who wanted to get a job have got one, which is why the figure has gone down from 7 to 3.8 per cent. Does she understand that the only reason why this flagship policy has not sunk without trace is that there has never been sufficient water under it to allow it to float?

Angela Eagle: One of the largest causes of poverty among our children—something that surely concerns the hon. Gentleman—is the fact that 60 per cent. of lone parent households are workless. We are trying to tackle the problem of workless households by giving lone parents the chance to get back into work so that they can provide for their children at much higher levels of income than income support could ever give them. That is what we are doing; the Tory record is one of total neglect and scapegoating.

We are trying to do something to get lone parents back into work. The new deal for lone parents will be properly assessed in the autumn and there will be an independent assessment of how it is working. We shall look at how it is doing then. I do not like taking lectures from a member of a party that, when it was in office, did absolutely nothing but condemn lone parents to a lifetime on benefit.

Madam Speaker: I call Mr. Brazier.

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): Thank you, Madam Speaker. The answer to the—I am sorry, Question 5.

Single Gateway

5. **Mr. Julian Brazier** (Canterbury): If he will make a statement on progress towards introduction of the single gateway to benefit. [73042]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Angela Eagle): A seamless move from Question 4 to Question 5. Our plans for the introduction of the single work-focused gateway are on course.

Mr. Brazier: The answer to an earlier question established that the voluntary principle is doing nothing to the new deal. What is the point in introducing compulsory gateway interviews for single parents and other categories of people who are not compulsorily required to take a job? Is the whole mass of exemptions under clause 47 of the Welfare Reform and Pensions Bill a sign that the Government are starting to change their mind? How much will it all cost?

Angela Eagle: I wish that Conservative Members would not dismiss as nothing the 39,000 lone parents who have had an interview so far and nearly 30,000 people who have joined the new deal for lone parents, let alone the 6,262 lone parents who are in work as a result of the new deal. The idea of the single work-focused gateway is to give individual, tailored help to people who may have been away from the labour market for a long time and to give them a strategic direction so that they can plan, when their children are old enough, to get back into the labour market and support themselves and their children.

Mr. Andrew Dismore (Hendon): On Friday, I visited a project in Burnt Oak in my constituency, which is run by Hendon college and involves working with the older age group of unemployed people. One of the big complaints that came through to me from the clients and the staff at the project was the lack of a gateway for the older age group. Will my hon. Friend the Minister take that on board and make sure that we do the best that we possibly can for people in the older age group—they face all sorts of barriers, including age discrimination—and start to broaden the gateway?

Angela Eagle: My hon. Friend correctly identifies the fact that people appreciate having a personal adviser and individualised help in a confusing system of benefits and a difficult and fast-changing labour market. That is something that we have learned from the new deal, and we are anxious to extend it to the benefits system, where it will be widely welcomed.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green): Is not the reality that the Government are in a complete mess over their programme—[HON. MEMBERS: "Oh!"] They do not like it, but we have a gateway programme and the Bill is going through Parliament, although the Government still do not understand or admit how much that will cost. They set no targets for the increase in the number of jobs that they want to achieve. There are 1 million lone parents on income support, but there is no comment about how many of them the Government expect to get into work. We have heard about the £200 million cost of the new deal for lone parents, which is wasted, and that 3.8 per cent. of lone parents get into work, although nearly one fifth of them fall away from work after six months. Must not the Government now accept that they have no joined-up thinking in that regard? They have two programmes aimed at two groups, and they are failing. It is the Government who are doing nothing: they raise expectations, and then dash them by failing.

Angela Eagle: The single work-focused gateway is a pilot scheme. In fact, there will be 12 pilot schemes, to enable us to learn how best—

Mr. Eric Pickles (Brentwood and Ongar): Make it up as you go along.

Angela Eagle: We are not making it up as we go along; we are ensuring that the changes that we are to make will work, and can be properly costed and planned. That is responsible government.

The hon. Gentleman needs to understand this. We believe that benefit claimants, as well as those who have been unemployed and are taking advantage of the new deal, will find personal adviser interviews and individualised assistance beneficial. As I have said, the single work-focused gateway involves pilot schemes, which will take place in 12 different areas over the next two or three years, and we have set aside £80 million for the purpose. We will evaluate and assess the pilot schemes, and will then be able to tell the House how we can transform our benefit system into an active system that will help individuals, rather than just doling out money and leaving them floundering.

Minimum Pension Guarantee

6. **Mr. Bill Rammell** (Harlow): If he will make a statement on the review of the savings allowance in relation to the minimum pension guarantee. [73043]

11. **Sir Sydney Chapman** (Chipping Barnet): What assessment he has made of the effect of the introduction of a minimum pension guarantee on low earners' savings. [73048]

The Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Alistair Darling): We made clear in the pensions Green Paper that we want to look at options for changing the rules on the treatment of voluntary saving better to reward those who have saved for their retirement.

Mr. Rammell: I thank my right hon. Friend for his reply. I fully support the Government's policy of aiming support at the poorest pensioners in the initial stages of the current Parliament, and decry the selective amnesia of the Opposition. A huge expansion of means-tested benefits took place when they were in power; now, they have suddenly discovered that they have problems with that.

Does my right hon. Friend agree that there is a problem for pensioners with relatively few savings who feel that they have played by the rules, but who are now finding that those relatively small sums disbar them from additional state support? May I strongly urge the Government to take that factor into account in the review?

Mr. Darling: My hon. Friend has made two good points. First, I think that we all take with a pinch of salt some of what is now being said by the Conservative party, and what will be said in the "kitchen table" talks that it is introducing. Secondly, I have made it clear on a number of occasions that we need to ensure that someone who has saved, and has a modest amount of capital or income, will not be penalised on that account. As we made clear in the pensions Green Paper, we are determined to act.

Sir Sydney Chapman: Given the Secretary of State's acceptance that the introduction of a minimum pension guarantee will lead to a distinct disincentive for those earning below the average to save, and given that it will lead to a massive increase in means-testing and more dependency on the state, will the right hon. Gentleman have a quiet word with the Chancellor in the next 24 hours, to ensure that he addresses those very real problems?

Mr. Darling: I think that the hon. Gentleman was a Whip during much of the last Government, and he did nothing about the problems about which he now complains.

We recognise that there is a problem for pensioners with income and capital, and we are therefore determined to do something about it. In regard to the minimum income guarantee, we—unlike the Conservative party—recognise that there are many pensioners who are poor, and who need immediate help. The guarantee means that we are giving to the poorest pensioners real help, which many of them greatly appreciate and which, sadly, many of them greatly need.

Mr. Steve Webb (Northavon): I restate my support for the Government's decision to link the minimum income guarantee to earnings. However, does the Secretary of State accept that an anomaly is being created? The overall aim of the policy is to ensure that people reach retirement age with an income above the minimum income guarantee level, but, in written answers to me, he has suggested that they will be below that level within five years of retirement. As the guarantee rises in line with earnings, and all other pension incomes rise in line with prices, people could slip back down later in their retirement. Is the right hon. Gentleman concerned about that, and does he plan to do something about it?

Mr. Darling: I appreciate the fact that the hon. Gentleman—I assume that he speaks for the whole Liberal Democrat party on the issue—*[Interruption.]* Obviously not. I appreciate what he said. Most sensible commentators, and he is clearly one, recognise the value of linking the minimum income guarantee to earnings.

On the hon. Gentleman's substantive point, our object is to ensure that, during their lifetime, people save as much as they possibly can, so that they do not have to rely on income-related benefit. With people living longer—sometimes for 20 or 30 years after retirement—that means that there has to be substantial saving. One of the things that we are doing that will help people who can save but do not, is to ensure that they receive an annual pension statement, which will concentrate some people's minds in a way that has not happened.

Mr. Malcolm Wicks (Croydon, North): Only this morning, before coming to the House, I met a group of pensioners in Croydon. The main issue that they raised was the perceived unfairness of the position of those people who, for either income or capital reasons, were just above the means-tested income support level.

One elderly woman, a widow, said that she had put aside savings so that she could do repairs to her home, if those were necessary. Because of those savings, she was debarred from income support. I welcome what my right hon. Friend has said about the savings trap and our need to spring it. It cannot be right that those who are the most responsible and thrifty among the elderly population are penalised, rather than supported.

Mr. Darling: I appreciate my hon. Friend's point. Without wishing to labour the point, let me say that the

Government are considering how best to deal with that matter. The problem of people who are nearly poor is one that has concerned many of us for some considerable time, but I emphasise that, given the situation that we inherited, where there were many extremely poor pensioners, to do something quickly to help those most in need, it was necessary to introduce the minimum income guarantee, as well as the other measures that we have taken: free eye tests for pensioners, concessionary travel, winter fuel payments and so on. Taken together, those measures are a significant boost for pensioners, but I take the point that my hon. Friend makes.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green): Is it not a fact that the Secretary of State has put pensioners in an expensive mess? The very fact that he has to look at the savings trap shows that the Government blundered into the whole business of the minimum income guarantee without thinking through the effects of what they were about to do. It will lead to increasing dependency.

Let the Secretary of State ask himself what the Government have done for pensioners. When they first came in, they taxed £5 billion a year off pension holders, which means that pensioners will be up to 15 per cent. worse off on their incomes after retirement. Not only is the budget rising by £37 billion a year, but the Government's response to that is to increase dependency through the minimum income guarantee, increase the cost further and so increase the overall cost of welfare.

The Prime Minister promised to cut the cost and the Secretary of State is raising it. We have heard of dumbing down, but surely that is dumb government.

Mr. Darling: Discussion over the breakfast table in the household must be absolutely fascinating.

The Conservatives have to face up to two points. First, the income and capital rules have been there for some considerable time. In fact, they were there during the whole time that the Conservatives were in office, and they did nothing about them.

Secondly, if we had not changed the way in which pension provision is made for the future, one person in three who is now working would rely on income-related benefits—in other words, the means test that the hon. Gentleman complains about. What we have done is to ensure that, where people work throughout their life, they are rewarded by not having to rely on income-related benefits when they retire.

The minimum income guarantee was introduced to tackle a real problem: there are far too many poor pensioners. *[Interruption.]* One would think that the Conservative party—I know that Conservative Members have been told this in their new presentation—had arrived on the planet only last week. They were not only on the planet; they were in government for 18 years, during which time they did nothing for poorer pensioners.

I am more than happy to be judged on the fact that I am part of a Government who introduced the minimum income guarantee, reduced VAT on fuel, introduced free eye tests for pensioners and extended concessionary travel. The present Government are determined to do far more for pensioners—for whom the Conservative party did absolutely nothing.

Child Support Agency

7. **Mr. Denis MacShane** (Rotherham): What plans he has to reform the administration of the CSA. [73044]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Angela Eagle): The Green Paper published last year stated our proposals for radical reform of the discredited child support system. We also made it clear that we would be expecting the Child Support Agency to make substantial improvements before the reforms took effect. Considerable progress has already been made. Planned changes for the coming year include a much improved face-to-face service; simplification of the decision-making and appeals process; introduction of improved arrangements for dealing with the self-employed; and clearer and simpler communication.

Mr. MacShane: I welcome the Minister's reply. Does she agree with two main points on the CSA? First, since the agency was established six years ago, it has done nothing to slow the break-up of families, or the relentless rise in lone parenthood and school-age pregnancies—the three major by-products of the Conservative era. Secondly, perhaps the agency's greatest failure is the fact that the proportion of lone parents on benefit who receive maintenance from absent fathers is now no higher than it was in 1993.

I welcome the report in today's newspapers about lone parents on low incomes and in work keeping more of their child maintenance. Will the Government consider extending those arrangement to unemployed single mothers—they should be able to keep as much of their child maintenance as is equivalent to child benefit—and ring-fencing that maintenance in detachment of earnings orders, so that fathers understand that some of their money is going directly to their children and not to the Treasury?

Angela Eagle: Although my hon. Friend is right about the proportion of parents with care who are currently receiving maintenance, he must also understand that there has been a 60 per cent. increase in case load. We are expecting the case load for the CSA to pass the 1 million mark before the end of the year. Although it is much more effective than it was, it is saddled with a very difficult system of child maintenance assessment, which we are in the middle—via our Green Paper—of attempting to simplify. We shall, in due course, be introducing those changes.

I also thank my hon. Friend for noticing the announcements on a 100 per cent disregard for women lone parents who are receiving working families tax credit. The disregard should provide them with a huge incentive to go into work. I hope that my hon. Friend will also recognise that there is a £10 disregard for parents with care who are on benefit. Therefore, absent fathers can see that some of their maintenance money is going for the upkeep of their children.

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Mid-Sussex): Will the hon. Lady accept from me that improvements in how the CSA works are greatly to be welcomed? However, will she also agree that part of the problem for all our constituents is the inconsistency in the service that they receive from the CSA? Although the training programmes that have been established are undoubtedly yielding great benefits, will

she talk to the head of the CSA to determine what can be done to achieve, through training, greater and more skilful communication with our constituents—who often have to ring up and deal with the CSA while under great stress?

Angela Eagle: I agree with the hon. Gentleman that child maintenance is a very delicate, difficult and complex issue, and welcome his acknowledgement that the CSA is making strides in how it deals with the issue, particularly through greater telephone contact. We are just completing assessments of pilots on joint Benefits Agency-CSA work, which relies on tele-claiming. We have also allocated £12 million extra to improve the direct client service this year. Those improvements are now showing results.

As I told my hon. Friend the Member for Rotherham (Mr. MacShane), however, the CSA has a very difficult task in attempting to assess child maintenance using the very complex formula established in primary legislation. I do not believe that we shall make any real breakthrough until we have managed to change the formula, for which we shall require primary legislation.

Mr. Terry Rooney (Bradford, North): Will my hon. Friend confirm that the proposals in the Green Paper will cut off the dozens of escape routes in information flow that are exercised by absent parents and that proposals will also be made to alter dramatically the ratio of staff time spent on chasing that information to time spent on collection?

Angela Eagle: Yes. I believe that with a simpler assessment process the CSA will be able to change the current situation—90 per cent. of time spent on assessing maintenance and only 10 per cent. of time spent collecting it—to a more healthy state of affairs.

Older Pensioners

8. **Mr. Simon Hughes** (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): What plans he has for increasing assistance to older pensioners. [73045]

The Minister of State, Department of Social Security (Mr. Stephen Timms): The hon. Gentleman raises an important point. The minimum income guarantee is being set at a higher level for older pensioners. It will be £75 a week for a single pensioner just above retirement age, but £77.30 a week for a single pensioner aged 75 to 79 and £82.25 a week for a pensioner aged 80 or over.

Mr. Hughes: That is welcome. However, what would the Minister say to pensioners over 75 throughout the country who do not want to go through the means-testing process, those who cannot do so and those who discover that their small life savings or a small occupational pension would result in them getting no minimum income guarantee top-up, leaving them with no additional basic state pension? There is not a single paragraph in the Green Paper on older pensioners' entitlements. Does that mean that the Government have excluded once and for all increasing the basic state pension for older pensioners and are going to leave them with the 25p for the over 80s, which they regard as a simple insult?

Mr. Timms: I am aware of the proposals in the document produced this morning by the Liberal Democrats for higher rates of state pension for older pensioners. That would be an expensive measure that would provide no help to older pensioners already on income support, which cannot be right. We acknowledged in our election manifesto that there was a problem with the number of people who claim the minimum income guarantee. We have carried out pilot projects trying out ways to encourage benefit take-up among pensioners. When the evaluation is complete we shall learn the lessons for encouraging wider take-up. It is right to concentrate extra help on those who need it most.

Mr. Ian Davidson (Glasgow, Pollok): Is my hon. Friend aware that my constituents die sooner than those who live in the more salubrious suburbs of Glasgow? Does he accept that there is a strong connection between prosperity and longevity? It would be unfair for money to be targeted on those who happen to live longer. Does he accept that it is essential that those who are in need receive money and that the Government's targeting process of giving more money to those in need is a far fairer way of distributing the money available?

Mr. Timms: I agree with my hon. Friend. Even the least well-off pensioners should share in rising national prosperity. That is why it is right to aim to link the level of the minimum income guarantee with average earnings. I welcome the fact that the Liberal Democrats have endorsed that policy today.

Minimum Pension Guarantee

9. **Mr. Nigel Waterson** (Eastbourne): What representations he has received about the minimum guaranteed pension. [73046]

The Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Alistair Darling): We have received a number of items of correspondence about the minimum income guarantee, including some responses to our proposals for pension reform, which I published last December.

Mr. Waterson: Will the right hon. Gentleman admit that his minimum pension guarantee is nothing of the sort? Some 600,000 pensioners in this country with a weekly income of less than £75 will not receive a top-up because they have been prudent enough to save during their working life.

Mr. Darling: Listening to the Conservatives this afternoon, I assume that they would get rid of the minimum income guarantee, which would be a great pity. We are ensuring that a single pensioner will get £75 a week and a married couple will get £116.60. That is far more than they would ever have received relying on earnings-related benefits. The hon. Gentleman must recognise that in his constituency and throughout the country, one of the problems that we, as a civilised society, have to face is that far too many pensioners have nothing. We were determined to end that scandal.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Is my right hon. Friend aware that during the 18 years that I sat on the Opposition Benches, I never heard a single complaint from Conservative Members about means-testing? What we are hearing today is unique for Labour Members who have served in Parliament for quite a time.

Having said that, does my right hon. Friend accept that much needs to be done for pensioners who, in some cases, are just above the income support level? They are having tremendous difficulties and I believe that their complaints have much justification. I hope that the Budget will offer help to those people, who are being punished—as they were under the Conservatives—for being poor, but who are just above the level described by my right hon. Friend.

Mr. Darling: As I have made clear, I am aware of the problems of people with modest incomes and capital, to which my hon. Friend has referred. He is also right on another point: the Conservatives were quiet about means-testing for the 18 years before 1997 because they doubled the incidence of it.

War Disablement Pensions

10. **Mr. Nick St. Aubyn** (Guildford): If he will make a statement on his plans for war disablement pensions. [73047]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Hugh Bayley): I would like to pay tribute to all those members of the armed forces who have been disabled or whose partners have been bereaved as a result of their service. It is only because of their courage and sacrifice that Members of this House have the democratic liberty to stand for election, and freedom of speech when we get here. We will ensure that the war pensions scheme remains available to them and to future generations of service personnel.

Mr. St. Aubyn: Just before the election, the then Leader of the Opposition described the Conservative Government's policy on disablement pensions for those suffering from deafness as shabby and mean-minded. We now learn from a press release—issued eight days after this question was tabled—that the present Government have no plans to change that policy in respect of deafness on medical grounds. Is that because the Government, too, now regard themselves as shabby and mean-minded, or is it a vindication of the policy of the previous Government? Is it not truly shabby and mean-minded to raise false hopes among war veterans a few months before an election, and then to take two years to come to grips with the facts, during which time many of those veterans—including some constituents of mine—have been waiting for their appeals to be heard?

Mr. Bayley: When in opposition, we pledged to undertake a review of the changes introduced by the Conservatives to the war pensions scheme. That review took place immediately after the election, and was timely.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green): And?

Mr. Bayley: I can tell the Opposition spokesman that that review came up with two conclusions. First, that the deafness attributable to war service and the deafness later in life attributable to ageing was no more than additive. Secondly, it was decided that a further review would take place within a year. The further review was delivered to the Department 10 days ago, and we made its results available to the House last Tuesday.

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): My hon. Friend rightly paid tribute to the sacrifice made during the war by many people who fought for democracy and freedom in Europe. Does he recognise that many of those people, for various reasons, failed to make early claims to get the pensions to which they were entitled? Is he aware that the Royal British Legion and many other organisations are fighting for those people, who are getting older? Many veterans and their widows die before their cases are heard. Will he do everything possible to expedite these cases to ensure that people get the payments to which they are entitled as speedily as possible?

Mr. Bayley: My hon. Friend raises an important point. There has been a serious backlog in appeals for war pensions. On 31 March 1997, there were 9,619 appeals outstanding. By April last year, we had managed to reduce that to just over 5,000. At that stage, we introduced a number of additional measures to speed up the hearing of war pensions appeals. As of 28 February 1999—the date on which the latest figure was available—the total was 2,917. We recognise that, although much lower than the figure that we inherited, that is still too many. The War Pensions Agency has commissioned Ernst and Young to undertake a review of the overall decision-making and appeals process, and we will announce the outcome when the review is completed.

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): I am sure that all hon. Members greatly respect those who have been disabled as a result of service in the armed forces. Is the Minister aware that many people—including, for example, members of the British Legion—feel aggrieved because their pensions are at nowhere near the levels paid in other European countries? Is a review being conducted of the level of pensions?

Mr. Bayley: The payments under our war pensions scheme are considerably more generous than those in other parts of our social security system. For instance, a single man who is severely disabled and is in the war pensions scheme will receive just over £400 a week, which is substantially more than would be paid under the industrial injuries arrangements, and substantially more—more than twice as much—than what would be paid in basic non-income-related state benefits. We believe that the scheme is generous and that its generosity must be maintained, because those who are injured as a result of service to our country should be generously rewarded.

Benefit Integrity Project

12. **Mr. Mark Oaten** (Winchester): If he will make a statement on the savings achieved as a result of the benefit integrity project. [73049]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Hugh Bayley): The most recent estimate of benefit savings from the benefit integrity project is £8 million for 1997-98 and £30 million for 1998-99. A further estimate of the savings will be calculated following the cessation of the scheme at the end of March.

Mr. Oaten: Does the Minister expect the replacement system for BIP to result in more or less savings?

Mr. Bayley: We are not setting out on the scheme simply to make savings. We want to introduce a fairer system that will allow people on disability living allowance to have their award increased when their mobility or care needs increase, as well as allowing decreases when needs decrease. The benefit integrity project, which we inherited from our predecessors, was unfair because, in effect, it allowed only reductions. Our scheme will allow appropriate adjustments up or down.

Mrs. Theresa May (Maidenhead): As the Minister has just admitted, the benefit integrity project achieved relatively little savings and caused untold anxiety and hardship for many disabled people. [HON. MEMBERS: "Who started it?"] The scheme was operated for nearly two years by the Labour Government, regardless of all the complaints from hon. Members of all parties asking the Government to suspend it. Will the Minister confirm that the replacement scheme, the periodic review system, will lead to more reviews, affecting more disabled people; that the decision-making process will be the same as for the benefit integrity project; and that, if the new review process also leads to anxiety and hardship among disabled people, he will stop it, regardless of the saving?

Mr. Bayley: I find it quite extraordinary that the hon. Lady should make such a broadside attack on a change to the benefits system that her party introduced. We acknowledge that the system was flawed, and that is why we have changed it. The scheme saved £30 million in 1998-99, which she described as relatively little savings. That is in stark contrast to statements from other Conservative Front Benchers about the need to get the level of payments of all benefits right, which is what we intend to do.

When we introduce the new system, which we are developing in consultation with the voluntary bodies, we will do so slowly and carefully, and ensure that it beds down well. If the Conservatives had developed their scheme, the benefit integrity project, in consultation with the voluntary bodies representing disabled people, we might not have had so many problems with it.

Mr. Syd Rapson (Portsmouth, North): May I congratulate the Benefits Agency on its sting operation over the weekend in Portsmouth, in which it targeted people returning from abroad who claim disability benefits but who had full sets of tools in their possession? They are now being investigated for fraud. Does my hon. Friend agree that every pound taken through fraud is stealing from the people who need it most?

Mr. Bayley: My hon. Friend could not be more right, and it is disgraceful that people make false claims for benefits. It is good that he should congratulate the Benefits Agency on its successful work to ensure that benefits are paid to those entitled to them, and it shows that the agency is doing its job.

Disabled People

13. **Mr. Michael Jabez Foster** (Hastings and Rye): What he is doing to improve the living standards of the poorest disabled people. [73050]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Hugh Bayley): Our proposals for a new disability income guarantee, together with measures in the Welfare Reform Bill, will provide more help for disabled adults and children who most need it, to enable them to live independently and with dignity.

Mr. Foster: Does my hon. Friend agree that some people will never be able to work, because of the nature of their disability? In view of that, does he also agree that the minimum income guarantee should be updated regularly and will he undertake to do that?

Mr. Bayley: Yes. The Government's policy is work for those who are able to work and security through the benefits system for those who are unable to work. We recognise that work will never be an option for many people on disability benefits and we must ensure that the poorest of those get more support, which is what the minimum income guarantee seeks to achieve. At current prices, when it is introduced it will add £5.75 a week to the basic disability premium and £8.30 a week for couples.

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): Will penalties be imposed on those disabled people who fail to turn up for interview? Will they lose their benefits, and if so, for how long?

Mr. Bayley: The proposals for attending a single gateway interview are before the House as part of the Welfare Reform Bill and they will be discussed in Committee. It is the Government's view that it should be a requirement for disabled people, as for others entering the single gateway, to attend an interview. Claimants are already required to do certain things before they are entitled to their money—for example, to fill in the application forms appropriately—and we believe that it makes sense for them to attend an interview. However, for disabled people, there will be no requirement to seek work or take a job if that is not appropriate given their condition.

Annuities

14. **Ms Gisela Stuart** (Birmingham, Edgbaston): What plans he has to abolish the vesting requirements on annuities. [73051]

The Minister of State, Department of Social Security (Mr. Stephen Timms): There are no such plans. The Inland Revenue rules require that personal pension and money purchase occupational pension funds must be used to buy an annuity at retirement. The exception is when a personal pension fund is used for income draw-down whereby income is drawn directly from the fund. Although that means that annuity purchase is deferred, an annuity must be purchased by the age of 75.

Ms Stuart: I thank my hon. Friend for that answer. However, annuity rates are at a historical low. The Government should be congratulated on their economic policies, which have brought an end to the boom and bust of the Tory years, but those policies will ensure a continued climate of low returns—although current pensioners should not be discouraged from taking

annuities. Is there a case for examining whether the age for vesting in annuities should be extended beyond 75, or for reconsidering easing the draw-down facilities and making the process easier for those over 75?

Mr. Timms: I recognise that many people have been disappointed by the fall in annuity rates, but they have enjoyed the benefits of substantial stock market growth so their funds are bigger than might once have been expected. My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to the Government's success in managing the economy and that can be expected to continue. Inflation is lower and stable so that annuities keep their value better. My hon. Friend is an acknowledged expert on these matters and I am always interested in her ideas, but I cannot see a practical alternative to the present framework. Life offices which provide annuities have a good record of reliability, which is an important point in favour of the existing system.

Mr. Howard Flight (Arundel and South Downs): Will the Minister accept that there is widespread pressure to abolish the obligation to buy an annuity at 75? In addition, will he accept that profits-linked annuities suffer from rules that discourage their usage? Given the enormous increase in the volume of money purchase pensions required, will the Government consider both the ability of the annuity industry to cope and the possibility of increasing the opportunities for draw-downs?

Mr. Timms: It is an important principle that since pensions savings are tax free, they must eventually be converted into an income stream so that tax may be paid on them. Of course, we always keep these matters under review, but, as I said to my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Ms Stuart), the present system is the only practical one available.

Countryside (Access)

3.31 pm

The Minister for the Environment (Mr. Michael Meacher): With permission, Madam Speaker, I should like to make a statement.

In our manifesto, we gave a commitment to give people greater freedom to explore our open countryside, balanced by the needs to protect the environment and to avoid any abuse of greater access. I am pleased to announce to the House today the Government's plan for England and Wales to honour our commitment. A number of documents, including "Framework for Action", will be available in the Vote Office when I have completed the statement.

Securing greater access to open countryside will bring tremendous benefits, and new opportunities for improving people's health—physical and mental. It will enable everybody to experience the wonders of wildlife and beautiful landscapes.

Over the past 50 years, a voluntary approach has delivered relatively little. Despite some commendable initiatives, there is little prospect of much new access being provided voluntarily in future. Even if much more access could be secured by voluntary means, it would not be permanent and the costs would be high. Only a new statutory right will deliver cost-effectively the extent and permanence of access that we seek.

There has been much ill-informed speculation that the Government would not introduce a statutory right of access. I can confirm that we have decided to introduce legislation as soon as parliamentary time allows to provide for a general statutory right of area access coupled with responsibilities for walkers to respect the rights of landowners and managers.

The legislation will include improvements to the rights of way system. The comprehensive package will provide fresh opportunities for walking and other recreational pursuits, while taking the legitimate interests of land managers fully into account.

The new statutory right of access will apply to mountain, moor, heath and down, subject to mapping by the new Countryside Agency and the Countryside Council for Wales, and to registered common land. That amounts to about 4 million acres. The right may be extended to other types of open country, such as some woodland. It will apply to access on foot for open-air recreation.

The Government studied more than 2,000 responses to our consultation document. We talked to a range of organisations, visited key sites and commissioned research into the costs and benefits of different approaches. We are convinced that legislation is the only way to make sure that people will be free in perpetuity to explore open countryside.

However, we accept that there are real concerns about the impact of a new statutory right. Therefore, the statutory right will be subject to proper and reasonable limitations, and there will be codes of practice. It will not apply to developed land, or to agricultural land, except that used for extensive grazing. There is no question of giving people a right to trample over crops, or through other people's gardens. There will be strict restrictions on dogs.

Land may be closed when necessary for health, safety or defence reasons. In addition, the new Countryside Agency, the Countryside Council for Wales and national park authorities will be able to authorise closures or restrictions to protect wildlife or historic interest, or for land management reasons, as long as the landowner can demonstrate that the restriction is necessary.

We attach considerable importance to local agreement being reached whenever possible, and we shall promote local access forums, with all the main interests represented, to advise on the details of any local limitations before the right comes into force. The aim of the forum will be to achieve consensus, but no member of the forum will have a final veto. The forums will be advisory; the decisions will be for the statutory agencies.

In addition, land managers will be able to close land temporarily without prior consent for a number of days each year. We propose to set the annual limit initially at 28 days, primarily for land management purposes, although landowners will also be able to close land for other reasons for up to 12 of the 28 days. If necessary, provision will be made to ensure that access is not restricted unreasonably at peak times.

Let me now deal with rights of way. We want to strengthen and develop the rights of way network to enable it to respond to the changing requirements of recreational use and the needs of land managers. Before concluding the detail of new legislation, we shall consider recommendations from the Countryside Commission and seek further views. There is no question of failing to secure the proper recording and maintenance of rights of way, or of reducing the overall value of the rights of way network.

Experience in Scotland and in Wales has shown that much consensus can also be achieved at national level. Therefore, we propose to ask the Countryside Agency to establish a national access forum in England. In Wales, the Countryside Council for Wales will be asked to consider how best to develop the existing informal arrangements.

It will be clear from my statement so far that the new Countryside Agency will play an important role in implementing the new statutory right, as well as in promoting sustainable rural development and protecting our finest landscapes. I can announce today that Ewen Cameron has been appointed to chair the agency: he has made it clear that he enthusiastically supports the Government's access proposals. We have also appointed Pamela Warhurst, who is currently leader of Calderdale council, as deputy chair. She will play a leading role in the agency's implementation of the access package.

Although there will be some extra costs for local authorities and statutory agencies, for which we shall make provision, we do not expect our legislative proposals to have major financial consequences. Nevertheless, the benefits of the basic statutory right and of the rights of way network will be much enhanced by further expenditure on, for example, the provision of additional routes and readily available information.

The lottery has already made a considerable contribution to improving access to the countryside. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport will ask the lottery distributors to consider ways in which their funding might contribute further. We are also considering what part the new opportunities fund,

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through the proposed green spaces initiative, might be able to play. My right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food will ensure that targeting of the access elements of agri-environment schemes contributes to the overall strategy. In Wales, it will be a matter for the National Assembly for Wales.

Almost 50 years ago, a Labour Government introduced legislation to safeguard our finest countryside and to open it to the nation. The largely voluntary approach to access in the National Parks and Access to the Open Countryside Act 1949 has proved inadequate. Glorious parts of our heritage are still the preserve of the few, not the delight of the many. As soon as parliamentary time permits, we will introduce legislation to remedy that. We look forward to discussing widely the details of the package, but we are firm on the principles. This balanced package fully meets the commitment that we gave in our manifesto and will be a lasting tribute to the memory of John Smith. I trust that hon. Members on both sides of the House will support it.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard (South-West Norfolk): I thank the Minister for the Environment for letting me have a copy of his statement half an hour in advance—although that obviously did not give me time to examine the accompanying documents.

The Opposition strongly support increased access to the countryside, based on voluntary co-operation set within a secure legal framework to define rights and responsibilities that would allow mutual respect to flourish. We believe that the work done by landowners and others has demonstrated that voluntary arrangements can deliver greatly increased access, and we deplore the fact that the right hon. Gentleman has sought to alienate the very people who have done so much to improve access in all parts of the country.

The right hon. Gentleman's tone this afternoon may have more to do with his Back-Bench problems than increasing access to the countryside. No doubt his hon. Friends will judge his proposals by the parliamentary timetable that he is able to achieve to put them into practice. However, it is regrettable—although perhaps only to be expected from someone who has described land owning as "exclusivity and inherited privilege"—that the right hon. Gentleman has this afternoon squandered the good will that those in the countryside have sought to bring to this issue.

When does the right hon. Gentleman propose to legislate? Given the importance that he attaches to these matters, will it be in the next Session? Given—as English Nature has pointed out—that the Government have at no stage during the consultation process defined either the need or demand for greater access to the countryside, how will the right hon. Gentleman measure the success or otherwise of the policy that he has announced today? He has explained that his statement applies to mountain, moor, heath, down and common land. Can he explain to the House when the mapping exercises will be completed and what work has already been done on definitions?

By what means does the right hon. Gentleman propose to assess the effects of increased access on biodiversity and fragile habitats, and thereby refute the claims of Friends of the Earth that he has focused almost exclusively on the social implications of increased access? How strongly does he believe in consensus as a way forward? Will the statutory agencies be encouraged to use compulsion as an early option? Will the Government issue guidelines? What will be the cost to local authorities and statutory agencies of negotiating and managing access? What new money will the Government make available, given that it is precisely rural local authorities that have suffered most in Labour's local government finance settlement?

The right hon. Gentleman's statement refers only to access on foot. How strongly will the Government encourage use of the countryside by the general public, such as horse riders, cyclists, families, bird watchers and the disabled? What is in the statement for them? If compulsion becomes necessary, what compensation will there be for landowners and farmers to meet the costs of access and the loss of land values? What arrangements is the right hon. Gentleman making to protect owner liability? Will there be a new legal code to ensure that those using the land and those owning it are clear about their rights and responsibilities in terms of both public behaviour and the control of dogs—which was a thorny issue during the consultation process?

Who will be responsible for appointing the local access forums? What balance will the right hon. Gentleman seek to achieve within and among the different groups to be represented?

The right hon. Gentleman has today produced a solution that has the potential to satisfy no one. It will be cumbersome and bureaucratic; it will further divide town and countryside; and it represents a squandered opportunity.

Mr. Meacher: Nothing reveals more starkly the fact that the Conservative party is stuck in an 18th century time warp than their approach to the statutory right of access. The right hon. Lady's problem is that she cannot make up her mind whether to accept that the Labour Government, with a full manifesto commitment behind today's proposals, should be supported, or whether, as she said towards the end of her remarks, the proposals will satisfy no one. The contrary is true—they will satisfy the overwhelming majority of the electorate.

The Country Landowners Association's Gallup poll last year showed that 80 per cent. of people are in favour of greater access to the countryside. The Ramblers Association NOP poll last year demonstrated that 85 per cent. of people wanted a legal right of access over mountain, moorland, heath and down and registered common land. Once again, the Tory party is allying itself with the tiny, exclusive minority of 15 per cent. I have not at any time accused landowners of being exclusive or committed to the retention of privilege. It is the Conservative party of which I have said that in the past.

I have made it clear that we shall introduce a Bill as soon as parliamentary time allows. The mapping exercise has to be carried out, and we shall tell the new Countryside Agency to get on with that as quickly as it can. On closure for wildlife, we shall fully protect wildlife, sites of special scientific interest and nature reserves. We have always made it clear that protection of wildlife and environmental crops is our priority, and that will not be overridden by public rights of access.

I have made it absolutely clear that we want minimum compulsion to be used. I favour the local access forums, which will be fully representative of all interests. The countryside agencies will issue guidelines. The policy is one not of compulsion but of maximising consensus.

The Government have made it perfectly clear that we shall make available new moneys to ensure that local authorities are able to meet the requirements of the legislation.

On horse riders and cyclists, the right hon. Lady needs to make up her mind whether she is in favour of people on foot having access before she decides whether people on a bicycle or a horse should have access.

On compensation, let me make it clear that the access provisions were devised to have regard to the needs of landowners as well as walkers, and independent research shows that landowners generally will not suffer costs significant enough to warrant compensation. The statutory right will allow agricultural activities, the development of land and the closure of land for good land management reasons to continue.

In answer to the right hon. Lady's final question about the local access forums, I can tell her that we shall certainly ask the Countryside Agency to advise us about the membership, geographical coverage and functions of those forums.

I hope that the right hon. Lady can find it in her heart at least to accept that the local access forums—on which her party will, perhaps, be significantly represented—can work towards resolving the question of access, which has poisoned relations between landowners and users during the past 50 years. We believe that our proposals can finally resolve that question.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the Government coming down in favour of a statutory approach is great news for walkers and all those who love the countryside? Does he accept, however, that there will be a few fears that the Government have gone for a very bureaucratic approach? Will he therefore assure us that access to the 4 million extra acres of land will be achieved quickly? Will he make a plea for co-operation between walkers and landowners, to ensure that that is carried out speedily, and that townspeople especially have a better understanding of the countryside as a result?

Mr. Meacher: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who makes the important point that the provisions will engender greater knowledge and concern for the countryside among millions of people who have not previously had access to it. I am as keen as he is that this should not be a bureaucratic exercise. That is exactly why we are setting up local access forums. They will be able flexibly to take account of local circumstances, which vary dramatically. We have specifically not decided to resolve all these issues on the basis of a single statutory criterion. As to the time scale, I can only repeat that my wish and the Government's wish is to bring the provisions into operation as fast as we can. The main limitation will be the requirement for mapping because, especially for heathland and downland, some uncertainties must be resolved before the right can be exercised.

Mr. Matthew Taylor (Truro and St. Austell): The Minister has taken a big step from national rights to local realities. On that basis, we welcome his statement and support the direction in which the Government are moving. However, there are some key difficulties, not least concerning how people will gain the information that allows them to make use of such access, given that there will be rights of closure and other restrictions.

Does the Minister expect to get the measure through at least before the next general election, a key date towards which perhaps he is working? Does he agree that safe and accessible land rights, as well as a legal right, are important, and that to achieve that will require funds? I hope that the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, who is negotiating reform of the common agricultural policy, is considering the release of extra funds to allow landowners and farmers to open up safe and accessible routes into the countryside, as well as simply burdening them with a legal right. Perhaps most important, given that the Minister is asking everybody else to open up their land, has he talked to his colleagues in the Ministry of Defence about the very large areas of land to which the Government restrict access?

Mr. Meacher: The hon. Gentleman asks whether we shall have a Bill before the next election. He knows that the Government—all Governments—make decisions about the next round of legislation year by year. My Department and I will certainly be bidding for such a Bill as quickly as possible. The hon. Gentleman knows that, as of this moment, I cannot guarantee it, but I certainly hope and expect that we shall have a Bill before the next election.

I take the hon. Gentleman's point on the question of safe and accessible rights as well as legal rights. I am very keen that, under Agenda 2000 proposals and the development of agri-environment schemes, especially countryside stewardship, which is the most important, and countryside access and environmentally sensitive area schemes, there will be voluntary expansion beyond the statutory rights that I have announced. There are already something like 500 km of extra footpaths and about 14,000 hectares of open-area access on that basis—a small but valuable addition.

Mr. Gordon Prentice (Pendle): The statement is a lot better than many people expected. I feel kind of warm towards new Labour at the moment. We share a common objective: a statutory right to roam—that is what the Minister has enunciated—over 4 million acres of open countryside. That is the shared objective. Where there are reservations, they must be about the means of delivery.

My hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) mentioned the bureaucratic solution of local access forums. How will the lines on the map be drawn? Who will be invited to the local access forums? How will disagreements be mediated within them?

What is the timetable? My support is conditional on this matter being resolved in the next year or two, not allowed to fester, as the Minister said, dragging on interminably. The people of this country want action, and they want it now.

My right hon. Friend talked about a suitable legislative opportunity. It may have escaped his notice that my Right to Roam Bill is coming up for Second Reading on 26 March, and it may well be that we should talk about it.

Mr. Meacher: We shall do more than talk about it; I am sure that we shall vigorously debate it on the date that

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my hon. Friend mentioned. The Government and my hon. Friend share a common objective—that there should be a statutory right of access. However, we believe that Government legislation is needed to achieve our objectives, which go wider than those of my hon. Friend's Bill. The Government's is a package measure; it also includes full protection of wildlife, effective management of land and livestock, local access forums, improved rights of way, changes to occupier's liability and reasonable and balanced rights to temporary closure. That is a very comprehensive package, but I still believe that my hon. Friend and I can meet, and I am sure that we can achieve a large measure of agreement.

My hon. Friend mentioned timing. I do not want this matter to fester. I do not want the arrangements to be bureaucratic or time wasting. The only factor that prevents early or immediate implementation is the requirement for mapping. My wish is that that should be done as fast as possible, but my hon. Friend must recognise that there are limits to the speed at which it can be done properly, bearing in mind that rights of appeal may well be exercised.

Local access forums are not a bureaucratic insertion into the process. We believe that they enable us to maximise local flexible resolution of the specific problems that exist, given the very different landscapes and very different types of land use in different parts of the country. If we tried to resolve those problems on a single centralised basis, we would run into far more problems. I therefore ask my hon. Friend to accept that local access forums are the best way to achieve a pragmatic consensus and early implementation of the right.

Mr. David Curry (Skipton and Ripon): Does the Minister accept that the countryside is not a commodity? Does he further accept that the countryside is extremely fragile and, in places like the Yorkshire dales and the Three Peaks in my constituency, under immense pressure? Will he ensure that his legislation respects that and seeks to maintain the countryside for enjoyment, not to destroy it by having too many people? That is a real problem for those who understand the countryside.

Does the Minister understand that the abuse of green lanes by four-wheel drive vehicles is a serious problem which must be addressed? Will he ensure that his local forums, on which much will hinge, are genuinely local, and that local agents of national organisations will not do the negotiating?

Finally, I assume that this will be an English Bill, as it will come in a long time after devolution.

Mr. Meacher: Of course I realise that the countryside is fragile in many ways and in many locations. Local access forums would be expected to take that fragility into account. If there is too much pressure on particular points, agreement will need to be reached to find alternatives, but it will have to be demonstrated that there is a real need for people to move away from one particular part because of excessive pressures. The extension of a statutory right and the spreading of the load is precisely the way to ensure that there is less pressure on areas which hitherto may have taken excessive pressures.

I do not agree with the right hon. Gentleman's reference to too many people. Once again, that is the exclusivity on which the Tory party so easily falls back. We live in crowded islands—there are 60 million of us in these islands, but it is not a matter of there being too many people. All of us have an entitlement. That is what the Labour party stands for and that is what we are implementing.

There is no access and there are no rights for four-wheel drive or other motorised vehicles. We are talking about access on foot for open-air recreation—for example, picnicking, bird watching or photography. We are not talking about access or rights for four-wheel drives. Those chosen for the local access forums will be local people and not simply representatives of national organisations. They will be people who know and love their local area.

Mr. Paul Marsden (Shrewsbury and Atcham): I welcome my right hon. Friend's statement. I am especially pleased that we can look forward, before the introduction and implementation of a statutory right, to local access forums having their say. That will be critical. The process should be about consensus, co-operation and negotiation. I have confidence that the local access forums will succeed. I implore my right hon. Friend not to forget other users of the countryside. For example, do not forget about horse riders and cyclists. There are millions of users. I am aware that eight accidents occur every day that involve horse riders, but we need greater access.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Order. This is the time to question the Minister, not to make comments. Some of us are more experienced than others, but let us have brisk questions.

Mr. Meacher: My hon. Friend the Member for Shrewsbury and Atcham (Mr. Marsden), like my hon. Friend the Member for Pendle (Mr. Prentice), has sought to make a positive contribution to this open debate. I hope that he will be pleased that the matters that he raised in his Bill on permanency of access, improved rights of way and changes to occupiers' liability have all been taken on board by the Government. We hope to secure these rights and changes in our legislation.

I repeat what my hon. Friend has said: this is a package for consensus and co-operation, within a statutory framework, which honours our manifesto commitment. That is why we are looking for co-operation. Of course we want to see improved access for horse riders and cyclists but I repeat that what I am announcing today is specifically for those who walk on foot and wish to enjoy open-air recreation. Horse riders and cyclists will have their day, but that will be separate from what I am announcing today.

Mr. James Paice (South-East Cambridgeshire): What benefit or enjoyment can be obtained from a right of access that cannot be obtained from a comprehensive network of footpaths?

Mr. Meacher: The problem with the comprehensive network of footpaths is that it is not as comprehensive as the hon. Gentleman makes it out to be. The latest survey, which was carried out in 1994, revealed that 74 per cent.

of ways were free from obstruction, which means that 26 per cent., more than 25,000 miles, are still subject to obstruction. The key point that the hon. Gentleman is not taking on board is that we are not talking about linear access. I am talking not about confining people to paths or ways but about giving them free right to roam across open country. We believe that open-area access is extremely important. Unless there are justifications for confining people to linear access, we continue to press for open-area access.

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): May I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his statement, and particularly on his good judgment in appointing Pamela Warhurst as deputy chair of the Countryside Agency? The appointment will bring balance, and Pamela Warhurst will bring with her a wealth of experience.

Will my right hon. Friend consider introducing stronger penalties for people who take four-wheel drive vehicles into the countryside and churn up valuable land, with no regard for people who want access by walking into the countryside?

Mr. Meacher: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's comments about Pamela Warhurst. There is no question but that she has a great deal of experience in countryside recreation and leisure, and I have no doubt that she will make a magnificent contribution to the implementation of the access provisions.

I take note of what my hon. Friend says about four-wheel drives. There are many areas of the country where they are causing substantial disturbance and where there is a need for tighter regulation and larger penalties. I am looking into such matters carefully, as the hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Mr. Hawkins) knows from his correspondence with me.

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): By granting a statutory right of access, the Minister's statement will necessarily produce damaging effects on the rights of property. Under the European convention on human rights, and under the Government's Human Rights Act 1998, that cannot happen without compensation. What assessment have the Government made of the levels of compensation that will be required under the convention and under the Act, and what further assessment have the Government made of the levels of additional insurance that landowners will have to take out to cover visitors on to their land?

Mr. Meacher: On the question of crime, may I make it clear to the hon. and learned Gentleman that the right of access will cease for anyone who breaches any of the range of restrictions under the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 or who commits a criminal offence. Such a person will automatically lose any statutory right of access and ipso facto be subject to the civil law of trespass. *[Interruption.]* Let me add, as the hon. and learned Gentleman looks a little mystified, that robbers, thieves and other miscreants do not require a statutory right of access in order to target the scenes of their crime. It may have escaped the hon. and learned Gentleman's notice that they will go there anyway.

Mr. Garnier: The Minister is not answering the question.

Mr. Meacher: If I did not understand the question, I am quite prepared, with your permission, Madam Speaker, to allow the hon. and learned Gentleman to clarify it.

Madam Speaker: I shall not let these exchanges run much longer, so I want brief questions. If the Minister has not understood the question, of course I must take it again.

Mr. Garnier: I am grateful, Madam Speaker. The new policy will affect the rights of property, but under the European convention on human rights and under the Human Rights Act 1998, which this Government passed, that cannot happen without compensation in lieu. My first question was what assessment the Government have made of the levels of compensation that will be required. Secondly, what assessment have they made of the levels of insurance that will have to be taken out by landowners in order to protect visitors to their land?

Mr. Meacher: I did understand the hon. and learned Gentleman's question and I was coming to that point. I have already made it clear that a statutory right is entirely consistent with other activities, such as agriculture and development, continuing. Our view is that a fair balance has been drawn between the interests of landowners and the general interest. In our view, there is no right to general compensation under the Human Rights Act 1998.

Mr. Barry Jones (Alyn and Deeside): I thank my right hon. Friend for his historic statement. I presume that besides a soft voice, he carries a big stick with which to deal with any remnants of 18th century oligarchy. What new access does my right hon. Friend envisage there will be in Wales? Will he say a little more about Wales with its unrivalled scenery, to which the people of Wales want more access?

Mr. Meacher: My hon. Friend is right to say that Wales probably has a higher proportion of beautiful landscape than any other part of the country. One third of the total open countryside in England and Wales, within the 4 million acres to which I referred, lies in Wales. The scope for the National Assembly for Wales to introduce arrangements that take account of particular Welsh circumstances will depend on provisions in the Bill. I have no doubt that the new Welsh Assembly will be interested in examining the application of the provisions. It will have the opportunity to do so, and we will take account of that when we draw up the Bill.

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): I have two brief questions for the Minister. Why have the Government not ensured that local government in Wales, for example, has the funds to keep existing footpaths open? Does he not realise that exempting extensively grazed land from the agricultural sector will thereby make

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it open for such traipsing? That land is the delicate environment which needs to be protected and cannot stand an influx of people.

Mr. Meacher: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman was not listening, but I made it clear that my Department and the Welsh Office will ensure that resources are available to local authorities to cover the costs of the new legislation. That will include the building of stiles, gates and signs and possibly some rangering services. We have made it clear that extra resources will be provided for those purposes.

In respect of grazed land, I dissociate myself from the hon. Gentleman's pejorative use of the word "traipsing". We are talking about a pastime that is probably more popular with more people in this country than any other and it would be appropriate to use more respectful terms such as "rambling" or "walking". I do not accept that rough-grazed land is inappropriate for rambling and, if there are particular cases where rambling is producing damage, I would expect the issue to be raised with the local access forum. Evidence would have to be produced that damage had been caused.

Mr. Kevin McNamara (Hull, North): I welcome the Government's proposals, and I am sure that my local branch of the Ramblers Association does so as well, but does my right hon. Friend accept that the devil will be in the detail? In anticipation of the legislation, will his Department establish local access forums at once to discuss the problems that will arise in particular areas and try to make ready for when the legislation is passed? Will my right hon. Friend ensure that mapping, which can be carried out after the legislation is passed, is not used as an excuse to prevent its introduction? In view of his undertaking to protect wildlife and his restrictions on the use of dogs, will we see the end of deer hunting, hare coursing and fox hunting?

Mr. Meacher: I am concerned that local access forums should be set in place as quickly as possible. I have asked the Countryside Commission, which is soon to be replaced by the Countryside Agency, to draw up proposals in respect of the precise functions, membership and coverage of those forums and I shall certainly want to proceed with that as quickly as I can. I agree that mapping should not be used as an excuse for delay and I shall be keeping a careful eye on that to ensure that mapping is achieved as quickly as possible, although access provisions for different categories of land may come into effect at different times.

In respect of dogs, my hon. Friend was making a rather wider point. There are general problems relating to dogs and we will be drawing up guidelines, which will provide for an outright ban in local circumstances where that is appropriate.

Mr. Michael Jack (Fylde): The Minister said in his statement that, at some point in the future, he may seek to extend the power of access to woodland. Does he propose to seek primary legislative power to give him a general right to designate access—not only to woodland, but to any other form of land—at his discretion?

Mr. Meacher: No, that is not the intention. I have asked what will be the Countryside Agency to draw up proposals about the desirability and appropriateness of extending these access provisions to areas that were included in the 1949 Act—to cliff and foreshore, to river and canalside and to woodland. Depending, of course, on what the agency recommends, we would seek to go further, but not on the basis of secondary legislation.

Ms Joan Walley (Stoke-on-Trent, North): I acknowledge the enormous amount of work done by my right hon. Friend, and warmly welcome the proposal for legislation on statutory rights of access. What extra funds, however, will be required in respect of footpaths and the wider aspects of the legislation? When he speaks to the new Countryside Agency and to local authorities, will my right hon. Friend bear in mind the fact that in Staffordshire, 189 applications regarding disputed rights of way are outstanding? At this rate, it will take 15 years to see them through. Will my right hon. Friend assure us that funds will be available?

Mr. Meacher: I have already tried to reassure the House that my Department and the Welsh Office will make resources available to cover the cost of the new legislation. I have said the same to local authorities. When that is still not sufficient, we think it reasonable to charge—where car parks, hides or guided trails are provided, for instance—but we do not think it reasonable to charge for the right of access in principle.

My hon. Friend mentioned the large number of disputed rights of way in her area. That is precisely what a statutory right of access is designed to prevent. It is because there is so much uncertainty, because there are no formal agreements and because so many of the alleged agreements are insecure that it is now necessary to introduce a statutory right, which I believe will clear up most of the difficulties.

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Mid-Sussex): Does the Minister accept that all who love and know about the hills, the uplands and the wild places in this country will deeply regret and resent his statement? It would have been so much better if he had decided on a system of voluntary access.

For how long will the right hon. Gentleman allow, for example, the moors to be closed during the nesting season of ground-nesting birds, and for shooting at a later date?

Mr. Meacher: I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman chooses to ally himself with the tiny minority who oppose a statutory right of access. As I have said, some 85 per cent. of those who responded to the statutory-voluntary question in our consultation exercise said that a voluntary approach was inadequate for the securing of access, and both the NOP and the Gallup polls showed similar figures.

I am as fascinated and mesmerised as the hon. Gentleman by the beauty, tranquillity and amazing attractiveness of our wonderful open spaces. That is exactly why it is so important to make them accessible to all our people, not just to the tiny number who happen to own thousands of acres of rolling hillside.

Of course I am concerned about ground-nesting birds. That is precisely the sort of issue that will lead to temporary and, if need be, permanent restrictions. I will not allow the rights of wildlife—living creatures that inhabit our country along with human beings—to be

overridden simply for purposes of access, but that is no reason for us not to have a general-strategy right of access.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): As the only London Member who is trying to question my right hon. Friend, and also the Member representing the most densely populated urban constituency in the country, I congratulate my right hon. Friend, and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, on today's statement and on their aspirations for a right of access. People in urban areas want such access desperately. They love the countryside just as much as Conservative Members, who pretend that loving it means hunting and killing animals in it.

My right hon. Friend said that there might be restricted access on account of defence purposes and defence needs. What discussions has he had with the Ministry of Defence, and what hopes has he that the vast acres of MOD-held land will be thrown open for the public to enjoy, just as we hope other land will be?

Mr. Meacher: My hon. Friend is undoubtedly right about the desire of many urban dwellers, not only in London, but in many large cities, to have access to open countryside, probably near to where they live but further out if necessary. As I have said, that will bring tremendous benefits.

I am glad that the Ministry of Defence has already begun to open significant portions of its estate for rambling. We have begun discussions with the Ministry on how much further that can be taken. My belief is that it is possible to take it considerably further, so long as we can absolutely guarantee the safety of people who ramble or wander over MOD land.

Mr. Peter Atkinson (Hexham): Will hill farmers be able to close upland commons and hills during the lambing season? Will gamekeepers be able to close moors during the bird-rearing season? If so, who will advise the public that access is to be denied to them? Who will police the provisions? Will the countryside be covered with a forest of notices as a result?

Mr. Meacher: I would expect temporary and limited closures, probably in a wide area of open countryside, during the lambing season and the breeding season, particularly between April and June. We have to work further on the information. I accept that the question of ensuring that information gets to people who wish to use the countryside is important. It will certainly include public notices, newspapers, local radio and, perhaps in the modern age, the website.

Road Traffic (NHS Charges) Bill

Clause 3

INFORMATION CONTAINED IN CERTIFICATES

Lords amendment: In page 3, line 31, after ("out") insert ("in").

Ordered, That the Lords amendment be now considered.—*[Mr. Dowd.]*

Lords amendment agreed to.

Women

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Dowd.]*

4.23 pm

The Minister for Public Health (Ms Tessa Jowell): Today is the 73rd international women's day—a day to mark what women do, want and achieve. In Europe, the Commission and Parliament are celebrating international women's day. Commissioner Gradin is launching a campaign to heighten public awareness about violence towards women.

Throughout the world, international women's day is being celebrated. Baroness Jay, the Minister for Women, is today in New York to attend the United Nations Commission for the Status of Women. She will take part in a debate on violence against women and join Commissioner Gradin via a video link.

What women want is a Government whose actions and priorities reflect their lives. For too many women, the political process is remote and irrelevant. That is why it is doubly important that women see evidence that the Government listen, act on what they hear and never break the link with women and families. The Government must respect the boundary between public policy and private lives, but understand that public policy can make the responsibilities of private life so much easier to handle. Governments do not bring up children; families do. Governments are able, however, to provide the framework of hope and opportunity in which families are given the very best chance of success—success for the part-time worker who is the full-time mother, for the full-time mother who is the part-time carer, and for the full-time mother.

Mr. Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): Will the right hon. Lady acknowledge the valuable work done by local play groups? What would she say to the Bowley Park play group in Lichfield which, because of the introduction of the minimum wage, faces the difficult choice of either packing up altogether or increasing prices considerably to the young mothers who are sending their toddlers to the play group?

Ms Jowell: I should first note that about 20 per cent. of Conservative Members are in the Chamber for the debate, and that about 20 per cent. of them has just spoken. I can tell the hon. Gentleman that the Department for Education and Employment is examining ways in which to span the interim period until the working families tax credit takes effect.

The Government, in making things better for women, are making things better for everyone: better for women is better for all. The issues of concern to women are the issues of concern to everyone: health, education, crime, jobs and the economy. Women benefit when we spend £21 billion to improve our hospitals, spend £19 billion extra to improve our schools, take action to cut youth unemployment by 55 per cent. and enable jobs overall to grow by 400,000. Those actions benefit women, because they benefit everyone.

Mrs. Jacqui Lait (Beckenham): I am sorry to divert the right hon. Lady from the big subjects, but I should

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like to pursue the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Lichfield (Mr. Fabricant). If I understood him correctly—I am fairly certain that I did—he said that staff at the pre-school play group he mentioned were currently paid less than £3.60.

Mr. Fabricant *indicated assent.*

Mrs. Lait: My hon. Friend acknowledges that that is correct. Therefore, given the Minister's answer to my hon. Friend's question, is she saying that the working families tax credit is a way of supplementing income of less than £3.60? She seemed to be saying that. I should be grateful if she will clarify the matter.

Ms Jowell: I should make three points. First, I reiterate that the Department for Education and Employment is closely examining the circumstances in which play groups may find it difficult to manage with the introduction of the minimum wage. Secondly, I make it clear that the working families tax credit will be a benefit available to couples earning up to £23,000 annually. Thirdly, the important point—which is always ignored by Opposition Members—is that the minimum wage, which the Government are introducing, will free from poverty pay about 1.3 million women in the United Kingdom. We are proud of that.

I shall outline the changes that are being made in women's lives, beginning with children. Recent opinion polls have made it clear that more than one third of women think that education is the most important issue facing Britain today. The Government have pledged—in addition to the extra £2.4 billion aimed at raising school standards—£19 billion to education in the next three years. As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister announced last week, by 2002, and probably earlier, class sizes for children under seven will be cut to no more than 30. Already, more than 100,000 children are in smaller infant classes. Those children will be able to learn better because they are in smaller classes.

Since September 1998, every four-year-old in England has had access to free good-quality, part-time, pre-school education. Moreover, we have allocated almost £400 million more to increase the proportion of three-year-olds receiving free pre-school education—from one in three to almost two thirds—by January 2002.

Mrs. Theresa May (Maidenhead): The Minister is lauding the Government's action on nursery education. Does she accept the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Lichfield (Mr. Fabricant), that as a result of the Government's policy on the minimum wage, many pre-schools may have to close? That will reduce opportunities for women and take away the chance of early years education for many children. It is hardly an example of the joined-up government that the Government keep saying that they are so proud of.

Ms Jowell: Once again, I assure the hon. Lady that the Government are determined to ensure stability in the provision for very young children. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment is making arrangements on that.

The aim of our sure start programme is to fill the gaps in local services for children from birth to age four, and to promote opportunity in areas of disadvantage. We recognise that we can improve the health of new babies by improving the health of mothers during pregnancy. Some 250 programmes will be funded by the end of this Parliament. We have invested £452 million in England alone and a total of £540 million will be invested nationwide over the next three years. We are not prepared to allow children's opportunities to be set on the day that they are born. Sure start is about creating opportunities for the poorest families by offering opportunities for all. In a few weeks, we shall see the biggest ever increase in child benefit. That is real delivery, real action and real progress.

Our second area of concern in the life cycle of women is teenage girls. By adolescence, the issues that face girls and boys can be very different. The effects of the choices that girls face during their teens can last for the rest of their lives. The issues that young women face today are significantly different from those of a generation ago. Britain has the highest rate of teenage motherhood in western Europe. By the age of 15, one in three young women smoke regularly, compared with one in four boys. The number of young women drinking more than 14 units of alcohol a week, which is more than is good for them, has increased over the past 10 years.

Mrs. Lait: Will the Minister give way?

Ms Jowell: I should like to make some progress first, but I am prepared to take interventions later.

Girls tend to outperform boys throughout their school years, but many lose confidence and self-esteem in their teenage years. We need changing actions and new ways of thinking to deal with new difficulties and new problems. That means looking across Government for solutions. We must take note of the evidence that the education of mothers is the most important predictor of the educational achievement of their daughters.

The social exclusion unit is studying teenage pregnancies. It has undertaken the largest ever consultation exercise and will report its findings shortly. The women's unit is looking at what happens to girls during their teenage years that, too often, prevents them from meeting earlier aspirations and achievements. It is looking at the extent of gender stereotyping, which drives girls into particular careers. It is also studying the growing concern about the risk behaviour that teenage girls are increasingly engaging in—behaviour that may compromise their health for the rest of their lives.

No one story can be told about the lives of mothers in Britain today, because women's lives are changing faster than ever before. Some 25 years ago, only one in four mothers with children under five were in paid employment. Now the figure is nearly half. Nearly eight out of 10 of all mothers are in paid work. Overwhelmingly, mothers want to work because work brings a sense of value, income and independence. Nearly seven out of 10 women—the same proportion as men—say that they would rather work, even if they could afford not to. However, many would prefer to work for shorter hours.

When children are young and dependent, there must be a choice—a real choice. The Government have made sure that support is there, whichever course the mother

chooses. The child care tax credit will fund the first £70 of child care costs for eligible mothers, and £105 for two or more children. The working families tax credit will make it easier for couples on low incomes to cope if one parent—invariably the mother—decides to stay at home when the children are very small. The choice no longer lies between underwork and overwork. Governments can help women to balance their lives, but these are private choices. They can be choices because we have listened to women.

The Government have taken an important step in improving the lot of families, with the biggest-ever increase in child benefit coming up. That will be in addition to the increase for every family with children on income support. Practical action by the Government will transform the lives of women in paid work.

From April, the national minimum wage will take effect. It will tackle exploitation and ensure greater fairness in the workplace. Nearly 2 million workers will benefit from the minimum wage, around two thirds of whom are women—1.3 million women. The working families tax credit—together with the minimum wage—will guarantee low-paid families with a full-time worker a minimum income of £190 a week, with no tax to pay on incomes below £220.

There is still a huge disparity between women's and men's incomes; the earnings gap is still there, and still wide. When men enter employment, their earnings, on average, tend to rise steadily to a peak, suggesting that their earnings reflect their increasing skills and experience—as well as the jobs that they enter. Women's earnings reach only a much lower point, and then gradually taper away.

We will make clear just how stark the gap is when we publish a new document on the gender gap in the pay packet shortly. Further work will provide us with valuable tools to build on existing measures, such as the national minimum wage, to identify correctly the nature and extent of the pay gap, to enable women to better balance taking paid work with family commitments, and to improve women's incomes in retirement.

The most important issue for women at work in terms of being able to balance the responsibilities of home and work is family-friendly employment. The Employment Relations Bill, introduced by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, makes a good start at levelling off the unequal playing field by extending maternity leave to 18 weeks, creating a right to parental leave and creating a right to time off to deal with an emergency in the family.

As they grow older, many women become carers; some 60 per cent. of our 6 million carers are women. It is a tough and vital role—a role that has been disgracefully ignored for too many years in this country. Our national carers strategy, published some weeks ago, has three key elements. The strategy will provide information for carers, speaking to the carer who says, "The problem is not just that I do not know what I am entitled to, but that I do not know what question to ask to find out what I am entitled to."

The strategy will speak to carers' need for greater and more flexible support. It will also provide care for carers. Evidence shows clearly that, too often, elderly people are admitted to residential care not because their own health fails, but because the health of their carer has failed.

We have listened to carers and acted on what we have heard, providing £140 million over the next three years to ensure that carers get the break that they need. We are also holding consultations on proposals that time spent caring will entitle carers to a second pension: a pension that by 2050—albeit that is some way off—will be worth up to £50 a week in today's terms, payable on top of the basic state retirement pension.

We are also dealing with the issues that affect older people; we should celebrate older people. Longer life expectancy means that the majority of older people are women, but longer life, sadly, does not necessarily mean longer, healthier life. The baby girl born today can expect to live until she is 80, but she can expect only 61 of those years to be free from any chronic illness or life-limiting disability. That is why one of our top priorities for improving people's health is to extend the number of years for which they enjoy fit, active and healthy life.

I was reminded of the consequences of failing to do that by a cartoon that I saw recently, showing two old ladies in the bleak austerity of a home for the elderly. They were wrapped in blankets and there was absolutely no sign of pleasure around them. One was saying to the other, "Just imagine, Mavis. I gave up smoking for this." The challenge is huge. Our better government for older people programme will have an impact on several fronts: for example, by improving the services that older people use and tackling in practical ways the issues of concern to older people.

We already know that pensions are a key concern for older people. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security has introduced the Welfare Reform and Pensions Bill, which contains important proposals for helping women in retirement. For the first time, divorcing women will be able to obtain a share of their former husband's pension rights, recognising the contribution that they have made to the financial well-being of the family. The new stakeholder pensions will help people who, until now, have been unable to make pensions provision through an occupational scheme or personal pension.

There are other issues of concern to women: tough issues such as violence against women. Violence, and the fear of violence, can haunt women throughout their lives: year in, year out, thousands of children witness cruelty and violence to their mothers; one in four women experience domestic violence at some time in their lives; every week, two women die as a result of violence in the home; and 46 per cent. of women over 60 hardly ever go out at night, because they feel unsafe.

Those are stark and unpalatable facts. We cannot achieve a fair and equal society as long as women are not safe in their own homes—for too many women, home is the most dangerous place—and as long as women are afraid to go out at night or cannot raise their children in safety. That is why tackling crime is a top priority for the Government.

My noble Friend the Minister for Women and I will publish later in the spring a document setting out good practice in protecting women from all forms of violence, with local initiatives to spur local action to make women safer. My noble Friend and I are travelling the country as part of a process called "Listening to Women". From Bristol to Birmingham and from Newcastle to Norwich,

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in Scotland, in Wales and in Northern Ireland, we are ensuring that action by this Government is rooted in the real lives of real women.

Mr. Dale Campbell–Savours (Workington): I wish to raise with my right hon. Friend a tough issue that I have raised with her several times before. I am sure that she will agree that the most important development in many women's lives is having a child. She knows of my constituent who has been refused in vitro fertilisation treatment by the health authority because her husband has a child by a previous marriage. That decision is an outrage and an intrusion on my constituent's civil rights. In this day and age, it is intolerable that a health authority feels it has the right to act in that way under a Labour Government, whose Ministers do not agree with it. Does my right hon. Friend have any news about that issue, because my constituent's husband came to my surgery in Workington on Saturday and told me that his wife was very distressed? Something must be done, because the situation is intolerable.

Ms Jowell: I thank my hon. Friend, and I pay tribute to the sheer diligence and commitment that he has shown to his constituent who faces a dreadfully distressing situation, in which I have taken a close personal interest. As he will know, we are considering several aspects of our policy on infertility. We are determined to get rid of what is no more than a geographical lottery and to ensure that treatment for infertility is based on the best available evidence. We are determined to ensure consistency, guided by the best clinical evidence, in the criteria used by health authorities to determine eligibility for fertility treatment. We are also determined that when couples are first referred for fertility treatment, they are given a proper assessment of the likelihood that it will be successful. It is heartbreaking for couples to persevere with fertility treatment, for reasons that every woman in the House will understand, when the clinical likelihood of a pregnancy is remote. I will remain closely in touch with my hon. Friend about the matter, and I am happy to meet him and his constituent to discuss the action that the Government are taking to create greater fairness in access to treatment for infertility.

Earlier today, I spoke to women representing more than 100 non-governmental organisations. I take this opportunity to pay tribute to them and to thank them for their tireless efforts on behalf of thousands of women. My right hon. Friend the Member for Airdrie and Shotts (Mrs. Liddell), the Scottish Office Minister with responsibility for women's issues, has responded on behalf of the Government this afternoon to a debate in the Scottish Grand Committee. The Scottish Parliament will be well placed to advance the interests of Scottish women.

Since our election, the Government have been committed to listening to, and acting on what we hear from, women. However, women still feel that their voices are not heard. They still feel under-represented. Let us look at the House of Commons. In the previous Parliament, there were more Members called John than there were women Members. In the current Parliament, we have done much better on my side of the House.

Mrs. Claire Curtis–Thomas (Crosby): I welcome the contemplated tour to listen to women, but I encourage my right hon. Friend to consider including Liverpool in her round of visits. She may know that that great city is the founding home of the women's refuge movement and the citizens advice bureau. A great collective of people in Liverpool—men and women—have a great vested interest in promoting women.

I should like to draw to my right hon. Friend's attention a sad fact that afflicts many women in my profession of engineering. Recently, the Women's Engineering Society has undergone a survey of the professional women who are its members. We wanted to know what happened to women throughout their careers. It is a sad fact that 30 per cent. of women aged between 30 and—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord): Order. The hon. Lady must take her seat while I am on my feet. The earlier intervention by the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell–Savours) was a trifle too long, but the current one is becoming a speech. The hon. Lady should put her question briefly and then resume her seat.

Mrs. Curtis–Thomas: What is being done to improve the participation in work of women with a science and engineering background, given that they have to take career breaks to manage their children and for caring duties?

Ms Jowell: My hon. Friend's important question goes to the heart of the issues that we are tackling for women in relation to the importance of family-friendly employment that recognises the importance of flexibility and the opportunity to take time off, particularly when children are small. A second question, which will be picked up by the teenage girls project, is why so few women go into careers such as science and engineering. We want more girls to do so.

In the current Parliament, the Government are proud to have achieved a parliamentary Labour party in which 25 per cent. of hon. Members are women. There are 101 women out of 421 Members.

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): Does the right hon. Lady accept that Labour broke European Union law by introducing women-only shortlists? Women must reach the House on merit. Equal opportunities are for men and women. Party lists exclusively composed of women broke the rules.

Ms Jowell: That is a tired old argument. Let me make it absolutely clear that the industrial tribunal that considered one case decided that all-women shortlists might be in breach of the Sex Discrimination Act 1975. No definitive judgment was made, but we decided before the general election not to continue to pursue that course.

The encouraging point is that even after our decision, the glass ceiling had been broken. Many women were selected from mixed lists in what had been safe seats. We are proud of the level of representation of women that we have achieved. I do not wish to intrude into the private grief of the Opposition on that matter, but *The Sunday Times* yesterday blew the gaff on what goes on in the Conservative party. Before the Opposition raises concerns about Labour, they should perhaps put their own house in order.

A quarter of the Labour parliamentary party are women. However, we do not accept that that is enough, and we will continue to build a Parliament that really reflects the balance between men and women throughout the country. We must do much to achieve that.

Ms Margaret Moran (Luton, South): Does my right hon. Friend agree that representation is not only an issue in this Parliament, and that in the Northern Ireland Assembly, for example, we need to ensure that there is much wider representation of women? Will she join me in congratulating women throughout the community in Northern Ireland on their work in conflict resolution, especially the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition, whose members deserve our highest praise for their work towards reconciliation and peace in Northern Ireland?

Ms Jowell: I am delighted to endorse my hon. Friend's remark. I would add that we have certainly put our effort where our mouth is on ensuring equality and gender balance in both the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Assembly.

We need to maintain the drive across Government. We have appointed a Minister for Women at Cabinet level; and we have a Cabinet Committee on women, whose members act as ambassadors for women in their own Departments of State, driving through change. We have had remarkable success: £300 million has been allocated to child care and an extra £30 million to breast, lung and colorectal cancer services, both of which sums will be supplemented by significant lottery funding channelled through the new opportunities fund initiatives on child care, and on cancer prevention, detection, treatment and care. In addition, a further £875 million has been allocated to child benefit. The women's unit, newly set up in the Cabinet Office, acts as a task force to add value and join up the effort across Whitehall.

Yvette Cooper (Pontefract and Castleford): Is my right hon. Friend aware that women benefited five times as much as men from the previous Budget—which was hailed by the Opposition as being sexist—because women are far more likely to look after children and to live in poverty? Will she join me in calling on our right hon. Friend the Chancellor to build on that work to support women and children in poverty in tomorrow's Budget?

Ms Jowell: I shall certainly join my hon. Friend in calling for that. By this time tomorrow, we should know to what extent my right hon. Friend the Chancellor has done what he has said he hopes to do, which is to deliver a Budget for women and families.

Jackie Ballard (Taunton): To follow up on that point, will the right hon. Lady also urge the Chancellor to lift the personal allowance by a considerable amount, which would take millions of low-paid women out of taxation altogether?

Ms Jowell: I am sure that many such proposals have been put to my right hon. Friend the Chancellor, but we shall have to contain our impatience and wait for his Budget speech tomorrow.

We need to increase women's involvement in public life and decision making more generally. We are committed to 50 per cent. representation of women in public appointments, and we have already made important progress by ensuring that nearly half of all national health service trust and health authority chairs and chief executives are women.

Mr. Fabricant: I understand the right hon. Lady's motivation, which is laudable, for saying that 50 per cent. of health trusts and various other committees should be made up of women, but will she give an undertaking to the House that women will be chosen according to merit, and not merely because they fill a quota?

Ms Jowell: Any such suggestion would be deeply offensive to the excellent women who have been appointed to trusts and health authorities throughout the country. We are lucky to have their services, which will help us to deliver a modern national health service to the people of this country.

We have also delivered stronger simple guidelines to Whitehall policy makers, in which we set out clearly how we expect them to assess the impact of their policies on women, ethnic minority groups, people with disabilities and other disadvantaged groups, to ensure that Departments are responsive and act with sensitivity. We need to track our action on our commitment to equality across society.

Lorna Fitzsimons (Rochdale): Does my right hon. Friend see it as a testament to the Government's record on putting policies into practice that the Treasury, the Department of Health, the Department for Education and Employment, the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, and the Foreign Office are all represented on the Treasury Bench, but that only seven Members are here to represent all the Opposition parties in a debate on issues that affect 52 per cent. of the population?

Ms Jowell: My hon. Friend makes a very good point. The Department for International Development is also represented on the Front Bench.

We must look not just at policy making, but at all Government processes—for example, service delivery—and ensure that we understand the differing impact on men and women. A set of proposals will be developed and printed in the "Modernising Government" White Paper, which will be published shortly by my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Cabinet Office.

For many years, the Women's National Commission has given 50 of the United Kingdom's largest women's organisations a direct voice to Government. I am delighted to report that we have extended the commission's remit by scrapping the limit of 50 member organisations and inviting all women's organisations to join the umbrella group. That is important as the group is a formal channel of communication between Government and women up and down the country. We want to ensure that we talk to all women—women from grassroots groups, community groups, tenants associations and other bodies in which many women are active—who, until now, have been excluded from that process.

This is a programme for women. It is a programme of listening, of action and of delivery with women for women. It is about not just what Government can do for women but what women, working with Government and

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in their communities, can achieve for themselves and their families. It is about delivering on the key issues that count for women—for example, health, education, crime and jobs. It is about making women's voices heard and supporting women in delivering on their responsibilities to their families, at work and in their communities.

That is what the Government are doing: recognising that the personal can be made possible by the political. We are delivering deeds not words—as the suffragettes demanded—and making things better: better for women and better for all.

5.2 pm

Mrs. Theresa May (Maidenhead): I welcome this opportunity to debate the Government's record on delivering for women—a debate that is made all the more important by Labour's emphasis on its approach to women's issues both before and during the last election. I also welcome the Minister with responsibility for women's issues to the Dispatch Box for this debate. I believe that I am correct in saying that this is the first debate on women's issues that the right hon. Lady has opened in the House since her appointment last July. Furthermore, in more than seven months in the job, the Minister has answered only one oral question relating to women—and that was about a health issue. That is hardly an example of placing women's issues firmly at the centre of Government, as the then Minister for Women, the hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Joan Ruddock), promised in June 1997.

Dr. Lynda Clark (Edinburgh, Pentlands): Does the hon. Lady accept that questions must be asked before they can be answered? Therefore, I assume that Opposition Members did not ask the Minister any oral questions on that topic.

Mrs. May: I remind the hon. and learned Lady that it is the Government who have made much of the fact that there are so many female Labour Members of Parliament who are very interested in women's issues. How much interest did Labour Members show in women's issues? How many questions did they ask of the Minister with responsibility for women's issues? Sadly, there were none. I wonder how many questions on that topic the hon. and learned Lady has tabled for the Minister.

Ms Jowell: If the hon. Lady looks at any Order Paper, she will see a long list of questions specifically about matters that concern women. I have made it very clear that we believe women's issues should not be locked in some Whitehall backwater but should be part of the mainstream of Government. Every single Minister is concerned about the position of women and about improving that position and delivering for women.

Mrs. May: I am somewhat surprised by the Minister's intervention because it appears that she now agrees with the Conservative party about the importance of mainstreaming, which was certainly not the impression given by the Labour party prior to the election.

What is noticeable about the issue of oral questions is that when her colleagues, the right hon. Member for Camberwell and Peckham (Ms Harman) and the hon. Member for Deptford, were responsible for women's issues, they were asked a number of questions specifically relating to women's unit matters. Those questions seem to have dried up since the present Minister for Women came to her position.

Helen Jackson (Sheffield, Hillsborough): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Lorna Fitzsimons *rose—*

Mrs. May: A surfeit of hon. Members want me to give way. I give way to the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Helen Jackson).

Helen Jackson: The hon. Lady referred to the previous Parliament. I remember that at that time, the Minister with responsibility for women was the Secretary of State for Employment, David Hunt, followed by Michael Portillo, and it fell to my hon. Friends to engineer any debate on women's issues during women's week. There was not even a glimmer of a suggestion from those Ministers that they wanted to discuss in the Chamber issues of great importance for women in this House.

Mrs. May: Not all my ministerial colleagues in the previous Government who took responsibility for women's issues were men.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Development (Mr. George Foulkes): They were men.

Mrs. May: The hon. Gentleman says that they were men. My right hon. Friend the Member for South-West Norfolk (Mrs. Shephard) is not a man and my hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs. Gillan) is not a man. If the hon. Gentleman wants to make sedentary interventions, he should get his facts right beforehand.

The Minister, in opening the debate, referred several times to the Government's programme of action and delivery. She spoke of "deeds, not words" and claimed that the Government were listening to and acting for women. Sadly, the opposite is true. Although the Labour party promised much for women before the last election, it has failed to deliver. Its record owes more to gloss than substance, and this is yet another case of Labour's actions failing to live up to its rhetoric.

I am grateful to the Minister for setting out a number of areas in which she claimed that women's quality of life and role in society had improved. She gave the examples of the number of women in higher education and in the work force. I remind the Minister that those are successes of the previous Conservative Government, who, through flexible labour markets and a healthy economy, ensured that women were able to play a fuller part in the workplace than had previously been the case. The pay differentials between men and women were significantly reduced under the previous Conservative Government, and I am sorry to hear that the pay differential went up last year under new Labour.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mrs. May: I shall give way to the hon. Member for Salford (Ms Blears) and then I will make progress.

Ms Hazel Blears (Salford): Does the hon. Lady believe that the 1.3 million women who will be helped by the first national minimum wage should not receive that wage and should continue to work in a flexible labour market for poverty pay?

Mrs. May: I shall comment on the impact of the minimum wage later in my speech, so perhaps the hon. Lady would like to listen to my remarks. As she heard from the intervention on the Minister by my hon. Friend the Member for Lichfield (Mr. Fabricant), problems associated with the minimum wage are affecting organisations and employers throughout the country. Pre-school playgroups will affect women in two ways because people employed in pre-schools are predominantly women and women are benefiting from the opportunity for their children to attend those pre-schools. The hon. Lady should not welcome the news that pre-schools may have to close because of the impact of the minimum wage.

Ms Rosie Winterton (Doncaster, Central): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. May: No, I have said that I want to make some progress. I am sure that there will be plenty of opportunities to allow interventions later, which I shall take.

Prior to the election, Labour promised a Minister for Women with full Cabinet status. Many assumed that that meant a Cabinet Minister with responsibility just for women; it certainly seemed to be a promise for a Minister for whom women would be their sole concern. As the Labour party said in "New Labour for Women",

> "The minister for women will ensure that women's interests are taken into account in all policy making, having power to scrutinise all major legislation to examine its impact on women."

We even had the somewhat unedifying sight of the hon. Member for Rossendale and Darwen (Janet Anderson) telling women that they would get more sex under Labour. What happened in reality? After the election, responsibility for women was given to the then Secretary of State for Social Security, the right hon. Member for Camberwell and Peckham, who is in her place—Cabinet responsibility for women, but hardly sole responsibility for women.

After much to-ing and fro-ing, the Prime Minister appointed a separate junior Minister for Women, the hon. Member for Deptford, who is also in her place. It appeared that the Prime Minister had recognised the importance of the job. But wait—he had left it so late that there was not enough money to pay any other Minister a full ministerial salary, so the Minister for Women was unpaid. What message did that send about how the Government viewed the importance of women and issues of importance to them? More significantly, what message did it send to women who are still fighting for equal pay?

After a year in which much continued to be promised to women, but during which the Secretary of State's main claim to fame on women's issues was cutting the lone-parent benefit premium, the two Ministers for Women were sacked. What is in their place? Cabinet responsibility for women has moved to the House of Lords. We all know what the Government think of the House of Lords. What does that say about the importance of women in their policy agenda?

The Minister for Public Health now responds to debates on women's issues in this House. Once again, responsibility for women's issues is not a Minister's sole responsibility, as many felt Labour had promised prior to the election, but merely one of the areas in a Minister's portfolio. Indeed, the list of responsibilities of the Minister for Public Health numbers 32. Where do women's issues come on that list? Do they come first, second or, perhaps, third? No, women's issues rank 32nd—bottom of the list.

In November, the Ministers for Women attempted to re-launch the women's unit. In their glossy brochure, "Delivering for women: Progress so far", they listed 18 measures to aid women. Of those 18, there was one strategy, one sub-committee, one initiative, one unit which was not exclusively for women, a new deal which is not working, a minimum wage which will cost jobs, and 12 promises of things to come. That is not about delivering for women; that is still about promising for women. That is not about action rather than words; that is about words and words and no action.

Let us look in a little more detail at the Government's policy actions for women, as they describe them. Once again, they pay lip service to women. Plenty of press releases claim to deliver for women, but actions speak louder than words. The Government have so far failed to deliver across so many areas of policy—be it the scheme to get lone parents back to work, which has been an expensive failure, plans to cut widows' benefit, or centralised employment policies, which, far from being family friendly, can only destroy jobs. In addition, the Deputy Prime Minister has attacked women who drive their children to school, and there has been a refusal to act on genetically modified crops and food.

Mr. Foulkes: Oh no.

Mrs. May: It is an issue of great importance to women.

Yvette Cooper: If the hon. Lady is so concerned about delivering for women, why will she not withdraw her opposition to the working families tax credit, which will make 700,000 women better off, and abandon her alternative proposal to introduce a tax hike for those 700,000 women?

Mrs. May: I shall talk about the working families tax credit later. Far from delivering for women, that tax credit may put many families in a worse position in terms of wallet versus purse.

The Under-Secretary of State for International Development made a comment from a sedentary position when I mentioned genetically modified crops and food. He may say "Oh, no" in that tone, but food safety issues strongly influence women when they decide what to feed their families, and beef—

Mr. Foulkes: Beef on the bone.

Mrs. May: Beef not on the bone—which was the result of the Government's decision, and their failure to allow women to decide for themselves what to feed their own families.

Lorna Fitzsimons: Does the hon. Lady accept Labour Members' incredulity at being lectured on the importance of food safety by representatives of a party that presided over the biggest disasters in food health and food safety that any Government in living memory have presided over?

Mrs. May: That intervention does not deserve a response.

One message is clear: the Government have not listened to women, and their priorities show more about their own priorities than about women's priorities.

I shall now discuss several specific issues. I shall not touch on all those that the Minister touched on, but I know that my hon. Friends who will be aiming to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, later in the debate will raise other issues.

Let us consider welfare issues. Labour came to power promising to cut the welfare budget by cutting the cost of economic and social failure. Labour adopted as a key policy the welfare-to-work campaign, and within that the aim of returning lone parents to the work force. The Government therefore introduced the new deal for lone parents as part of that welfare-to-work campaign.

The pilot scheme was a dismal failure. Less than a quarter of those lone parents who were invited to participate had an interview. Of those, nearly a quarter did not participate in the scheme and, overall, only 5 per cent. of those invited to participate got a job. We were told that things would get better when the scheme was extended nationwide. The Government are very good at promising that things will get better, but they are not good at delivering better things and better results.

In questions to the Secretary of State for Social Security earlier, it was made absolutely clear that the new deal for lone parents has an overall success rate, not of 5 per cent., as in the pilot scheme—which we were told would get better—but of only 3.8 per cent.

Of course, we welcome anyone finding a job and getting back into the workplace when they want to, but of 163,000 lone parents invited to participate in the new deal so far, only 6,000 have jobs. The scheme has cost £200 million, so each job has cost about £15,000—and it is not even clear that the people who have got jobs under the scheme would not have got them anyway. In each year between 1995 and 1997, about 40,000 lone parents found work—under a Conservative Government. Two years into the Labour Government's new deal for lone parents, only 6,000 have found jobs under the new deal. The new deal is proving to be an expensive failure—failure for Government and failure for women.

Judy Mallaber (Amber Valley): Will the hon. Lady visit my local jobcentre, in Alfreton, where the new deal for lone parents has now been rolled out, and where I talked, a couple of weeks ago, to the lone parent adviser? In response to the initial letters that she sent out, 30 people came to a meeting, and she has now obtained jobs for 17 of those lone parents.

Mrs. May: I am interested in the experience that the hon. Lady has set out. I note that she did not say how many letters were sent to people.

Judy Mallaber: Sixty.

Mrs. May: Sixty letters, and half of those who were sent a letter came to a meeting and now 17 have jobs. Overall, of 163,000 people who have been invited—

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Ms Margaret Hodge): Pathetic.

Mrs. May: What is pathetic is the result that the Government are getting from their new deal for lone parents. It is proving to be an expensive failure. It is failing to deliver for women and failing for the Government.

The problems for women in the area of welfare benefits do not end there. The working families tax credit was lauded by the Government as the answer to a working woman's problems. It is also expensive but, more significantly, it will fail to deliver the freedom that women want to choose what is right for them and their families. It will bring more families into the welfare net and hence into the dependency culture. It will provide benefit for families earning as much as £38,000 and it will cost £1.5 billion per annum.

The WFTC will be paid through employers.

Mrs. Lait: I warn my hon. Friend against accepting the Government's estimate of £1.5 billion as the cost of the working families tax credit. That estimate is based on the assumption that no one changes his or her form of child care. If there are large sums available for child care tax credit and people register as child minders, the entire equation changes. The cost could increase to £15 billion if everyone eligible under the WFTC opted for a child minder. If only half of them did so, the cost would be £7 billion.

Mrs. May: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for setting out the figures so clearly. She has brought more proof about how expensive the WFTC will be. It is interesting that it was up to my hon. Friend to introduce the figures of £15 billion and £7 billion. Those figures are not coming through from the Government. The Government do not want us to know how much the WFTC will cost.

There are other aspects of the WFTC that cause concern. It will be paid through employers, which means that they will have to know their employees' personal circumstances. There is real concern that the scheme will increase the stigma that is attached to receiving benefit. The point has been raised by independent commentators. The Institute for Fiscal Studies has said:

> "As employers and potentially work colleagues would observe the WFTC, it might increase the stigma associated with receiving transfer payments and so decrease take up."

Decreased take-up would mean fewer families benefiting than those now doing so under the family credit regime.

We also have the ridiculous situation that the Government's new arrangements for child care may make it more financially advantageous for a woman to pay a neighbour to look after her children and go out to work herself rather than stay at home and look after them.

Lorna Fitzsimons: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. May: Not at this moment. I shall make some progress.

The Government's new arrangements are an attack on the many informal arrangements that are made by women to ensure that their children are looked after while they go to work. At my surgery the other day, I saw a constituent who helps her daughter and son-in-law by looking after their young children for part of the week. She told me, "With this new benefit system, I'm going to have to register as a child minder to look after my own grandchildren." Where will women stand when they are no longer free to make the arrangements that they want for their children to be looked after, when they will have to comply with the Government's set regulations?

The WFTC makes one very significant change for women, about which we have heard little from Labour Members.

Lorna Fitzsimons: I thank the hon. Lady for giving way a second time. Does she understand that there is some confusion, certainly among Labour Members, about the line that the Conservative party is taking? Given that the Conservative party talks so much about choice, surely the hon. Lady accepts that the increase of £17 a week that families in receipt of family credit will receive as a result of the introduction of the working families tax credit will give them choice. At present they have no choice but to work longer hours for poverty pay. They will have the chance to stay at home and spend more time with their children. The WFTC will also give women the choice to send their children to child care, an economic choice that they have not had previously. Therefore, we are empowering women to make real choices when under the previous Government there was no choice.

Mrs. May: Of course we are in favour of women being able to make choices. As I have shown, however, the choices available to women may well be reduced rather than increased because of the way in which the WFTC will operate.

The WFTC makes one significant change about which, as I have said, we have heard little from Labour Members. Family credit, which it replaces, was paid predominantly to women. It was introduced by the Conservative Government to help people get back into work, and at the time the Labour party opposed it. As I have said, it has been paid mainly to the mother as a benefit. It will be replaced by the WFTC, which will be paid through the employer. As I said earlier, this will mean that the employer will need to know all the employee's financial circumstances, and the benefit will be paid through the wage packet. That means that the money will predominantly be paid to fathers, particularly in low income families.

Ms Beverley Hughes (Stretford and Urmston): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. May: No, not at this stage.

In its research paper last year, "Purse or Wallet? Gender Inequalities and Income Distribution within Families on Benefit", the Policy Studies Institute showed that when money is paid to the father, it is less likely to be spent on child care. New Labour said that it would help mothers to balance work and home, but the working families tax credit will take an estimated £900 million away from women and children.

How much thought for women and their child care needs was there when the Government signed up to the working time directive? Suddenly, they have realised that it might not be such a good idea to include au pairs in the scope of the legislation, and we see them backtracking on that point. If the women's unit and women's Ministers had had their eye on the ball, the problem would never have arisen.

That is not all. Women now find that their entitlement to widows benefit is to be cut. Their husbands may have paid into national insurance for years, but that means nothing to the Labour Government. It does not matter how much has been contributed. If a woman has no dependent children, after six months she will not get widows benefit. Some 250,000 women will lose out. How is that delivering for women?

There are other examples of the way in which Government policy is failing to take account of the needs of women. Far from mainstreaming women's concerns, too often the Government are marginalising them. In the Welfare Reform and Pensions Bill, for example, changes are being made to disability benefits. Severe disablement allowance was described by the Disability Benefits Consortium in the following terms:

"The introduction of SDA was a victory for the women's movement."

However, the consortium goes on to state:

"We view with dismay the abolition of Severe Disablement Allowance to all new claimants over the age of 24. We believe this change will have a particularly harsh impact on severely disabled women—61 per cent. of SDA recipients are women and amongst older women the proportion rises to 70 per cent."

Cutting off women's ability to get severe disablement allowance—how is that delivering for women?

Let us consider the changes to incapacity benefit proposed in the Welfare Reform and Pensions Bill. Those changes mean that to qualify for incapacity benefit, in future a person will have to have paid national insurance contributions for one of the previous two years. Failure to have done so will mean that that person will fail to get benefit. That will impact particularly hard on those who are carers, those in lower paid jobs below the threshold for national insurance contributions, and those who have two part-time jobs that are each below that threshold. It will hit disabled women and many women who are carers, who are unable to build up a record of contributions and who do not claim invalid care allowance. Restricting the benefit opportunities for women—how is that delivering for women?

Pensions issues are further examples. In its response to the pensions Green Paper, the National Council of Women criticised the Government's proposals as complex and confusing. The NCW is concerned that not enough is being done to educate women, young and old, about pensions and the options available to them, especially looking ahead to the new complex and confusing pensions scenario proposed by the Welfare Reform and Pensions Bill.

The National Council of Women has described as "regrettable" the fact that the Government have launched the stakeholder pensions part of the Bill before the consultation period on the proposals has ended. That is regrettable, indeed, but perhaps not surprising, given the contempt that the Government so often show for consultation. Pensions are a key area of concern for

[Mrs. May]

women, and it is more than regrettable that the Government have not listened to women before embarking on the changes.

It is not just in respect of social security and welfare benefits that the Government have failed to understand the needs of women. Part of the Government's claim to be delivering for women is that they are making it easier for women to get into the workplace by providing family-friendly employment policies. Conservatives support higher standards for workers and more flexible working arrangements to meet the challenges of family and work responsibilities. However, we do not believe that the corporatist attitude of the Government is the right way forward.

Countries with more flexible labour markets are generally better at integrating women into the work force. David Soskice, the director of the Institute for Employment and Economic Change in Berlin, wrote recently:

"Well educated women do significantly better in the US (and Britain) than in Germany, Japan or Sweden. Upwardly mobile women should be wary of proposals to develop a northern European type labour market".

That is just the sort of labour market that the Labour Government are intent on producing in this country.

Ms Rosie Winterton: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for giving way, because it is important to clarify one or two points. As has been said, 1.3 million women will benefit from the national minimum wage and women will also benefit from the fairness at work proposals. Will the Conservative party go into the next election saying that it would reverse the national minimum wage proposals, which would effectively cut the wages of 1.3 million women? Will it also be saying that it would reduce women's rights at work?

Mrs. May: The hon. Lady will have to be patient for a little while. I shall refer to the national minimum wage later on—*[Interruption.]* Just be patient, ladies. There is plenty of time for our manifesto for the next election to be written and for the hon. Lady to find out what our policies will be.

Mrs. Ann Winterton (Congleton): Is not it a fact that more jobs for women have been created in this country over the past 15 to 20 years and that we have a higher percentage of women in the work force than any of those countries in Europe where there are restrictive practices? Is not it the job of a Government to create an economic climate in which more employment opportunities can be created?

Mrs. May: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that excellent intervention. She is absolutely right: it is the Government's job to create the right economic climate so that jobs can be created, for men and women alike. There are so many women in the work force today precisely because of the policies followed by the Conservative party in government. In her opening speech, the Minister praised the fact that there are so many women in the work force, but she failed to mention that that statistic is due to the policies of the previous Government.

Ms Jowell: Will the hon. Lady accept that there are 400,000 more jobs compared with the number available at the time of the general election?

Mrs. May: We left a golden legacy, but one job has been lost every 10 minutes under this Government.

The measures being introduced by the Government on the back of the social chapter and under the heading of family-friendly practices are, as yet, somewhat lacking in detail. For example, the Chemical Industries Association recently said:

"Every employer in the chemical industry will be hit by the proposals on parental leave. It is worrying that with Parental Leave due to be implemented by the end of the year, we have seen no detailed proposals from the Government indicating to employers just what they will have to do . . . a consultation period of at least three months would be needed to assess the likely impact of the regulations and respond accordingly."

Where have the Government thought about the impact of what they describe as family-friendly policies on employers and the extent to which employers can afford them?

Caroline Flint (Don Valley): Is the hon. Lady not aware that the provision for parental leave was put together and negotiated by organisations representing European employers and trade unions?

Mrs. May: I am not sure what the hon. Lady expects anyone to say in response to that. Is she saying that the provision should be accepted because it was put together by a group of European organisations? She would do well to listen to the concerns expressed by employers' organisations in this country about the impact of the policy. It will do employees, male or female, no good at all if statutory requirements imposed by the Government mean that small businesses, or any business, cannot afford to keep employing them.

Real concern has been expressed by the Confederation of British Industry and by other organisations about the impact of the parental leave legislation, especially in respect of the way in which the measure may be open to abuse.

In its research paper on fairness at work, the Institute of Directors said:

"Most fair employers won't mind giving time off for family situations."

Ms Jowell: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. May: No; I am in the middle of a quotation.

The paper continues:

"However, if it is made a statutory right, some employees will see it as part of their holiday entitlement."

In Sweden, the Government have found it necessary to introduce a new law to curtail the problems caused by employees' abuse of emergency family leave rights.

Ms Jowell: Has the hon. Lady discussed the issue of family-friendly employment with her hon. Friend the Member for Tunbridge Wells (Mr. Norman), who has a long association with Asda? When Asda introduced family-friendly employment policies, the number of staff absences fell by 1 per cent. in the first year, saving the firm £3 million. Labour turnover has fallen by 4 per cent., saving £2.4 million. Some of Asda's stores have halved their labour turnover. More than 95 per cent. of female staff who have been on maternity leave are now returning to work. As a result of Asda's family-friendly policies, the number of customers has risen by 35 per cent., and the firm has experienced growth of 8.9 per cent. Does that not suggest that family-friendly employment is good for business and good for women?

Mrs. May: The Minister would not have needed to intervene if she had listened to what I was saying. I said earlier that Conservative Members support higher standards for workers, and support more flexible working arrangements to meet the challenges involved in fulfilling family and work responsibilities. Our concern relates to the way in which the Government are trying to impose their proposals on businesses of all sizes. I note that the laudable measures taken by Asda were taken without intervention from Government.

Good practice will be supported. The Institute of Directors made the position clear when it said:

"Most fair employers won't mind giving time off for family situations."

The problem arises when the Government impose regulations and restrictions on businesses that cannot provide such opportunities. If a company already has problems and must shed employees because of the extra costs, that will not benefit any members of the work force, be they male or female.

Judy Mallaber *rose—*

Mrs. May: I will give way, but then I will try to make progress.

Judy Mallaber: Does the hon. Lady recall that, during a debate on the Employment Relations Bill, the shadow Secretary of State for Trade and Industry implied that even legislating for paternity leave at the time of birth was legislating too far, too fast? Does she agree with that?

Mrs. May: I think that what my right hon. Friend the shadow Secretary of State for Trade and Industry has been stressing is the importance of flexibility and choice for those involved, rather than the Government simply legislating for things to happen at a particular time.

Labour Members should listen to what some parents are saying. In a recent edition of the *Evening Standard*, a member of the National Childbirth Trust was reported as saying that, in some ways, time-off-work measures were an empty gesture, because many families could not do without the income for three months. That, however, is not the only way in which the Government are potentially attacking the market for jobs, especially jobs held by women. The minimum wage, for instance, is likely to have a strong impact on a number of industries that traditionally employ a large number of women. The textile industry and the retail sector are good examples. Bill Martin, chief economist at Phillips and Drew Fund Management, has said:

"If one person loses his job because of the minimum wage that is bad news but we expect there to be up to 90,000 job losses in the textile sector and hotel and retail sector".

All those sectors are traditionally high employers of women. How can 90,000 job losses benefit women? How can that be an example of the Government delivering for women?

In his intervention during the opening speech, my hon. Friend the Member for Lichfield (Mr. Fabricant) made the valid point that, in his experience—he had visited a pre-school this morning that had made exactly the following point—such schools will have problems meeting the requirements.

Jacqui Smith (Redditch): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. May: No. I will try to make some progress.

Such schools will have problems meeting the cost of the minimum wage for their employees. It is a complaint that I, too, have heard from pre-schools. They are concerned about the impact of the Government's legislation.

Ms Jowell: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. May: I will in just a minute.

That legislation will have two impacts: first, on women who are employed by pre-schools that are unable to keep going; secondly, on women who want their children to attend those pre-schools. Potentially, it reduces choice for women.

Ms Jowell: Can we return to the question of my hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster, Central (Ms Winterton): is it now the Opposition's policy to abolish the minimum wage and to return 1.3 million women to poverty pay?

Mrs. May: I answered that question when it was asked, so I suggest that the Minister looks at the answer in *Hansard* tomorrow. It might help her, if she cares to read it.

The Government are loading £40 billion of extra costs on to British business, which will reduce competitiveness and lead to job losses. Many women will suffer as a result. How is that delivering for women?

Jacqui Smith: Is the hon. Lady aware that exactly the same arguments were made about equal pay legislation, and what happened to women's employment after that was introduced?

Mrs. May: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for that intervention. It was, of course, under the previous Government that the differentials between male and female pay reduced significantly. There is more to be done, but it is sad that, last year, under a Labour Government, the differential increased, rather than reduced.

Ms Rosie Winterton: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. May: I will not take any more interventions.

[Mrs. May]

The Government are loading extra costs on to business, which will affect women's jobs. Many women will suffer as a result. That is not delivering for women.

As if that were not enough, I mention one other area where, somewhat surprisingly, women have found themselves under attack from the Government. The Deputy Prime Minister has attacked people who drive children to school and the increased use of cars. Women make up one of the key user groups that has led to a significant increase in car usage in recent years. He wants to attack and to cut that growth. He wants to stop women from driving their children to school, regardless of whether they do so to meet their working needs, or to exercise choice as to which school their children attend.

Many women would have felt that they were highly unlikely to come under attack from the Deputy Prime Minister. Sadly, that was not the case. There is a complete lack of joined-up thinking in the Government. It is not true that women's issues are firmly at the centre of Government policy, or that the Minister for women looks, as was promised, at every piece of legislation that goes through and ensures that it does not have an adverse effect on women. In many areas of Government policy, the headlines claim that they are helping women. The reality is that women will suffer as a result of those policies.

I could go on. There are many examples from Department to Department where, far from mainstreaming women's issues, putting them firmly at the centre of Government policy and looking at the impact of policy on women, the Government have pushed women to one side. They talk a lot about women and child care, but they do not deliver policies that will help in a practical sense.

Women are being hit through the benefit system and are under attack in transport policy. Their jobs are under threat from the Government's adherence to the social chapter and handling of the economy.

The Government claim to understand women's needs, but they fail to act. They follow their own priorities. Perhaps the best example of that was at the relaunch of the women's unit last November, when the Government came up with the idea of a panel of role models for young women and girls. The panel was to include a former topless model, the former Ginger Spice. However, when those women and girls were asked what they wanted, the panel got the thumbs down.

Ms Rosie Winterton: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. May: No; I am sorry. I am coming to the end of my speech, and I shall not give way.

I quote an article from the *Daily Mail* of Tuesday, 10 November, which stated:

"Ministers backpedalled furiously yesterday on plans to use celebrities such as Geri Halliwell as role models for teenage girls.

"The initiative was reconsidered when it emerged that girls admired their own mothers or sisters more than the former Ginger Spice.

"The Government had planned to invite celebrities—actress Emma Thompson, therapist Susie Orbach and pop starlet Billie were among others—to join an advisory panel to reflect teenagers' views.

"With overtones of the 'committee for cool', the Foreign Office's panel of hip young things promoting Cool Britannia abroad, it sounded like a classic New Labour solution. But when the new crusade on women's issues was launched yesterday, the scheme had been pushed to one side.

"Pupils of North Westminster Community School, who met Baroness Jay, Tessa Jowell, the Commons Minister for Women, and Margaret Hodge, the Minister for Employment and Equal Opportunities yesterday, described the idea of celebrity role models as patronising."

Sadly, patronising is what sums up the Government's attitude to women.

Before the general election, the Government promised women so much. Since then, their approach has been more one of, "There, there Dear. We'll tell you we're doing something, but, if we're not, it really won't matter, because you probably won't notice." But women are noticing.

Perhaps the Government should take some notice of the comments made by the teenage girls interviewed, last November, about the issue of the role models panel. The *Daily Mail* article went on to say:

"The girls also appeared less than thrilled at being singled out. 'It seems to me boys need support as well', said Terri Roach."

On 10 November, *The Independent* also dealt with the matter:

"'Why isn't there a men's unit as well?' said Nepa Chopra. 'I want equality. I don't want women to go round wanting to be better than men.'

"'I don't want women being given jobs or being made cabinet ministers just because they're women' said Vicky Markham."

Emma Blackburn said:

"'Men have problems as well that should be addressed.'"

The sad fact is that men and women are now realising that Labour's promises are evaporating. Labour's actions are failing to deliver. The Government are not delivering for women—they are not delivering for any of us. They are certainly not delivering for the United Kingdom.

5.47 pm

Ms Harriet Harman (Camberwell and Peckham): I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Minister for Public Health on the work that she is doing, and fully agree with the points that she made in her speech. I shall take the very welcome opportunity of today's debate—which the Government have called to mark the week in which we celebrate international women's day—to raise some issues and ask some questions about the Government's relationship with women.

I believe that this Government have done a great deal for women, yet that is not fully the perception. I do not believe that women feel that this is their Government as strongly as men feel that this is their Government, who are there for them. Before I offer some explanations of why that may be so, and suggest what can be done about it, I should like to spend a few minutes reinforcing my point that the Government, and new Labour, have already met a great many women's concerns. The list is impressive.

The Government are establishing universal, affordable and high-quality child care provision, which has long been a demand of the women's movement and, certainly, a major issue for mothers in my constituency. There has been a massive increase in child benefit—public money paid to women with children. The new deal for lone parents recognises, for the first time, that the billions of pounds that are spent on advice and training for work should go to help not only men but women. The working families tax credit and the minimum wage are, in practice, a massive redistribution towards low-paid women and

their families. Moreover, there will be equal representation of women in both the new National Assembly for Wales and the new Parliament for Scotland.

Why are feminists not in the vanguard of support for new Labour, and why are women not the most committed to, rather than the most doubtful of, the Government? I would like to make suggestions as to why that might be the case, and what the Government could do about it. Men in the Government must always remember that they are talking to women as well as to men. Where the Government are making changes that will be important for women, such as policies to help them to balance their home and work responsibilities, they should give them much more attention. Where the Government are making policy that will particularly affect women, such as family policy, men must not do it on their own, but do it jointly with women. There needs to be a genuine sharing of power with women within the Government, not just a sharing of positions.

My first point is that the Government should remember that they are talking to women as well as to men. This is about style, but it is also about content. They must avoid falling back on militaristic, macho, hierarchical language and behaviour. It is a turn-off for women and alienates them from their Government. The Government know the importance of communication and need to remember that they are speaking to women as well as men. I shall give one small example. When the Government, in the wake of the resignation of my right hon. Friend the Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson)—which I deeply regretted—rightly tried to refocus the media agenda, they did so by announcing that that would be led by the big guns, the big hitters and the big beasts. No women talk about women whom they respect in that way. It was clearly men talking about men to other men. Would women talk about the big hitters in the Government tackling domestic violence? I do not think so. Would women in Northern Ireland talk about their Secretary of State as a big gun? Would women talk about big beasts implementing our child care programme? Of course not.

People can dismiss that as political correctness, but it is a serious point. One can either adopt macho rhetoric or one can talk to women—one cannot do both. I am certain that women do not want a Government of big guns, big hitters or big beasts; they want a Government who understand their changed and changing lives and who deliver for men, but also deliver for them and for their families. The Government are for women, and they should not be afraid to say so.

My second point is that there needs to be a greater focus on those issues that are important to women, which should be moved higher up the political agenda. Take family-friendly employment. In the Employment Relations Bill, as well as a new right to trade union recognition, there is a new right for employees to take family leave. That is of huge importance to women. It recognises for the first time that half the work force are women and that most of those women are someone's mother. The ability of those women to balance their important home and work responsibilities is critical. Until now, the law has not recognised that the economy depends on women's as well as men's work. Employees can get time off if they are sick, but not if their child is sick. Employment law assumes that an employee is a man who has a wife at home to look after a sick child. That will change under the new legislation. That will be a huge relief to women, who will not have to pretend that they are ill when it is their child who is ill, or send a sick child to the childminder rather than risk losing their job.

Yet, there has been hardly a whisper about that new right and the other new rights to time off, such as when elderly relatives need care. In contrast, hours of debate in the House, hours of Ministers' time and acres of newsprint have been taken up with the debate about trade union recognition, and that has squeezed out the debate on family leave, yet that new right should command our time and attention as well.

That right, which I am sure that all would support in principle, could be highly controversial to put into practice. If we get it right, it will be a huge plus for women, but if, through lack of attention, we get it wrong, it will be an embarrassment for the Government. The last thing that we want is for the Government to falter when implementing new and important rights for women.

I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, who has, to his credit, given high priority to the issue, as have Ministers with responsibilities for women. It is high time that everyone else did so as well. I make that point not just to the Government, but to all Members of Parliament—men as well as women—and the representatives of business and trade unions.

Thirdly, men in the Government must avoid doing policy-making on their own. They must do it with women on equal terms. Take policy on the family. I pay a warm tribute to my right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and the Home Secretary for moving family policy up the political agenda. However, the family is about men and women. Sometimes, that is not an easy relationship. The high divorce rate tells us only about those who have not made it and have resolved to end it. Family life is nearly always a balance between the interests of men and of women. Family policy presented only by men, however right or carefully thought out it may be, will sound and feel like patriarchy. Women will not listen to men telling them about their families, so we need a higher profile for women Ministers on the issue—Ministers such as my right hon. Friend the Minister for Public Health. Policy on domestic violence is currently the responsibility of a male Minister in the Home Office. That responsibility should be shared with the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, my hon. Friend the Member for Vauxhall (Kate Hoey), working in partnership with Ministers with responsibility for women.

My fourth, final and most important point—the one that presents the greatest challenge—is that there needs to be a genuine sharing of power, not just of positions, between men and women at all levels in the Government. There should be more women in the Government. We need to support them more than we do; they need to support each other; and men in the Government need to make space for them.

On that last point, I should like to draw a parallel with devolution. The Government are devolving power away from Westminster to Scotland and Wales because they believe that that is right. Democracy in the centre and in the devolved areas will grow stronger as a result. However, the Government have learned that they are devolving power to Scotland and Wales in a climate of scepticism. People who are used to being powerless remain suspicious even when they are being given power. They suspect the motives and the extent of change.

[Ms Harriet Harman]

When men offer to share power with women, sometimes the sceptics are partly right. It is not easy for anyone to give away power. Not everyone in government has the same commitment. It is easy for people to give power to those who are the same as they are, but that is pointless. The Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Assembly will be different from Westminster. That is why they are worth setting up. The same goes for men sharing power with women.

Women in government are not the same as men in government. Women and men are shaped by their experience and, because of tradition, history and, above all, the division of labour in the home, women still lead different lives. That difference makes it a challenge for men to share power at the top, but it is worth doing and it is necessary. Our policy will be better and our democracy will be refreshed when we are genuinely a Government of, and for, women and men on equal terms.

I should like to take this opportunity to tell women that the Government are delivering for them, although there is more to be done. My message for the Government is that they have already done a tremendous amount to improve women's lives, but they still have further to go.

5.58 pm

Jackie Ballard (Taunton): It is just over a year since we last had an opportunity to debate the Government's priorities and policies for women. The debate a year ago was held on a poorly attended Friday morning. I think that the same cast of players were here then as we have at this slightly better attended debate on a Monday afternoon. I hope that next time the debate will be even better attended.

Sadly, during the past year the two Ministers with responsibilities for women have been moved on without explanation and for no apparent reason, before they had time to get to grips with the challenges in their roles. I am sorry that the Government have not appointed a Minister for Women who has no other major portfolio or responsibility. I agree with the hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May) on that.

The right hon. Member for Camberwell and Peckham (Ms Harman) rightly said that the Government do not have the appeal to women that they might think that they should have. That is partly because of their way of communicating. Government communications still use male language. Although there are a number of women in the Cabinet, the main spending Departments are headed by male Secretaries of State.

I acknowledge—graciously, I hope—that the Government have made progress on a number of issues, including child care and the proposals for family-friendly working practices. However, I am a member of an Opposition party, so I am sure that the Minister will understand if I concentrate constructively on areas where the Government could do more.

According to the Equal Opportunities Commission, only 33 per cent. of managers and administrators are women—yet, as the Minister pointed out, 45 per cent. of all workers are women. In 1975, women earned only 71 per cent. of male earnings. Twenty years later, that had increased to 80 per cent—still one fifth less than average male earnings. Our society cannot be judged to be healthy if women still earn that much less on average than men for doing the same job, despite equal pay legislation.

Many women work part-time, especially those with caring responsibilities, and part-time workers are in an even worse position. Their hourly wage is less than two thirds that of full-time male workers. Despite legislation against sex discrimination, women are still discriminated against—especially in the work force and in terms of social security. Some 2 million women earn too little to pay national insurance contributions, and will—if the contributory principle remains—become poor pensioners in the years to come.

Around two thirds of widows live on or below the income support level. There can be no equality for women until they are economically independent and economically equal. I hope that the Budget will not take a retrograde step towards ending separate taxation for couples in order to tax the child benefit of high earners.

Each year, the Equal Opportunities Commission presents its report to the Secretary of State for Education and Employment. Last year, I sought to get the report debated in Parliament, but I was unsuccessful. I hope that the Government will consider having not only an annual headline debate on their priorities for women, but a wider debate on sex equality, based on the EOC report.

One of the major pieces of work undertaken by the EOC last year was a proposal for a new sex equality law to replace equal pay and sex discrimination legislation. It proposed strengthening the rights of individuals and placing new responsibilities on employers and public authorities. The proposed legislation would provide better regulation and help to reduce the incidence of expensive litigation, which can arise when organisations fail to build gender equality into their plans, programmes and practices. I hope that the Government will make a commitment today to review the current legislation, and to introduce their own equality legislation in the next Session of Parliament. I will be interested to hear the Minister's response.

That would be a real step forward, not just for women who face discrimination on gender grounds, but for men—because equality is not just about women's rights. Women are still under-represented in many areas of life. I will not repeat the arguments that I have made often in this House on the gender balance in Parliament. I am too well aware of the problems in my party in that regard.

Those who wield power in Britain are still overwhelmingly male—just look at High Court judges, heads of large companies, newspaper editors and members of powerful quangos. That shows how far we have to go before the glass ceiling is broken. The Government have a stated aim to achieve parity in appointments to quangos, although I do not think that as much progress has been made as could have been. The Minister referred to health trust appointments, but 50 per cent. has not been achieved in appointing women chairs to the new regional development agencies.

The Government have done nothing to encourage the number of women in the judiciary. Women's organisations across the country say that the judiciary is in desperate need of reform—especially in areas such as domestic violence, rape and other issues. There are still no women in the highest court in the land, and only 7 per cent. in the High Court. I hope that Ministers have the ear of the Lord Chancellor on the issue, and that we will soon have a more transparent system of appointing judges that includes a balance of women. There is no shortage of able

women in the legal profession, and I know that during the last round of appointments, the names of a number of able women were proposed by women barrister associations and women lawyer associations as being suitable for appointment.

The fact that those wielding power are men conditions the way in which decisions are made that affect all our lives. Any decision or action by Government, or anyone who holds power, is bound to affect men and women differently. I am pleased that the Government have recognised that fact, and I hope that the Cabinet Sub-Committee examining Government legislation for its impact on women will be listened to by all Departments. For example, some of the Government's welfare reform proposals will have an impact on women, including the abolition of the severe disablement allowance to new claimants aged over 24—61 per cent. of whom are women. However, because the Cabinet Sub-Committee meets in secret, we do not know what it thought about the proposal.

I would like this country to have what many other legislatures have—a Select Committee on equality, to examine all proposed legislation for its impact on equality; not just in gender, but other areas. A pre-legislative Select Committee, made up of Members from all parties, which met in public, could provide proper scrutiny of Government legislation.

I wish to refer to paid work versus caring responsibilities. The belief in paid work as a panacea for all society's ills does not give adequate recognition of the contribution that women make as members of the unpaid economy, both in their role as carers and in holding together thousands of voluntary organisations on which society has come to depend. The Minister talked about work conferring a sense of independence and value, but parenting provides a sense of value also. It is the most difficult job in the world to do, and being a single parent is even more difficult than being part of a couple of parents. However, it is also the most rewarding job in the world.

The economic value of the unpaid economy, in which women are predominant, is not recognised, although both the paid and the unpaid economies are interdependent. To remove labour from the unpaid economy would have dire economic consequences, which even the experts—such as my hon. Friend the Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb)—have not fully estimated.

Mr. Steve Webb (Northavon): It is my fault, is it?

Jackie Ballard: It is not my hon. Friend's fault. I am saying that my hon. Friend, who is such an expert on these matters, has not fully computed the impact.

If the pool of unpaid labour is not replenished with new volunteers, there will be a cost to society of providing care from the paid sector. The Government's schizophrenic attitude towards unpaid caring is at odds with their desire to promote and subsidise child care provided by the paid economy. The implication seems to be that non-parents provide better care than parents.

Inasmuch as the House has a role in promoting lifestyles for women—it has a very small role—in terms of them staying at home or going out to work, I would like us to give women real options and choices. Many individuals, especially women, cannot have meaningful choices unless the Government take action to remove the barriers to those choices. Those barriers are not just economic—they are social, political and cultural. Otherwise, there can be no progress and the inequalities in society will remain entrenched.

Universal access to child care will not be provided solely by the private sector—the market will not meet all needs. Universal child care has been mentioned, but it is not universal yet, and we have some way to go before it is as accessible in rural constituencies, such as mine, as it may be in inner-city communities. It is not universally easily accessible for those on average or lower incomes.

I welcome the Government's national child care strategy, which is a step in the right direction and something for which we have waited for a long time. It will be difficult to build a properly universal strategy that will give accessible and affordable child care to all those who want it. In the beginning, there are difficult choices. Should the priority be allowing people with children under five to get back on the career ladder quickly, or providing after-school clubs for children of school age?

Like many other women Members, I have in the past juggled with a variety of forms of child care. One cannot simply find one child minder who will do everything. Often one has to find one person for before school, one person for after school and someone else in the holidays; and then what does one do when the child is sick? We have all had that awful guilt feeling when we have sent our children to school because we are sure that they are not really ill, but we are not sure whether we are acting for their convenience or ours.

The women's jury, set up by previous Ministers for Women, concluded that women want genuine choice and help with balancing work and family life. It also felt that child care should be provided in conjunction with family-friendly policies in employment. I welcome the Government's recognition of that.

I hope that business, too, will recognise that both fathers and mothers are parents and that mothers will not have freedom until fatherhood is taken seriously by employers. Fathers should be entitled to paternal leave when a child is born. I read a letter in one of the newspapers this morning from a father who did not understand why he would want leave when a child is born, because his wife would not want him there for a couple of months after having the baby, so that she could bond with the child. What a strange father he must be.

Either parent should have an entitlement to paid leave to cope with the inevitable childhood illnesses; it should not always have to be the mother. No professional carer will look after an ill child for a day, and when children are ill there is no emotional substitute for a parent. If parental leave is not paid, as the right hon. Member for Camberwell and Peckham said, it will in practice be denied to the lower paid. I hope that, at the very least, the Government will consider enabling low-paid women to go on and off income support easily, so that they, too, can take parental leave.

Functional families need functional parents who are not tied to their desks or production line. We must get away from the idea that people need to prove their commitment or ambition by getting into work at 7 am and leaving at 11 pm. Perhaps we should take a lead by working more normal hours, both in Westminster and in our constituencies. So many of us now are parents that we

[Jackie Ballard]

ought to be able to have some influence. I hope that we will take a lead from the Scottish Parliament, which will work normal hours when it sets up later this year.

Sadly, not all families are functional. Violence in the home is experienced by thousands of women—and by men—every year. Domestic violence is one of the Government's stated priorities for action, but the voluntary sector, which provides most of the services for victims of violence, is underfunded and suffers the double blow of withdrawal of grants by local authorities whose budgets are under severe pressure. There is a patchwork of provision of refuges, with availability of help varying from area to area, and many police forces still do not provide all their officers with training in dealing with complaints of domestic violence.

Domestic violence cuts across many departmental responsibilities, with input from the Department of Social Security, the Department of Health, the Home Office and probably other Departments that I have forgotten. The Government say that they are committed to joined-up thinking and have set up many cross-departmental working parties, but joined-up thinking needs joined-up resources, and there is as yet no evidence of that. Instead, there is a multiplicity of sources for bidding for funds. Domestic violence is too serious to be left to a lottery of fund bidding and funding.

All people want equality, not special treatment. Our daughters are beginning to expect equality as the norm, but it should also be the right of women currently on pensions or about to retire; of those doing the same job as a man but getting less pay; and of those whose choice is to look after their children at home or to take care of an elderly relative. Only then will both men and women be liberated to take on whatever roles they choose.

As the right hon. Member for Camberwell and Peckham said, men losing some of their powers in some areas will gain advantages in others, giving them the freedom to take on roles involving caring or staying at home, which in the past they felt were not open to them. Surely that should be our aim.

As the Minister said, better for women is better for all. That is why it is especially disappointing that so few men have chosen to take part in this debate—there are one or two honourable exceptions—which is not only about women but is, and should be, about both genders.

Women should not have to pay the price of cuts in Government spending or suffer because of the history of a male-dominated political culture. The Government are tackling many of the issues, but much remains to be done. I hope that we will not have to wait another full year before we can debate their priorities in this area.

6.15 pm

Valerie Davey (Bristol, West): I am delighted to contribute to this debate following a weekend in Bristol during which many groups of women and their families came together to celebrate both the women's world day of prayer and international women's day. Individual women started both those now traditional celebrations.

Perhaps it is ironic that the hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May) should have spoken of the problems affecting textile workers in connection with the minimum wage, since international women's day stems from demonstrations in 1857 by New York women in the textile and garment industries. Because of low pay and the frustration and concern that they felt, they banded together and probably thereby started international women's day.

We had music, dance and poetry in a celebration hosted by Bristol city council. People came not only to look back but to look forward and to recognise what the Government have begun to do to meet women's needs and give them greater choice. We must remember that the movements were born in the adversity of New York, where new immigrants had to live in slum dwellings, were out of work and lacked health and education facilities. That is the context in which we look forward to improving conditions for women.

Make Votes Count, an all-party organisation that seeks to increase political involvement and accountability, also held a meeting in Bristol.

This year, we celebrate the 80th anniversary of the first woman taking her place in the House, yet only 239 women have ever been elected as Members of Parliament. It is a telling fact that 121 of us—more than half the total—are Members now. There is a long way to go. We are still only 18 per cent., or about one in five. We need more women to be involved.

We need to take a deep look at making women's votes count and allowing women to be more involved in Parliament and local government.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: Like the hon. Lady, I believe that we must get as many people as possible to vote in any democratic election. What are the hon. Lady or her party doing to encourage more women to vote in the vital forthcoming local elections? Does she share my concern at the fact that sometimes less than 30 per cent. of the electorate vote—never mind the percentage of women who vote?

Valerie Davey: If the hon. Lady had come to Bristol yesterday and seen the stalls, and the women urging people to participate in the city council elections to come, and the way in which the city council opened its doors, she would have been encouraged.

We must seriously consider more radical suggestions, such as everyone being able to vote in the supermarket or by post. That is exactly what Make Votes Count was discussing.

The other group marching through the streets of Bristol was Jubilee 2000. The people were not so much marching as dancing, because they were led by a rumba band. It was a lovely, colourful occasion, but it brought home the fact that poverty around the world has a female face. I was delighted to see a Minister from the Department for International Development on the Front Bench earlier, in recognition of the fact that the issue is of international concern.

I wish to share with the House some facts and figures provided at a seminar organised by the Department for International Development on gender development and poverty. The international facts are reflected in this country. Some 70 per cent. of the world's 1.3 billion poorest people are women. Political participation by women is low. Around the world women hold only 11.7 per cent. of seats in parliaments. We have 18 per

cent. here, but that is not enough. Some 60 per cent. of the world's nearly 1 billion illiterate adults are women. Thanks to this Government, more money will be put in to that area; it needs to be because, of the 130 million children who are not in school, two thirds are girls.

Worldwide, women earn 75 per cent. of the pay of men for the same work. The value of women's unpaid housework and community work is now estimated by the United Nations to be 35 per cent. of gross domestic product worldwide. In most countries, women work approximately twice the unpaid time that men do. Up to 50 per cent. of women experience some degree of domestic violence during marriage worldwide, and in this country the figure is 25 per cent. The most poignant and important figure is that 585,000 die every year from causes related to pregnancy and childbirth. That is more than 1,600 women every day. In sub-Saharan Africa, one in 13 women will die from pregnancy and childbirth causes, compared to one in 3,300 in the United States of America. There is so much to do to improve women's health and to give women the choice about childbirth. All the neglect of girls and the preference shown for boys causes an unhappy and appalling situation for many women in the world.

I am proud that the Government are concerned about the plight of women in this country and are extending that concern to women worldwide. I assure the Minister that whichever Minister comes to Bristol for the listening to women day, planned for next month, she will hear questions from women in Bristol that will be varied and set in a global context.

6.24 pm

Mr. Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): I am grateful to have caught your eye so early, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because I have to attend an engagement in the Speaker's House at 6.45 pm. I also apologise if I miss the winding-up speeches. The hon. Member for Bristol, West (Valerie Davey) talked about the role of women in the textile industry and congratulated the Government on what they have done for women. However, Bill Martin, the chief economist at PDFM, has said:

"If one person loses his job because of the minimum wage that is bad news but we expect there to be up to 90,000 job losses in the textile sector and hotels and retail sector."

I do not need to tell the hon. Lady that most of those people will be women.

Looking around the Chamber, I can see more women here as a percentage than usual. The right hon. Member for Camberwell and Peckham (Ms Harman) was right when she said that we do not have enough women Members of Parliament. However, we should not condemn ourselves too readily, because although the Westminster Parliament's record is not good, the Assemblée Nationale has an especially bad reputation. Whether its current policy of parité will have any effect, only time will tell. Currently, fewer than 10 per cent. of Members of the Assemblée Nationale are women. As we have heard, the Labour party tried to introduce women-only lists for candidate selection, but that was ruled unlawful and was stopped.

Ms Joan Ryan (Enfield, North): In relation to that point and to the hon. Gentleman's earlier intervention, does he feel that he is here on merit, or as token man?

Mr. Fabricant: As the hon. Member for Taunton (Jackie Ballard) said, I took part in the debate on this issue a year ago, so I like to think that I am taking part as a matter of consistency. I am also taking part because I was an employer—and I shall come back to that point.

I am firmly committed to equal opportunities for all, whether for women or ethnic minorities. However, I firmly oppose the introduction of quotas, which serve only to reduce standards. If a woman cannot make it through her ability, she should not do the job in the first place. The role of Government is to break down the barriers of prejudice so that women and the ethnic minorities are given equal opportunities with men.

Mrs. Maria Fyfe (Glasgow, Maryhill): The hon. Gentleman is probably aware that there has not been a Scottish Conservative woman Member of Parliament since Anna McCurley, so his opinion of his female colleagues in Scotland seems to be extremely poor.

Mr. Fabricant: I am sad to say that Scotland does not have a Conservative Member of Parliament at all at the moment.

Now I must admit to the House—mea culpa—that when I ran a broadcast finance and engineering group before 1992, almost all our operational employees were men. The head of finance, the head of engineering and the head of marketing were all men. All the research and development team were men. I admit that I am ashamed of that record. We recruited from the BBC, Rediffusion and other organisations, and they, too, were staffed mainly by men in engineering positions. That was wrong. My only claim to fame is that, when I was at university, I went out with a girl who subsequently became the BBC's first female boom operator—although I doubt whether that was because she went out with me.

Nothing in the Minister's speech today would have helped the situation. Nothing that the Government are doing would have helped me or other employers to employ women. The debate is entitled, "The Government's priorities for women: progress on their delivery". Like all Government policies, it is like those blister-wrap packages on sale in supermarkets: it makes a cheap, tacky product look exciting and fresh. A pair of mechanical shears is needed to break into it. When you finally get to look at the product that you have purchased, you realise that you have fallen for the marketing spiel and the bright colours, but the contents are cheap and tacky and—more important—do not work, with or without batteries.

My hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May) has already mentioned the problems facing playgroups, such as my local one in Lichfield. They are typical of the problems facing many women in employment.

I have always made it clear that I do not oppose the national minimum wage in principle. However, the Prime Minister defended the minimum wage by saying, "There was such a system in the United States of America, so why isn't good enough for us?" I agree with that, but the minimum wage in the United States has numerous exemptions, including charities and caring organisations. Playgroups would not fall under the ambit of the USA's legislation, and American playgroups would not face the problems that ours do. There are also regional variations for the minimum wage in the United States, and many exemptions depend on the type of job.

[Mr. Fabricant]

For the sake of packaging and dogma, however, our Government could not allow any exemptions. The economy will reap the whirlwind, and the first people to suffer will be women—both those who work in playgroups and those who hope to send their children to playgroups while they go out to work.

Caroline Flint: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Fabricant: I give way to the hon. Member for Don Valley (Caroline Flint), who has never been an employer in her life.

Caroline Flint: Does the hon. Gentleman believe that children placed in a care environment should have the staff of the best quality in terms of both training and pay? We must pay for an environment in which our children can be looked after, and decent pay and decent training are part of that.

Mr. Fabricant: The hon. Lady shows her own naivety and that of those on the Labour Benches in the way that she puts her question. If playgroups go out of business because of the minimum wage, there will be no environment at all—good or bad. Moreover, parents will be unable to go out to work, so they will not have the equal opportunity that the hon. Lady seeks. She may nod her head at me, but if she had ever worked in industry instead of being a trade union official or whatever she was, she would know better than to ask such a damned stupid question.

There is a similarity with the law of conservation of energy. Energy cannot be created from nothing. In the same way, the mere setting of higher wages means that someone is bound to suffer. Small businesses and young women will suffer most. It will take time for that to show, but the minimum wage and other Bills going through Parliament will harm rather than enhance women's employment prospects.

Ms Beverley Hughes: Does the hon. Gentleman think it right that women, whatever job they are in, should earn £1.50 or £2 or £2.50 or £3 an hour? Is that acceptable in today's society?

Mr. Fabricant: It is wrong for women—and for men—to be exploited. However, it is better to be employed than to have one's firm go out of business and not employ anyone. We have already heard that many good firms such as Asda, the John Lewis Partnership and Marks and Spencer have women-friendly policies and care about their employees—both men and women. However, those firms can afford it. There are many industries—we have heard already about textiles—that cannot afford it. The Government's legislation—including the minimum wage with its lack of exemptions, unlike the minimum wage in the United States—will create unemployment. The first category of people to become unemployed will be the very people whom we are debating—women. Mark my words on that point.

Since the Government came to power, 25,000 women have lost their jobs in the textile industry. A recent article in *The Economist* predicted that the textile industry might be forced to shed another 30 per cent. of its work force—around 100,000 jobs.

The minimum wage is not the only problem. Let us remind ourselves of the burdens put on businesses during 22 short months of Labour Government: the windfall tax of £5.2 billion in July 1997; the past two Budgets, which added taxes of £19.15 billion; the national minimum wage, which is costing £8.1 billion; the working time directive, which is costing £6.65 billion; the European works councils directive, which is costing £0.085 billion; and parental leave, which is costing £0.11 billion. All that totals £39.3 billion of taxes on business. If a business can afford that, some Labour Members might say, "So be it." However, many businesses cannot afford it, and it will cost people their jobs.

The Prime Minister said that his Government would make a difference. He was right. The difference will be fewer opportunities for women to achieve gainful employment. The Government call themselves new Labour, but they are not new. They have not learned that Governments cannot create jobs: only businesses can do so. The Government's constant interference, ranging from tinkering to hammer blows, has done nothing for opportunities for women.

The Government have offered hope to many. Every new initiative has been trumpeted from every rooftop—though rarely first in Parliament. Every old initiative has been dusted down and regularly relaunched from every rooftop. Never has the Central Office of Information been so busy sending out e-mails, faxes and photocopies. Entire forests have been destroyed to provide the paperwork as each initiative has been announced and reannounced.

Up to 3 pm today, there had been no fewer than four announcements about this debate.

"Make way for women—Nick Raynsford tells the construction industry",

said one news release. Apart from the title, however, and apart from the fact that the Minister for London and Construction was addressing the women in construction conference in London, the release makes no reference at all to women.

Another news release announced:

"Minister for Women addresses global videoconference".

A third states:

"UK Armed Forces—celebrating International Women's Day".

A fourth is entitled, "International Women's Day—delivering for women". No doubt there have been yet more news releases since 3 pm.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Fabricant: I shall not give way, as I promised you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that I would be brief, and as I have given way five or six times already.

An elderly gentleman stands every Saturday in the precinct in Lichfield with a sandwich board around his shoulders, teaching the word of the Lord. As he might well say, "The time of reckoning is at hand." Newspapers in the west midlands are fed up with the Government, whose Barbie-doll policies ought to be confined to the playground. The newspapers have seen how few expectations have been met for men, let alone women. The Government are all gloss and no substance, and women are most likely to suffer from that.

6.37 pm

Mrs. Sylvia Heal (Halesowen and Rowley Regis): I congratulate Ministers on initiating the debate. Most women are neither "Superwoman" nor the little woman at home who gets the slippers and supper ready. It is sad that so many women underestimate themselves. Many felt increasingly frustrated with a society that demanded black and white choices of them, when they could have chosen from a colourful spectrum of possibilities.

Women have been let down by previous Governments who did not respond to women's changed place in the labour market. Provision of child care has not caught up with working women's changed roles, or with their desire and their need to work. Since their election just over 20 months ago, the Labour Government have produced many policies that will improve the lives of women and benefit their families. They are providing a choice of possibilities for women, and that is what is important.

I want to concentrate on two aspects of the debate—women and employment, and women and violence. More than half the United Kingdom's population are women—29.9 million. Some 12 million of those women are in employment. Yet, in 1997, the Equal Opportunities Commission gave evidence to the Low Pay Commission stating that 40 per cent. of women earned less than £4.50 an hour—less than £8,775 a year for a 37½-hour week. Some 10 per cent. of women earned less than £3 an hour—under £6,000 a year.

Home workers—nearly always women—are often the most exploited workers. Some are paid as little as 50p an hour, and they are expected to run machines from their homes at their own expense. Most are self-employed, receiving no entitlement to holiday or sick pay, and never being eligible for an occupational pension. They will be among the 1.3 million people who will benefit from the introduction of a national minimum wage. In April, that will be welcomed by many, not least by some people I met recently—for example, a chambermaid in Halesowen in my constituency who works in a Birmingham hotel. She told me that she voted Labour for the first time in 1997 because our party was promoting the national minimum wage. She has a husband and three children but, in that hotel, she earns only £2.50 an hour. She will be one of the many women who will rejoice after 1 April.

In the west midlands region alone, there will be 230,000 workers who are likely to benefit from the national minimum wage. As the Low Pay Commission was told by the National Council for One Parent Families:

"The advantage of replacing benefit income with earned income is real—it genuinely helps workers move out of the poverty trap."

The Government acknowledge that many women have a dual responsibility within the home and as employees. Some of the more forward-looking companies have offered flexible working arrangements and provided child care arrangements, but the majority have made no allowance for the additional responsibilities shouldered by women. Many women have had to make a choice between caring for children or dependent relatives, or pursuing a career of their choice. Many thousands of women have chosen part-time, low-paid and less responsible jobs than they are capable of simply because that enables them to combine domestic responsibilities and work.

That can affect women's income dramatically, both in the present and in the longer term. Women are less likely to have entitlement to a pension. The Employment Relations Bill, currently going through the House, will extend maternity leave to 18 weeks for all women. It proposes that parents should be able to take up to three months parental leave when they have a baby or adopt a child. That will certainly help with the necessary adjustment that has to take place in a family when a new member joins it, whether by birth or adoption. It is an important time for one or both parents to spend with that child. The Bill also provides a right to reasonable time off for family emergencies.

There are 6 million carers in Britain, of whom 60 per cent. are women. They might be caring for a child with a disability or for an elderly or disabled relative; some are caring for both. I hope that the provisions of the Bill will cover carers because, despite the increased participation of women in the work force in the United Kingdom, evidence suggests that the number of carers is increasing—it rose by 800,000 in the five years between 1985 and 1990.

Provision of good-quality and affordable child care is essential for working parents; it is especially important for lone parents. I welcome the attention that the Government are paying to the provision of child care; that is long overdue. In my constituency a ward of almost 13,000 people has no child care provision; there are no registered child minders. Not everyone is able to rely on relatives to provide child care, which is why the Government's national child care strategy is to be welcomed. On Friday, I visited an after-school club in a primary school in Halesowen where there were 16 to 18 children. They were happy, motivated and enjoying themselves participating in a range of different activities, and they were given some sandwiches and fruit towards the end of their stay. I met two or three of the parents when they collected their children at 5.30. I did not have to ask them what they felt; they volunteered to me their gratitude that the possibility of the provision of child care had become a reality. It has made a huge difference to the working lives of some of those women, some of whom told me that they now work full-time for three days a week, compared with five days a week part-time. Clearly, that gives them a better opportunity in their careers.

I met a nurse who has recently graduated after completing her training and now works in the community. Her two daughters attend the after-school club, which has enabled her to take up her post in the community knowing that her children are safe, happy and well cared for. She told me that the club was reasonable and affordable, and means that she can have satisfying and enjoyable work and make a contribution to the community. She also told me that the trust is considering term-time work for staff with children. The Government have given the lead, and employers are taking up the challenge and addressing the issue.

My second point relates to women and violence. Women suffer horribly from violence at men's hands in the home and on the streets. Men still think that that behaviour can be excused by saying, "She asked for it." Of course women ask to be beaten black and blue, and of course they decide to wear a short skirt because they want to be raped. It has taken women's organisations decades of constant and concerted effort to obtain international recognition of the fact that violence against women is a human rights issue. The affirmation that such violence is a human rights problem entails Governments' obligation to recognise that women are entitled to be protected

[Mrs. Sylvia Heal]

against violence, and that that is their human right. Governments should guarantee that right and provide remedies when it is violated.

Violence against women is not a private, but a public issue. Government action is needed to protect women against violence, no matter who the perpetrators are. The Government accept their responsibility in that field and are committed to tackling all forms of violence against women. I welcome the Government's initiative to work across Departments to develop policies that combat violence against women—whether it be the Home Office developing a national strategy on domestic violence, or the Lord Chancellor's Department with its responsibility for family law.

Legislation against harassment and stalking has been introduced, as have ways in which vulnerable and intimidated witnesses can be helped to give evidence. Under the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, local crime audits must be conducted. Those will help to focus on violence against women, whether in the home or in the community in which they live. It will no longer be possible to assume, "It doesn't happen here." The audits will identify the extent of the problem in each area, and help local authorities and voluntary organisations to develop the support services that are so necessary.

I welcome the Government's policies to date, because they are a good foundation on which we shall be able to build throughout this Parliament and the next. We never said that things would change overnight, but we do say that things are improving. I add my voice to those of women in my constituency and throughout the country who are celebrating international women's week, in congratulation and celebration of the Government's start on improving the lives of women.

6.48 pm

Mrs. Jacqui Lait (Beckenham): Each year when I take part in this debate, I am not sure whether to welcome or deprecate it. It is sad that we continue to feel the need for a separate debate on women. I wonder whether we should be debating the excluded young men whom young women do not want to marry and with whom they do not want to have children—or rather, the young women will have the children, but do not want the responsibility of having the young men as husbands or even, dare I say it, partners.

For a long time, many of us have fought to achieve equality for women. Many hon. Members are old hands on that subject, not only through participation in debates in the House, but because we have campaigned for decades—in my case, I am happy to admit that it is since the 1960s—for equality for women. It is sad that the same subjects continue to come up, although the position has improved dramatically since I first started to debate such matters at university in the 1960s.

Let us consider the achievements of women. If one goes into a school and asks the girls what they plan to do, they are organised and clear in their views; they have clear goals and know what they want to achieve. They are pouring into universities and colleges, where they comprise at least 50 per cent. of students; they are gaining degrees and will make a huge impact on the professions. The situation has changed beyond all recognition. Police forces now recognise the problems of domestic violence and have set up domestic violence centres. They know that, if they get a panicked telephone call in the early hours of the morning, they must respond quickly and do what they can to remove the perpetrator of violence against women.

The situation has changed in many ways. I am one of the oldies who remembers what it was like before. I campaigned for sex discrimination legislation and for the establishment of the Equal Opportunities Commission. However, in spite of those changes for the better, I now believe that we should consider long and hard whether the commission is still required.

I welcome the announcement that membership of the Women's National Commission will now include smaller women's groups. I campaigned hard for that inclusion when I was a member of a smaller group. I felt excluded from communicating to Government the clear and positive views of my group. If the Women's National Commission is now to encompass all smaller groups and if we assume—it is possibly a big assumption—that it will receive sufficient funds to service those groups properly, we should look to that body and to the women's unit to do the work of the Equal Opportunities Commission.

I believe that the Government—who claim all sorts of achievements with regard to women's issues—should review sex discrimination legislation and assess what does and does not work in that area. The Government must identify what formats are helpful and those that are past their sell-by date. Organisations such as the Equal Opportunities Commission were crucial in the early days, but I question whether their role remains important today.

The Government trumpet their achievements in the area of women's issues and we have spent hours considering on the Floor of the House and in Committee legislation that they claim will assist women. So why are we spending precious time today talking about women and women's issues when we have done nothing else ever since I returned to this place in November 1997? I have served on the Committee considering the working families tax credit. It contains some huge flaws, only some of which have been identified at this stage. However, that measure is discussed endlessly as a means of helping women.

My hon. Friend the maiden for—*[Interruption.]* That was an interesting slip of the tongue. My hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May) pointed out that the working families tax credit contains a fundamental flaw which we fought hard to eliminate in the 1960s and 1970s: the transfer of money from the purse to the wallet. We fought for child benefit as opposed to a tax allowance that recognised the cost associated with raising children because we did not want money to go to the wallet. The Government are returning to the bad old days by reinstating that money to the wallet.

Mrs. May: I am also concerned about the transfer of funds from the purse to the wallet which will occur under the working families tax credit. Does my hon. Friend share my great concern that the issue has not been raised on the Labour Benches? I am somewhat surprised that Labour Members are entirely silent about the matter. They trumpet the advantages of the WFTC but are unable to see its flaws.

Mrs. Lait: My hon. Friend is absolutely right: the silence was deafening from Labour Members during discussion of that issue in Committee. We made the point time and again, but it has remained unacknowledged.

I noted with interest that the Minister said that the working families tax credit would benefit families who earned up to £23,000. I was tempted at the time to ask whether she was formulating new policy in that area and reducing the taper—thereby reinforcing the poverty trap—or whether she did not know that the working families tax credit is available to families who earn up to £38,000. That creates the paradox whereby some people who pay 40 per cent. tax—that is, super tax—receive the working families tax credit. The logic behind that calculation is slightly beyond me—and we have received no answers from the Government.

Another interesting issue has arisen as a direct result of the working families tax credit and its interaction with the national minimum wage. My hon. Friend the Member for Lichfield (Mr. Fabricant) referred to this matter, and it is one about which I have received several lobbying cards from my constituents on behalf of the Pre-School Learning Alliance. They point out the effect that the national minimum wage will have on pre-school employees and express the fear that it will damage that provision.

We agree that all four-year-olds should receive nursery education, but the previous Government ensured that choice remained. The minute that Labour was elected, it abolished nursery education vouchers and insisted upon free pre-school education for all children from the age of four onwards. The state-maintained sector is now eating into choice and the pre-school sector by reducing the age at which it is prepared to offer children nursery education. Pre-schools must not only deal with the consequences of the national minimum wage, but compete on an unfair basis—we welcome fair competition—with the maintained pre-school education sector.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: I have listened to my hon. Friend's remarks with interest, and I agree with her entirely. This morning, I visited a playgroup in Rode Heath in my constituency, and exactly those points were raised with me. The playgroup serves a village and a rural area, and without the support of an extra grant, would not exist this year. Without that playgroup, there would be no provision in the area. It has been hit by provision for four-year-olds in the maintained sector and by the legislation introduced by the Government.

Mrs. Lait: I agree completely; my hon. Friend reinforces the point made by pre-schools.

However, there is another twist in the tale. Costs will be forced up by the minimum wage, which will prompt the pre-schools that survive to increase their prices. The working families tax credit and the child care tax credit will meet those costs, but prices will increase in the sector as a whole.

At the risk of being declared out of order—if that is possible in a debate such as this, Mr. Deputy Speaker—I will compare that experience to what has happened in the rest homes sector. As soon as the state declared a minimum price, that was the price charged. Costs increased, the state—for whatever reason—was not prepared to increase prices and the quality of provision fell. In those circumstances, unless county councils were prepared to assist—which is what happened in the maintained rest homes sector—prices increased and were further subsidised by the maintained sector. I suggest that exactly the same thing will occur in the child care sector as a result of the child care tax credit. Prices will increase, as will the cost to the taxpayer.

Another reason why the working families tax credit and the child care tax credit will be so expensive—I intervened on my hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead on precisely this point—is that people will organise their affairs to maximise their income. That is why a poverty trap exists. People will say, "I cannot afford to go back to work because I get more benefit when I am out of work." I am not saying that that is right, but those people are making a clear economic statement. They will organise their child care and working patterns to maximise that tax credit. That means that the £1.5 billion that the Government dream will be the cost of the measure will increase certainly to about £7 billion and potentially to as much as £15 billion. That is an increase of 8p in the pound in the basic rate of income tax.

That leads me to tomorrow's Budget, with which I have potential problems. The Chancellor has already said that he plans to tax child benefit. If he does, he will undermine the basic right of individuals to have control of their tax affairs. I lobbied on that issue throughout the 1970s and 1980s until, in reply to my speech at the Conservative party conference, Nigel Lawson said that women would get independent taxation. If the Chancellor introduces the taxation of child benefit, he will fatally undermine that principle because he will be insisting that couples share their tax information, and confidentiality is one of the basic principles of independent taxation.

The Chancellor will not only penalise a family with one earner who pays 40 per cent. tax, while another family with two earners who do not pay 40 per cent. tax have a combined income that is higher than that of the first family, but he will break the basic principle of independent taxation. I am sure that the Government would not want that accusation made against them because the scales would suddenly fall from the eyes of the legions of women who campaigned, lobbied, wrote and sat in the Gallery, day after day, in their fight for independent taxation.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mrs. Lait: There are many more matters about which I am angry, but I promise that I shall not take up much more time.

I want now to address a subject that does not speak its name—what we should do about young boys who are alienated from society. I raised the subject in this debate four or five years ago, and I hate to be repetitive, but nothing is being done. I should prefer us to spend an Adjournment debate discussing young lads and their problems rather than women, whom we discuss year after year, and about whom we say the same things again and again.

There is a problem that needs to be tackled: women do not want some chaps as fathers because they are useless—in every respect except one—and our education and parenting systems are the cause. We must somehow deal with unskilled young lads who cannot contribute to

[Mrs. Lait]

society and who feel rejected. Nothing that the Government have done so far has addressed that issue. The emphasis on mainstreaming through education is further alienating those lads. More and more of them are excluded from school. Those who are in school refuse to learn. They do not benefit from any measures that have been taken.

We must address those concerns because if we do not create a society in which men feel responsible for a family, we will reinforce the huge problems experienced by lone parents. My hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead pointed out the sheer costs and difficulties of trying to get single mothers back into work. We are excluding and alienating those young lads from work because they need to be educated to get a decent job, and unskilled jobs have gone. As we know, they are more prone to criminality and to perpetrating acts of violence against women.

We must, as a society, tackle the problems of those alienated young men. I hope that on international women's day next year, the Government will have the guts to hold an Adjournment debate on that subject, not women yet again.

7.5 pm

Mrs. Ann Cryer (Keighley): I, for one, am absolutely delighted to participate in a debate about women to celebrate international women's day.

I am also very proud to be the chair of the parliamentary Labour party Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and in that capacity, I pay tribute to the leading role played by women in the peace movement over the years. Many women who are now in this place established their political credentials through involvement with the peace camp at Greenham Common and in the wider peace movement. Many of them continue to put forward arguments for peace and disarmament in this place whenever possible.

We are well assisted by the many campaigners outside Parliament who continue to focus on arguments against Trident and the non-accountable nature of US spy stations such as Menwith Hill, which is not far from my constituency. The women at the Menwith Hill peace camp have for many years bravely questioned the reason for the existence of the US base, its legality and precisely what goes on there. Helen John, Lindis Percy and Anne Lee are among many women who have continued to oppose the existence and expansion of the base. In the early days, when the existence of the station became known, many of us attended picnics—rallies—in the adjacent fields, where we had excellent speakers such as my right hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett), the Secretary of State for Education and Employment. The picnics have ended, but the arguments continue.

As a member of the Council of Europe committee on equal opportunities for women and men, I have recently been involved in a report on the equal representation of women and men in the Parliaments of the 40 member countries. In a table demonstrating the representation of women in Parliaments, the UK is 12th, Sweden is at the top and Turkey is at the bottom. Albania did not get its act together so we did not receive figures for its Parliament. Should the House need reminding, this Chamber has at present 659 MPs, of whom 121, or 18.4 per cent., are women, and 101 of them are Labour Members. Our position on the list would have been much higher if it had not been for the overwhelming preponderance of men among hereditary peers. Perhaps next year, our position on the list will have improved.

Parliamentary selections will be made by all parties in the next year, and I am not particularly hopeful that the representation of women will be addressed by any party, including my own. Three years ago, when two male no-hopers took three constituency Labour parties, including my own, to an industrial tribunal, I felt confident that the chair would throw out the case because a prospective parliamentary candidate could in no way be described as an employee of a party. There is no wage, no contract of employment and no employer-employee relationship.

Those men would have had no chance of selection, whichever party they had applied to and whatever the shortlist. They would probably not even have made it on to an all-male shortlist, yet the tribunal chair accepted their complaint and the tribunal—amazingly, in my view—decided in the plaintiffs' favour. That decision still stands and therefore, sadly, no party can safely use an all-women shortlist as a vehicle, no matter how imperfect, to move towards equality of representation in Parliament.

The Council of Europe equal opportunities committee suggests that member states introduce a quota system—although that would be effective only where the very undemocratic system of lists operates. There are other carrot-and-stick approaches to encourage political parties to move toward the nomination of equal numbers of men and women in winnable seats too; but without constituency parties being able to opt for all-women short lists, such good intentions may result in little improvement. In fact, unless changes are made, there may be a reduction in the number of women Members of Parliament following the next election.

The Council of Europe equal opportunities committee has also been considering in detail the issue of violence against women. Last week, we decided to hold a press conference to coincide with international women's day. The committee's unanimously adopted declaration on zero tolerance of violence against women and girls reads as follows:

"Gender violence is a fundamental violation of the right to life, to liberty and security, to personal, mental and physical integrity, equal protection before the law, equality within the family as well as the right not to be subject to torture or inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

Violence against women is both a serious obstacle to the achievement of women's equality, and the outcome of the inequality which persists throughout Europe. The most important way to fight violence against women consequently is the fight for equal rights and opportunities for women.

We therefore call for equality being one of the issues covered by monitoring compliance with the obligations of Council of Europe member States."

I shall finally mention just a few of the Government's measures which will help women. The £40 billion extra for health and education will certainly be greatly welcomed by women with small children who, more than most, must visit their doctor. They will see improvements. The money will also be welcomed by many older women, who also have to use their doctors a great deal more than the average person.

There is a commitment to promote family-friendly initiatives through, among other things, the "Fairness at Work" White Paper and implementation of the working time, part-time work and parental leave directives. Anything that makes life easier for women who work and have small children will be of help. There are many stresses and strains on such women. When they are at work, they feel guilty about not being with their children, and when they are with their children, they feel guilty about not being at work. Anything that helps them in any direction should be welcomed. I certainly welcome such measures.

I welcome the new deal for lone parents, to help them move from welfare to work, provided that the final decision on whether a young mother with small children goes to work is the mother's alone. She should not feel pushed into going back to work. I am very much in favour of the introduction of a national minimum wage, too. It will be very popular in Keighley, which is traditionally a very low-wage area. The hon. Member for Lichfield (Mr. Fabricant) described the policy as one of the Barbie doll proposals or strategies. If that is so, many women on very poor wages in Keighley will say, "Long live Barbie."

There has been much argument about playgroups. The national minimum wage will provide working women with enough money to pay a playgroup an economic rate, which will in turn enable the playgroup to pay those whom it employs an economic and reasonable wage. Even the Conservative party cannot knock increases in child benefit and income-related benefits to help families with children—although I am sure that it will try. As a grandmother with five—going on six—small grandchildren, I can speak with authority on the first ever national child care strategy. Readily available and reasonably priced good quality child care is the greatest enabler of all for women. I for one welcome the measure with very great enthusiasm.

7.14 pm

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): Here we are debating the Government's priorities for women, and progress—or lack of it—in delivering on them. In welcoming the hon. Member for Barking (Ms Hodge) to her post—this is my first opportunity to do so—I wholeheartedly endorse the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May), who eloquently set out the position of Conservative Members. I want to separate the fact from the fiction in this debate. I shall draw attention to the Government's ultimate failure to set priorities for women, and accuse them of being hopelessly remiss in delivering for women.

I am mildly surprised that no reference has been made to the United Nations action programme for women. My researchers pulled a three-page document from the internet on the programme, which I had imagined would be the core of this debate. It raises real issues for women, not just in this country but throughout the world. As we celebrate international women's day, the programme raises issues such as the contribution of women to all aspects of society, equal opportunities for women, the role of women in developing countries, and Government funding to enable women to perform such a role.

In the light of the remarks of the hon. Member for Keighley (Mrs. Cryer), I should like to refer to the number of women on the Government Benches. The Minister for Public Health said that all-women lists for parliamentary selection at the general election were not deemed to be in breach of any rules. But as the hon. Member for Keighley said, when the matter was taken to an industrial tribunal, such lists were found to be clearly in breach of the treaty of Rome and the Sex Discrimination Act 1975, which implemented its provisions. As a result, the Labour party stopped selection from all-women lists.

I should like to share with Labour Members, especially the Minister, the following thought: the Government must learn—I am sure that they will not mind taking lectures from Opposition Members in this regard—that there must be genuinely equal opportunities for men and women. I am wholeheartedly enthusiastic about the fact that I and the other 13 women who represent the Conservative party in this House were selected on merit, and not simply to fulfil the gender quota.

I pay tribute to the previous Government, and especially my right hon. Friend the Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major) for his contribution as Prime Minister to delivering positive policies for women. He introduced and endorsed Opportunity 2000, which has put more women into public life and indirectly resulted in greater numbers of women in the professions, the boardrooms and other walks of life from which politics can draw. More work opportunities for women arise today as a result of the previous Government's commitment to flexible labour markets. As of April 1997, there were 12.3 million women in the work force. By comparison, this Government have failed miserably to deliver positive policies for women.

The Minister for Public Health referred to every stage of a woman's life, from girlhood to womanhood, as well as to those who care for elderly relatives. This Government have failed at every such stage. Women whose aspirations were raised before the election have been let down. To illustrate that point, I shall start with the example of nursery education. Nursery education vouchers were introduced nationwide in April 1997, and would have resulted in the provision of free nursery education for every four-year-old. Many mothers want the provision of such pre-school education, which gives them the opportunity to work. On being elected in May 1997, the Labour Government immediately abolished that scheme.

Equally, it was recognised that the minimum wage for au pairs would have a devastating effect on women returning to work. I understand—perhaps the Minister will put my mind at rest on this score when she winds up the debate—that that category has now been excluded under Government provisions for the minimum wage, first, because it would have led to fewer au pairs working, and secondly, because, as a result, fewer mothers would have entered the workplace.

There are probably more women teachers than men teachers; certainly there are more women heads than men heads. In North Yorkshire, and especially in the Vale of York, teachers and heads have been extremely disappointed by this year's poor standard spending assessment for north Yorkshire. Teachers are being promised a pay increase, but the Government have committed no new money to pay for it. Moreover, the Government are committed to cutting class sizes to 30, yet they have committed no new money to achieving that aim.

[Miss Anne McIntosh]

The Government are going even further, saying that they wish to introduce performance-related pay for teachers in two years' time without considering how that is to be achieved or the administrative burden that the achievement of that aim will impose on teachers and heads. Many of those teachers and many of those heads will be women.

The Minister with responsibility for women's issues briefly mentioned the plight of teenage girls, and especially the increasing number of teenage pregnancies. That is now an extremely pressing problem, in view of the number of teenage girls falling pregnant, many of whom are applying to take the morning-after pill before a pregnancy has been diagnosed, or—in the long term—applying to go on the contraceptive pill. However, the Minister made no mention of the higher incidence of sexually transmitted diseases among teenagers. That is an especially worrying development for young teenagers, especially girls, because as they develop and, hopefully, marry, it could have a very negative effect on their fertility and ability to give birth.

I am concerned that intrusive, old-fashioned socialist policies such as the minimum wage and maternity or paternity leave will lead to higher unemployment among women. It is believed that the working time directive and the constraints imposed by it will hit working women hardest.

I shall now discuss those choosing not to work but to stay at home to bring up children or to care for sick or elderly relatives. It has been found that the tax situation imposed by the Government is severely disadvantaging women who choose to stay at home. The only beneficiaries, under the present tax law, are couples living together and choosing not to marry, or one-parent families. That is hardly an incentive to working mothers, or carers choosing to stay at home.

I should like to discuss the equal opportunities provisions under the treaty of Rome and the implementing regulations, especially in relation to woman returners to work. That is a special category which has been recognised, especially under objective 3 training funds. There have been qualifying programmes for women such as "New Opportunities for Women"—the NOW programme. I understand that, in all probability, that programme will lapse under the Agenda 2000 reforms.

I leave the Minister with the following question. What provisions will replace those schemes, enabling woman returners to work to undertake courses to boost their chances of taking up employment, especially after leaving employment to bring up young people—their children—and to ensure that there will be new provision either under a Government programme or a future European programme?

The enduring message that I shall be left with at the end of tonight's debate is that the Government are now adopting Conservative language. They are "seeing women as mainstream" in life and they have adopted a programme of listening to women. Obviously we have coined a phrase with our Listening to Britain campaign, in which we addressed 52 per cent. of the electorate and 45 per cent. of the work force, namely women.

The Labour party's rhetoric has changed. In opposition, it claimed to want to do something to help women; now, in government, it supports the Conservative rhetoric of developing a strategy to make women feel mainstream in society, not a hived-off special category. However, in my view the Government have consistently discriminated against women.

The Government have failed women and disappointed their aspirations—raised before the most recent general election—most in relation to family credit, which is now being paid to the mother. Family credit has been paid through the benefits system to the mother; the working families tax credit will be distributed through the tax system, and in the majority of low-income households the father, as the sole wage earner, will receive that benefit. The money will therefore be paid to him through his pay packet, and the wife and children will lose out, because scientific evidence proves that money given to the father is less likely to be spent on child care. That is a fundamental point, which the Government have failed to address and on which they have failed to deliver for women.

Incapacity benefit is changing, and is now to be available only to those who paid national insurance contributions in only one of the past two tax years—not the past five or six tax years. That will hit women especially hard, and the majority of those penalised will be those with young children who become ill, or carers for elderly relatives.

Finally, bereavement pensions—the new bereavement benefit—will be cut off after only six months for those without dependent children. It is important that we, the Conservatives, take the message to those who will lose out after six months and will no longer receive a bereavement pension until retirement age, as they currently do. As my hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead pointed out, 250,000 women will lose out in that category alone.

I conclude that the Government have failed to deliver for women on a catalogue of areas and policies, and that they can hardly be welcomed as having introduced woman-friendly policies.

7.27 pm

Barbara Follett (Stevenage): I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak in the debate on the last international women's day of the 20th century. This has been the century of women, just as the 15th was the century of exploration and the 18th the century of industrial revolution. In this century, the revolution has been in women's lives. A hundred years ago there were no women engineers, no women professors, no women managing directors or women MPs, let alone women Speakers, Chief Whips or Leaders of the House. A hundred years ago, women did not even have the vote. Then, as now, there were many talented and entrepreneurial women, but their abilities were wasted and their ambitions stifled by a seemingly monolithic social order.

Women today still have a number of glass ceilings to break, including that of leader of the Liberal Democrat party; 100 years ago they were still on the floor. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Dulwich and West Norwood (Ms Jowell) said, women's lives have changed beyond recognition. I know that she, like me, is proud that the Labour party, which came into being with the century, has played its part in ensuring that those changes are reflected in the laws of our land.

It was the 1945 Labour Government—who, like the 1997 Labour Government, contained a record number of women—who brought in the maternity allowance in the

Beveridge reforms of 1948. It was the 1974 Labour Government who made formal provision for maternity leave in their Employment Protection Act 1975. In 1997, it is the Labour Government who are increasing that maternity leave from 14 to 18 weeks and introducing—for the first time in our country—the right to parental leave and time off for family emergencies.

Those new provisions recognise the importance of women in the workplace and the importance of men in the family—better for women and much better for us all. Men—not just retiring Conservative Members—need to spend more time with their families. Research into underperforming boys has shown that the root of the problem is the boys' unwillingness to learn to read because they consider reading too girlie—too unmanly. That is because they are generally read to by their mothers or by their primary school teachers, who on the whole are women. Almost never are they read to by their fathers or by other men. They rarely see men or their fathers reading anything at all except newspapers. Families definitely need fathers and I am proud to be serving on a Committee that is considering a Bill that translates recognition of that fact into law.

We have heard today about how the Government are delivering for women in this country and for women in developing countries throughout the world. The minimum wage, the working families tax credit, the sure start programme and the national child care strategy have all been mentioned. With my hon. Friend the Member for Keighley (Mrs. Cryer), I am pleased to say how much the national child care strategy means to me personally as a mother of three and a grandmother of two. I was one of those women who in the early 1980s sent a son to school even though he did not look very well because I needed desperately to keep my job. I was called to the school later in the day, and a day later he was diagnosed as having meningitis. He hung between life and death for two days. Fortunately, he is now a man of 23. If he had died, I do not think that I could ever have forgiven myself. We put women in that position every day of their lives in this country.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, West (Valerie Davey) so tellingly recounted, the numbers of women elected to the House in the past 80 years have been pitifully small. It was not until 1983 that the number of women in the House exceeded 5 per cent. of the total membership. When Parliament was dissolved in April 1997, that percentage had risen by four, to 9 per cent. On 1 May 1997, it doubled to 18 per cent. Meanwhile the number of women on the Conservative Benches fell from 18 to 13. It was only after the hon. Member for Beckenham (Mrs. Lait) came to the House after a by-election that the number rose to 14. Only three Liberal Democrat women Members and two women Scottish Nationalist Members were returned. It is clear that it was the 101 Labour women who made the difference.

In opposition, the Labour party made a huge effort to ensure that women were selected in seats which they had a chance of winning. I find it unbelievable that Opposition Members cannot accept that on both sides of the House we have had hundreds of years of men-only shortlists, which owed much more to Buggin's turn than to merit; few of us have acknowledged that today. I applaud the efforts that the Labour party made to overcome Buggin's turn. I am glad to see that in government we are committed to righting this democratic deficit, not merely to promote equality but to promote women's participation in the political process.

Women throughout the country, especially outside the House but including some of us inside it, find the way in which we debate the issues that we care about—the economy, education and the health service—demeaning. They feel that it involves a lot of shouting but little doing. If we really want to involve more people, including women, in the political process, we shall have to reform it. I am delighted that the Government have made a start. I am glad to say that the new Assemblies in Scotland and Wales will be horseshoe-shaped and will work far more family-friendly hours than we currently enjoy.

Although the same cannot be said for the reformed House of Lords, I am confident that the current number of women in that place—7 per cent. of the total membership—will rise. It is the upper Chamber which keeps the British Parliament so low in the league table of women's representation. Yes, we are above France, but the French are so desperate that they are thinking of amending their constitution to ensure that the law encourages women to participate in public life. However, we are below countries such as Kuwait and Korea, which are not known for their women-friendly policies. The Labour party is committed to encourage the principle of a 50:50 ratio of women and men in public appointments. The number of women appointed to public posts has risen by 7 per cent. in the 20 months that we have been in office.

We do and will select on merit. As the century draws to a close, I look forward to the next, which I hope will be the century of partnership between the Government and the people and between men and women. Only in that way can we guarantee a better future for us all.

7.35 pm

Mrs. Teresa Gorman (Billericay): The hon. Member for Stevenage (Barbara Follett) said how much she welcomes the 101 women Labour Members who have entered the House following the general election, which she informed us had made the difference in this place. I find it difficult to understand what the difference has been as a result of additional female talent coming into this place. There have been occasions when women Labour Members have all sat on their hands, robotic-like, not even being prepared to support one of their colleagues. I remember witnessing the slaughter of the right hon. Member for Camberwell and Peckham (Ms Harman), who was attacked for her policies that were altering the legislation applying to women, which I thought had been reasonably well thought out. Hardly one of the women Labour Members would do a thing to support the right hon. Lady on the occasions when she sat in her place as lonely as a cloud.

There is no point in looking at the width; it is the quality that matters. If women are to justify their increased numbers in this place, they must try to decide what issues really matter in improving the position of women in our society and then to do something about them. For example, if Labour women Members were collectively to go and sort out the Lord Chancellor on matters such as

[Mrs. Teresa Gorman]

the number of women judges, I am sure that they could frighten him to death. If that were to happen, we might see some more women judges appointed.

Ms Blears: Would the hon. Lady like to tell us what she achieved, as a supporter of the Conservative Government for 18 years, to increase the number of women in public life?

Mrs. Gorman: I do not think that that is the point. However, with my colleagues I went and sorted out our own Lord Chancellor. We persuaded him to introduce several changes in legislation bearing on children and matters relating to cohabitation, for example. On those occasions we had an impact. There is no point in calling for more women in the House unless those women will act independently, individually and in support of the issues that they claim are still waiting to be sorted out.

Women want much the same as men want. They want more opportunities, a better standard of living and more independence for themselves. To put it crudely, they want to be better off. The Conservative free-market, free-enterprise policies have introduced a vast new range of industries and opportunities, which have given women the opportunity that they now have, for example, to own motor cars, albeit that they block the roads when collecting their children from school. It is an opportunity that they did not have before. I recall the old, stale Labour policies of keeping alive out-of-date heavy industries which were enormously subsidised. They gobbled up public funds to sustain jobs that were long out of date. Conservative changes over the past 20 years have transformed the free market and made it possible for women to gain opportunities.

Lorna Fitzsimons: If the hon. Lady is saying that greater financial independence has given women the ability to have their own motor car, I expect her to join me in welcoming the increase in women's incomes as a result of the national minimum wage and the working families tax credit.

Mrs. Gorman: I think that both measures are extremely misguided. Once women have taken time out of work and need to get back in it, they usually need the opportunity to get back on the ladder. If we load the employment of women with extraneous costs, of which the minimum wage is sometimes one, but not always, we will encumber women and make employment much more difficult. In making that remark I quote not a rabid right-wing Conservative like myself, but Carmen Callil, who is a well-known supporter of the Labour party and an extremely successful publisher. I believe that recently she was running HarperCollins, one of our major publishers. She said that trying to employ women, as she does—many book editors are women, and it is predominantly a woman's profession—is a nightmare. If a woman is doing a job that is exclusive to that individual and she needs to take time off—there is the old cry about maternity leave—it becomes impossibly difficult to offer such opportunities to other women. I do not believe for one moment that the policy that the Labour party is pursuing on the matter will help women one little bit. It will make small firms in particular, where there is a limited choice of staff, less likely to take a woman on. In that respect, Labour's legislation is extremely backward-looking.

Ms Moran: One of the effects of the flexible labour market which the hon. Lady so eloquently espouses has been the fact that more women work for lower pay and longer hours. For example, one in four women works more than 40 hours a week. Does she believe that that is an improvement in the quality of life for women and, more particularly, for their children?

Mrs. Gorman: The woman's individual circumstances are paramount. I do not know why an individual woman may be in a particular job. I do know, however, that as most women in their middle years, especially if they have a family, take relatively unskilled work because they do not have the time to devote to a more highly skilled job or even to a higher level of training, they tend to be in the lower-paid percentiles.

The Labour party does women no favours by constantly referring to them as victimised and badly paid. That simply is not true. In the past week I have met women bank managers, women managers of large hotels, a woman who runs one of the largest transport companies in the country, a woman who runs one of the largest Ford car dealerships in the country, women doctors and dentists, and women who work in the stock exchange.

There are many rapidly rising women in Britain. That is largely because of the education reforms that were introduced during the last period of Conservative government, which have made it much easier for women to undertake higher education. The mere fact that their families could afford to support them in that speaks highly of the legislation introduced and implemented over the past 20 years.

It is foolish for Labour to suggest that women have made no progress over that time. They have come from nowhere during my lifetime. Earlier, someone of my age and as intelligent, bright and in every way as attractive to the employment market as I am was unable to find a university place. Less than two in 10 people went to university and of those, the percentage of women was minimal. That position persisted almost until the mid-1980s, when Conservative education policies altered it.

The Labour party does no credit to women by constantly harping on the notion that we are all victims and underdogs and are being ground down by evil employers. That is silly. If a woman does not like her occupation, and if the pay is so poor, under our welfare system she almost has the option of staying at home and not bothering to go out to work at all. I deplore that, but it is a fact of life. Under welfare legislation, a great many women are assisted.

Ms Moran *rose—*

Mrs. Gorman: No, I have given way to the hon. Lady once, and I am sure that many other hon. Members want to speak.

There is a further issue to which the Labour party should turn its mind. One the most significant developments in the progress of women in a relatively short time has been the ability to control the size of their

families. Legislation has brought that about, but we still have a serious problem of young women becoming pregnant when they are not old enough or mature enough to raise children. That is detrimental to the children, although I know that many of the young mothers do a wonderful job.

We spend most of our time condemning girls for getting themselves into that situation. We talk about giving young women more assistance in such matters and allowing them so-called emergency contraception if they face an unwanted pregnancy. I suggest to Labour women Members, as there are 101 of them, that if they insisted on that—if they went to see the Secretary of State for Health and told him that that should be made easier for women—they could achieve something, but they do not try. They sit on their hands.

As a result, we read newspaper articles such a cutting that I have, which states that hospitals are refusing such assistance to young women who, not knowing where else to turn, go along to the hospital accident and emergency department. Perhaps hon. Members will tell me whether a delegation of Labour women Members has been to see the Secretary of State for Health, to ask what he is doing about the matter.

It is extremely important that young women should be given better information. It is still the case that a woman who decides that she cannot go through with a pregnancy, and wishes to have it terminated, must beg two doctors, and must humiliate herself and often lie, in order to get that assistance—a process that is often dragged out until the middle or even late stages of the pregnancy, when it could have been dealt with earlier. A reform of that situation would give dignity to women's lives and remove some of the carping and criticism from the subject of birth control and abortion.

What have Labour women done? They have a marvellous opportunity to make progress. Bringing into women's lives dignity and control over their fertility would advance the cause of women by giving them control over the way in which their lives progress. I have given two examples of the way in which Labour Members could have done something for women, but have not done so.

Many young women have low expectations. Like many other hon. Members, I taught. It is a great shame that so many girls come from homes where they do not see much future for themselves, even now. I challenge the women on the Labour Benches to tell us what they are doing to raise the expectations of those young women, so that they do not think that the first thing to do, as soon as they are old enough, is to have a baby and live unhappily—or rather, meanly—ever after, trying to raise that child, possibly on their own, or even sink into thinking that they may as well have two or three babies while they are at it, because at least that brings in a little more social security. What sort of ambition in life is that for a young woman?

Although standards have improved enormously, educational opportunities have been opened up by a Conservative Government, and at the top end a huge number of women have benefited from that, we still have a long way to go. In their term of office, which I naturally hope will be short, Labour women Members can start the ball rolling and show us what they are made of, so that when they leave office they can claim to have contributed to women's progress.

I shall deal briefly with the informal networks that women often set up to help themselves. The playschool movement is an excellent example. Women get together, they do not want a great deal of money out of it for themselves, they are doing something useful, and along comes the heavy hand of Government and clobbers them. The Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment, the hon. Member for Barking (Ms Hodge) and I have corresponded extensively on the subject. She has given me to understand that there is a great dollop of money floating around out there on which such groups can call, but I have read the small print. That dollop of money is to be limited to areas of special need, which precludes many of the schools in my constituency.

Again, that is a challenge for Labour—not necessarily to find more money, but just to leave those women alone so that they can get on with improving their own lot. A similar case is that of women who look after their neighbour's children. Because of perhaps one or two bad cases that went national, all informal arrangements were stopped. Through the Children Act 1989, which otherwise had many good points, licensing was introduced, regulations came in, and the women's houses had to be specially adapted, with low toilets, prefabricated windows and goodness knows what else. Those initiatives were crushed, and women were denied the opportunity of relatively low-cost child care, which they could afford, which they could swap around and through which they could help each other out. We made that an illegal activity and I think that we will go down the same route with playschools, which I would deplore. I challenge the women on the Labour Benches to do something about that because they tell us that they are here to improve the lot of women.

I want to say a word on behalf of older women, who are much underrated and undervalued in this country. Many women prefer to work part-time for relatively modest pay because of their life pattern when they are raising their children, although the policies that the Labour party is introducing will probably squeeze a lot of them out of that market and they will be even worse off than they were before.

I challenge the women on the Labour Benches to think about how more mature women can be helped to become Members of the House. One method, which I have mentioned in the House on more than one occasion, is their health care. In particular, we should think seriously about doing a great deal more to make older women aware that their health can be enormously improved in many ways. I will not go on about hormone replacement, but that is a significant element. For the record, I am told that my skeleton is equivalent to that of a 15-year-old. It will last me, even if I last for a century or more.

I emphasise that there are still elements of health care that make older women less interested in going back into the workplace, even though they probably have 30 years of useful life left, and we should not forget that the average age of mortality for women is their mid-80s. The chaps have still to catch up.

What should we do to make use of mature women? We often read of terrible abuse cases involving children in institutions. Many women have had massive and explicit experience of judging people's characters and weighing up the pros and cons of what is going on in a household. They could make a better fist of that type of work than many councils, who make a mess of it—not

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least Islington council, on which the Minister sat and whose record on child care and abuse in the homes that it controlled was deplorable.

The issue of how to get more women elected to the House has been raised and we have heard the old saw that we should get here on merit. Well, we all know that the men do not all get here on merit. They get here by pulling strings, phoning up the right person or pushing themselves forward.

Ms Ryan: Or by having the right wife.

Mrs. Gorman: Perhaps by having the right wife—that, too. We need women as Members of the House because half the population are women. Most of the legislation passed by the House these days concerns matters of primary interest to women, especially health, education and social welfare. We spend the majority of our budget on those issues—not on war and defence, as we did in the old days. Government was largely about defence and foreign affairs and, even today, the Chamber fills up with the chaps when we are talking about such things. However, that is not where the bulk of the Government's concern lies and we should have more women in the House for that reason.

On two occasions I have introduced Bills calling for an equal number of men and women Members to be achieved through dual lists, with constituencies voting for a man and for a woman. So far as I know, that idea originated with George Bernard Shaw and has been pushed for many years by the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn). In that respect, we would make progress if the women on the Labour Benches were genuinely interested in more women being elected to the House, not on a temporary basis, which is the basis on which many of the Labour women Members are here, but permanently. Although I share the interest in more women being elected to the House, I do not want them to be sent here artificially.

Jackie Ballard: Although a change was made in this House in 1997, is the hon. Lady aware that the legislatures with the highest proportion of women Members are in Scandinavian countries, which have a form of proportional voting? Would she support that form of voting to get more women into Parliament?

Mrs. Gorman: I do not want a half-baked system of proportional representation or women's lists, but change, once and for all. I want dual lists so that each constituency can choose a man and a woman—not doubling up on numbers, but twinning of candidates. I have presented such Bills to the House and hon. Members can read the technical details in *Hansard*.

I challenge the women on the Labour Benches to make a true impact on the ability of women to progress, without forgetting the fact that what happened under the previous Government provided the best role model that women have yet had in politics. We had the first woman Prime Minister, whose achievements were mammoth. She rescued this country from the doldrums of a socialist Government—there was a strike every other day of the week, which is only one example of something that she cured—and brought this country to such a level of prosperity that the women on the Labour Benches have good jobs, women own cars and control industries. Their progress is rapid because of the legislation that the Conservative party introduced. Let us see what the women on the Labour Benches can achieve during their term in office.

7.56 pm

Caroline Flint (Don Valley): I welcome the opportunity to take part in the debate. In last year's debate I was the last Back-Bench speaker. I had three minutes, which I devoted to the important issue of domestic violence. That issue has been raised today and I hope to touch on it later.

It is important to say to people in the Gallery and those watching us on cable television that the debate has been initiated because this is international women's day. We are concentrating our minds and our ideas on the issues affecting women throughout the world. That is not to say that contributions on issues affecting women have not been made by hon. Members on both sides of the House in the year since we last celebrated international women's day—and I am sure that such contributions will continue to be made during the next 12 months.

Earlier in the debate, I was called "stupid" by the hon. Member for Lichfield (Mr. Fabricant), who has left the Chamber, although he gave notice that he would have to do so. I was making a point about child care and those who work in that field, which we all have to address. For too long, work involving care has been undervalued and given low status. Correspondingly, that has affected the premium at which the work done by such people is valued and, therefore, the rate at which they are paid.

This country is going through a transition in respect of addressing the needs of parents who require child care. I hope that, during that transition, we reassess the role of the people, predominantly women, who work with children, care for the elderly and work in other areas of care. It is about time that we put a premium on such care and recognised it. We should respect those workers and we should also hope to achieve the best quality of care for children or elderly people who are being looked after.

My satisfaction at being part of the new Labour Administration is that we have tackled a number of issues that predominantly affect women on low incomes. To sum up a proportion of the debate, if there was a general election tomorrow and, for some reason, the Conservative party won, we could be certain that it would get rid of the national minimum wage and part-time workers' rights, say no to statutory holidays and undermine the child care strategy that has been developed. That strategy has been welcomed by every child care organisation in which I have been involved. I was chair of a national child care organisation for four years before I became a Member of Parliament. All those policies would be undone by a Conservative Government.

There is still a barrier, especially in manual work. In certain professions, some of the institutionalised segregation has gone over the years, but in manual work there is still rigid segregation between men and women. I believe that that is why women still earn only 80 per cent. of the hourly pay of men, and 72 per cent. of their average weekly pay.

That economic picture leads me to the more fundamental relationship between family and work, for two reasons. We must ask ourselves why women end up

with all the part-time work, with broken working lives and low or non-existent pensions. That is due first to the distribution of family—and parental—responsibility, and secondly to an uneasy partnership between men and women.

I know that I can go out, pick up a magazine from the shelf of any newsagent and, probably, find examples of new men who are parenting, working from home and challenging traditional roles. Those, however, are merely crumbs of comfort. Perhaps there are more choices for middle-class, highly educated women. We should celebrate the fact that some women have broken into different fields, and that such women have more choices—they have financial independence, their own cars and can employ cleaners, hopefully paying at least the national minimum wage. That, however, is just a small segment of the wider picture. Women overwhelmingly perform the household organisation tasks; women overwhelmingly deal with schools and doctors; women take part-time work in order to balance employment with looking after their families.

We all want women to be able to make choices, but pre-set parameters ensure that economic choices favour men, while domestic responsibilities fall on women. That must be challenged. I have referred to an uneasy partnership. Reference has been made to domestic violence, and it is to the credit of all the women's organisations that formed the refuge movement that so much progress has been made in that regard. I am pleased, however, that we now have a Government who are finally producing a national strategy. Although domestic violence is known about, there is little evidence of its eradication from relationships between men and women.

I must now declare an interest: I am a parliamentary adviser to the Police Federation. When considering local budgets, the Government must ensure that resources are available to support police stations containing domestic violence suites. Much work has been done over many years to provide a sensitive service in that regard, and we want the police to be able to continue to do the job well.

The uneasy partnership—as I term it—between men and women is partly a product of the sexual revolution. As a feminist, I can say that a fundamental tenet of the sexual revolution was women taking control of their own bodies. The personal became political: it was a case of "our bodies, ourselves". We can learn all the top sex tips from women's magazines, and wherever we look British society is more sexualised, but there are 10 times as many teenage pregnancies in the United Kingdom as there are in Holland, and many young mothers will become young grandmothers. As a feminist, I think we should address that.

The problem is not just young parenthood, but a high rate of failure to establish solid relationships, or even to get men to pay for their pound of flesh. As we enter the 21st century, there is still considerable evidence that men take and leave what they want from women—and the Child Support Agency has failed to scratch the surface. I say that although I have a good deal of case work from men who have been treated badly by the CSA when its administration has gone wrong. The number of such cases does not equal those of women who have been abandoned to look after their children alone, left in poverty by men who should take responsibility for fathering children.

Unfortunately, a large number of young women who are engaged in sexual activity—and that is the reality—have not mastered their own fertility or any control in their relationships. For me, the concept of "our bodies, ourselves" was a metaphor for the ability to control all aspects of one's life. By controlling when they became pregnant, women could control their working lives and education, influence their earning power and maximise their happiness by planning their families if and when they wanted them. However, as my right hon. Friend the Minister said earlier, there is a significant vulnerable group of young women. Disaffection at school among boys can manifest itself in low self-esteem, truancy and criminal activity, but among girls such low self-esteem often leads to early sexual relationships and pregnancy.

Members of that vulnerable group are becoming parents before their education is completed, without solid relationships, with poor parental support and facing a possible 10 years or more out of the labour market, dependent on benefits. Such women often become dependent on boy friends to provide occasional luxuries. They are likely to have more children in difficult circumstances, and, crucially, are likely to have daughters who follow the same pattern of young parenthood, low achievement and abusive relationships. There are a number of young women in such circumstances who try their best, are good mothers and go on to succeed; but the evidence shows that a large proportion are left alone and isolated. Certainly, the fact that there are grandparents of 30 and parents of 14—as there are in my constituency—represents not a triumph for feminism, but a challenge.

Mrs. Gorman: How does the hon. Lady view the Home Secretary's proposal that such young women should be required to live in hostels collectively, in what could be described as a return to the old workhouses, rather than being supported separately?

Caroline Flint: That is an interesting point. In my area, the foyer project is intended to encourage young people to take advantage of training, and to put a roof over their heads. In my experience, one of the problems for teenage mothers is isolation: isolation on run-down estates, and isolation from the resources and opportunities that could be available through training and health care. One way of tackling that is trying to bring together housing, health and education services so that young women have the opportunity to take advantage of them if they wish. It would be voluntary, but it should be offered to young women. There is a sure start initiative in part of my constituency, and I hope that we can look at the way in which resources are put together there to ensure that women have as much access to resources as they need.

If we want young women with children—especially lone parents—to exercise choices, we must ensure that we give them choices. I know that Members on both sides of the House, including Labour Members, have asked why it is necessary to pay someone else to look after a child when one can do it oneself. I think that we sometimes confuse freedom of choice with Hobson's choice. We confuse women who are deciders with women who are victims. These women have never been financially independent. Although we have raised child benefit to record levels, they need much more than that to escape from the poverty trap. Many may find a man to subsidise their lot in life, but I would sooner offer them new doors

[Caroline Flint]

that they can open to have real choices, with education, employment, child care, taxation and benefits working with them rather than against them. If they then enter new relationships with men, they will be able to do so on more equal terms.

As I have said, I am pleased that Denaby, in my constituency, is to be a trailblazer for the sure start initiative, which will target services on women with pre-school children. New money will be pumped in to support vulnerable families. It will not be top down; success will depend on allowing local partnerships to flourish. It is especially important to listen to what young women think about the matter. I shall quote the words of some young women who became pregnant when they were young and on their own. According to one:

"The reality of looking after a baby 24 hours a day, 365 days a year is a far cry from the pretty clothes and the pictures that you see in magazines . . . To this day I still haven't understood why I wanted to have a baby so much. Sometimes I wonder if it was due to my upbringing, as I watched my father walk out of the door when I was about 6 years old and I am forever having arguments with my mother. I have considered the possibility that perhaps I wanted a baby to love in the way that I felt I had not been."

Such young women can also give advice on the support that needs to be given. Another of them said:

"I find now that my friends come to me for advice and I feel that they don't get sex education in normal schools that we get here at the unit."

She was referring to a young parents unit. She continued:

"Normal schools just tend to show you body parts and teach you how they work, and how you can conceive. They don't really teach you anything about feelings and they definitely don't teach you enough about parenthood . . . more sex education in schools would have been useful to me and that education about feelings is as important as knowledge about body parts."

We should involve such young women in the projects that we hope to fund and to support because, possibly more than any other group, they can act as good role models to younger girls.

Jackie Ballard: Does the hon. Lady agree that very few young women deliberately get pregnant to live a life of Riley on benefits, which was the impression that the previous Government used to give? It is more because of wanting someone to love, failures of contraception and lack of education. Once that has happened to them, to give them a meaningful choice of what to do with their lives they should have benefits at a level that enables them to stay at home and to bring up their children, if that is what they want, as well the option, to which the hon. Lady referred, of education and training opportunities to go into work, if that is what they want. Does she agree that, if they want to stay at home, the benefit levels need to be adequate so that they do not live in poverty with those children?

Caroline Flint: I am dealing with a 13-year-old who has given birth to a child. I am talking about young girls of 12, 13 or 14. The best thing to do is to give them support during their pregnancy. I hope that we can try to do something to raise their self-esteem, so that they do not enter relationships over which they have no control, and to give them support so that they can continue their education, both up to 16 and beyond.

Evidence shows that we should try to ensure that young girls of 13, 14 or 15 are aware of the health risks that are associated with early pregnancy, and there is also evidence showing the detrimental effect that it will have on their health in later years.

When I went to my young parents unit—I am pleased that Doncaster has one to sustain young women who want to continue their education and who may find that their school is not the best place to do that—I found that the emphasis was on continuing education. All the women to whom I spoke wanted to continue that post-16. Where we have a problem is that, having been given child care and support when those young women are under 16, and the education environment to support that, the child care is not there to back it up when they want to go on to a further education college or another educational establishment. As one of the workers said to me at the young parents unit, the tendency in that vacuum is to have another child, possibly in a relationship with someone else, so the problem gets worse and worse.

Given the choice, those young women want education and a chance to work and to support their children. I hope that the Government will attend to that and provide the necessary support for them to succeed. That is why the sure start project is so important. It is about not only choices, but empowering those young women to move beyond their circumstances, or relationships that fundamentally leave them powerless.

We will see further changes as women become a majority of the work force. I hope—on the basis more of optimism than experience—that technological change speeds up changes in the labour market, breaking down the traditional gender segregation. It has been predicted that, in 30 years, half of us will be doing jobs that have not even been invented. That suggests a dynamic in society the like of which most people have not experienced before. That being said, women still face difficulties. Women are continuing to gain ground in traditional no-go areas, be they representation in the armed forces or in the professionalisation of women's team sports, but men still run the armed forces, control our major sports and dominate in the political arena.

Representation of women is important. It is important that, in the House, we have women from all walks of life and backgrounds, but representation cannot be allowed to overshadow the need to deliver on outcomes for women. A total of 330 women Members alone will not mean equality. It is economic and social change in wider society that must be the barometer of women's progress.

The goals that have been outlined by my right hon. Friend the Minister for Public Health and by my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment give us plenty to think about, campaign on and move forward with. At the heart of the issue is the need to address the relationship between men and women and its emotional and psychological make-up, which, in many ways, defines male and female genders, but can also make us prisoners.

I say that having three prisons in my constituency and having seen the good work at Hatfield young offenders institute, where young men, 60 per cent. of whom are parents, go on parenting courses and do work that is aimed at developing their communication skills. There is something to be said for men being feminised. I have no problems with saying that. We would have a less

violent society if people talked, rather than fought out issues. The Government should address the issue of the masculinity of boys at school and men in our society.

I am happy that women have managed to force their agenda into the mainstream—long may it continue—and that the Government are addressing the many concerns of women that were untouched by previous Administrations. I am proud to be here and to represent the whole of Don Valley, but I am also proud of the work and commitment of the many women in my constituency who make community life worth while and who support the initiatives on which the Government have set themselves an agenda.

8.16 pm

Ms Joan Ryan (Enfield, North): It is a great pleasure and an honour to be called on international women's day to speak in a debate on delivering priorities for women.

Clearly, there are still those who refuse to recognise the need to ensure that we deliver for women—who claim that all is well; that we do not need to do anything extra or special; and that women today can make it entirely on their own merits. The implication is that, as women form 51 per cent. of the population but do not figure in the numbers that they should in the professions, the House or anywhere else, we can only conclude that women do not have the ability: if they did, they would be there.

I found it distressing to hear the hon. Member for Lichfield (Mr. Fabricant) put that view, and do so forcefully. Clearly, he believed it. He is entirely wrong. If they hear that contribution, women will despair. I entirely reject that view.

It is as well to remember what my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, West (Valerie Davey) said about the number of women who have been elected to the House: about half of all those who have ever been elected are Members now. That is interesting. Presumably, the hon. Member for Lichfield would still maintain that women have not been elected because they do not have the ability, and that we are not here on our merits.

I applaud the measures that the Labour party took to ensure that there was an enormous leap forward in the representation of women among Labour Members. Women Conservative Members should look closely at what happened to their numbers and what they might do to improve that situation.

Thank goodness we have a Labour Government who are not characterised by an approach which says that women do not need to be taken account of in any special sense. Women certainly have great strength, determination and motivation and have succeeded, but that is despite the barriers that they face. It is not true that women do not need to be concentrated on in the way that the Government are doing. It is the job of Government to work in partnership with others to remove the barriers.

It is because the Government acknowledge the need to deliver for women and to tackle the barriers that they face that they are making real progress in delivering for them. We have heard it many times: women make up 51 per cent. of the population. Any Government who deliver for women deliver not only for women, but for men, for communities and for society as a whole. We came into government to deliver for the many, not just the few. It is vital that we do so.

It was interesting listening to the contribution of the hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May). She and the right hon. Member for South-West Surrey (Mrs. Bottomley)—perhaps I am only being kind, but we have to be kind to our sisters—have seemed to be a little uncomfortable during this debate, for most of which they have been in the Chamber. Perhaps they are uncomfortable because the 18 years of Conservative Government were characterised by complacent sentiments such as these: women will make it on their own merit; there is no need to consider the world that women are forced to inhabit or the inequality that women suffer. Perhaps the right hon. and hon. Ladies believe that.

Opposition Front Benchers are uncomfortable because the Labour Government are delivering for women across the board. Although there is much more to do, the Government are making progress in leaps and bounds in delivering for women. Opposition Front Benchers may jump up and say, "No, you're not delivering for women," but their argument is unsustainable because, according to them, there is not a need to deliver for women. They are therefore in a difficult position. I should like to think that they are criticising the Government's fundamental policy changes to support women—so that women may play their full role in society—more as Conservatives than as women.

I am delighted that the Government have adopted the use of mainstreaming. I was also pleased to hear that there seems to be considerable support for mainstreaming among Opposition Members. It is vital that, in all policy areas—as a first thought, not as an afterthought—we meet women's wants and needs. There is no add-on sphere entitled "women's issues", because all issues are women's issues. Women's needs and wants must be dealt with—at the beginning, in the middle and in the outcome.

I should like to consider a few of the matters on which the Government have delivered substantially for women. We know that women make a crucial contribution to the economy, in their roles both as workers and as carers, and that the proportion of women in the labour force has been increasing. That trend is likely to continue. In Great Britain, more than 12 million women—just over half of all women—aged 16 and over are economically active. In 1977, however—as has already been said in the debate—the average weekly earnings of women in full-time employment was still only 72 to 73 per cent. of men's average weekly earnings.

In Enfield, in my own constituency and my own borough, women's earnings have often been among the lowest in London. I therefore face the issue on my own doorstep. As the hon. Member for Taunton (Jackie Ballard) said, although the number of women employed in many managerial professions has increased, women hold only 32 per cent. of managerial and administrative jobs, and fewer than 5 per cent. of company directors are women. Therefore, although I enjoyed the speech of the hon. Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman)—I was very interested to hear of her 15-year-old skeleton—I think that she will agree that the women and jobs she described do not accurately reflect the situation of the vast majority of working women. We have to deliver for the many, not the few.

Some 92 per cent. of all women in employment are employees, and only 7 per cent. of women are self-employed. In my own borough of Enfield, about 20 per cent. of men, but only 5.2 per cent. of women,

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are self-employed. It is important that we should implement measures to encourage women into self-employment. I am therefore very pleased that the Government are supporting Opportunity 2000.

We have a long way to go before women both are treated equally and are able to compete equally. The Government are introducing policies to make the difference that we seek to achieve. As we have heard already today, the pay gap between men and women is still too great, primarily because many women work in part-time, low-status jobs—often because they have dependent children.

We have heard many speeches today, primarily from Labour Members, on the Government's action to improve women's pay, women's rights at work and women's access to quality affordable child care. The Government's action will make a significant difference in women's working lives, and in determining whether they are able initially to decide to work.

Opposition Members seem to have lost the plot a bit on the working families tax credit. They seem not to realise that the credit will not necessarily go from purse to wallet, and that there will be a choice in deciding to whom it is paid.

The national minimum wage will help over 1 million women. Unfortunately, Opposition Members have made it absolutely clear today that, should they ever again be elected to government, they would reverse the minimum wage.

We should emphasise that family-friendly employment policies are not only good for women but very good for men. Many working men also are fathers, and what is good for working mothers is good also for working fathers.

The Government's action on women's issues makes an impressive list. We have acted in providing better child care, which is vital in giving children the best start in life. The national child care strategy and the £540 million for sure start are not merely words, words, words, as the hon. Member for Maidenhead said, but action, implementation, resources, quality and monitoring. That is what matters; that is what we need; and that is what we are delivering.

The Government are also delivering the child care tax credit, and a 20 per cent. increase in child benefit.

If all those actions are insufficient, or mere drops in the ocean—which is what Opposition Front Benchers seemed to be arguing—why did the Conservatives not do more for women when they were in government, when they had ample opportunity to do so?

The majority of the poorest pensioners are women, and action to help them is extremely important. If one takes the time to speak to a range of women, one learns that it is not only women with small children who have difficulties. We shall have to address the concerns also of women in other age groups.

From April 1999—next month—income support will be uprated by the largest-ever amount, and the pilot schemes that have brought help automatically to the poorest pensioners will go nationwide. As has been said already today, the Government's plans for pension sharing on divorce will also help to narrow the pension gap between men and women. We should acknowledge those significant measures, which are very welcome.

I should like specifically to deal with cancer screening. I think that all hon. Members will appreciate how frightening cancer is, and that the guarantee that everyone with suspected cancer will be seen by a specialist within two weeks of an urgent referral by their general practitioner is most important. The action was long overdue and has been most reassuring and welcome to those who are in that position. Many women in my constituency have mentioned to me also the Government's provision of £10 million for breast cancer services.

I was very taken by what my hon. Friend the Member for Halesowen and Rowley Regis (Mrs. Heal) said about domestic violence, and the fact that it is a human rights issue. I support that, as does the Enfield women's aid centre. A Government document is due out shortly.

Confidence is of great importance in women's safety. It is important that women feel safe and confident when they are out and about in the community, in parks and public places, going to and from work and using public transport. Women who fear for their safety can be restricted in going about their day-to-day business. Opposition Members smirk at the mention of joined-up thinking, but the measures in the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 and the integrated transport White Paper are important. We are taking action on issues on which women need to feel safe. Those important measures cannot be achieved without cross-departmental working and joined-up thinking, however much some may smirk at the notion.

I have been impressed this year and last year with the number of events held in my constituency around international women's day to raise awareness of the women's groups and organisations in Enfield that support, care for, encourage, motivate and enthuse local women. I should like to mention in particular the Enfield women's centre and its work with the new horizons 50-plus group, Enfield women's aid and the Enfield and Freezywater townswomen's guild.

Finally, I should like to mention two women in my constituency. At this time of year, we hear a lot about the origins of international women's day and the struggle for votes for women. We look back with gratitude and thanks to women such as Emmeline Pankhurst, but we should also remember the unsung heroes of our communities. Molly Sutton, a pensioner, is a community school governor and a member of the Co-operative party and the Labour party. However, this is not a partisan issue. She spends many hours encouraging, supporting and motivating other women to fulfil their potential. We are grateful to her. Doris Nulty, also a pensioner, runs a pensioners' luncheon club with great vigour and energy, providing a lifeline to many elderly women in my constituency. I pay tribute to those unsung heroes—or heroines, perhaps I should say; so much for sexist language—who work day in, day out, week in, week out, year after year, often without being mentioned. It is important to acknowledge the work of the millions of ordinary women who contribute so much to our communities, to their families and to society.

8.32 pm

Ms Julie Morgan (Cardiff, North): Thank you for calling me to speak in this important debate on international women's day, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I should like to speak about the position in politics and society of women in Wales. Women have always been under-represented in politics in Wales. Of the 40

Members of Parliament from Wales, only four are women—although Labour has four more than any of the Opposition parties. There have only ever been seven women Members of Parliament from Wales. Before the election, my hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd) was the only female Member of Parliament from Wales.

We also have few women councillors in Wales. A recent research paper by my right hon. Friend the Member for Camberwell and Peckham (Ms Harman) showed that Wales has the worst record in the UK for the number of women councillors. Again, the majority of them are Labour. Only 27 per cent. of councillors in the UK are women and Wales is bottom of the league, with only 20 per cent. Of the 10 councils with the lowest percentage of women, five are Welsh. Anglesey and Blaenau Gwent have the worst representation of women in the United Kingdom. My local council in Cardiff has the highest percentage of women councillors—35 per cent. From what I know of the women who are coming through to be candidates, it looks as though there will not be much of an increase at the coming elections in May.

Dealing with the under-representation of women on local authorities is a huge task for all political parties. Local authorities deal with bread-and-butter issues. It is sad that such issues are decided by people who represent only 50 per cent. of the population. That is particularly important given that women are so active in other areas, such as school governing bodies and voluntary groups. In Wales, women more or less run the voluntary sector, but they have not taken enough places on local authorities.

The National Assembly for Wales will be elected on 6 May, and half the Labour candidates will be women. That was not an easy achievement, bearing in mind the traditions of the Welsh political parties, where men have totally run the show. Despite the natural problems caused by the introduction of the twinning procedure—there has been concern about constituency autonomy—we now have 30 women and 30 men in place. Many of those women would not have been candidates if we had not had that arrangement. The Labour party should be proud that we have an equal number of men and women standing as candidates. I am sure that the presence of those women will make the National Assembly a very different place from this House.

As my right hon. Friend the Member for Camberwell and Peckham (Ms Harman) said, we hope that power will be shared, and that women will not have to operate like men to achieve power. In Wales, an exciting time is ahead, with a unique body—perhaps the first in the world with an equal number of men and women. If Labour wins every seat, there will be an equal number of men and women.

In Wales, women are under-represented in many positions. When the unitary authorities were created in Wales, the only two chief executives appointed who were women were in those local authorities which followed the equal opportunities guidelines recommended by the Local Government Association. That produced two women chief executives out of 40 in the unitary authorities. Generally, women lost out in the unitary authorities, and we have few women in senior positions.

Outside Wales, the popular image of the Welsh woman fluctuates between the idea of the traditional woman in a tall, black hat and shawl—the traditional costume—and the image of the Welsh "mam"; the home maker, and the indomitable figure, holding the Welsh family together in bad times and good. In Wales, when we talk about opportunities for women outside the home, we should never play down the role that women have played as home makers.

Women's lives in Wales have been hard and, for some, they still are. "Struggle or Strive"—a book describing the lives of women in the south Wales valleys between the two world wars—draws attention to the constant struggle of women to keep their homes, backyards and pavements spotlessly clean. I can remember my own grandmother struggling to keep the house and the backyard clean despite the constant dirt and dust that was coming in from the pits. Miners were working a seven-hour day, but their wives' working day was nearer 17 hours.

Women's work was as well regulated as men's: washing on a Monday; ironing and cleaning on a Tuesday; baking and shopping on a Wednesday; cleaning the upstairs on a Thursday—it was a full-time task. The book tells us that "tidy" was the most important word in "mam's" vocabulary. To be tidy—or "decha" in colloquial Welsh—was to be decent and respectable, and despite the grinding poverty that existed in those valleys, there was many a tidy woman. We should recognise the enormous contribution made to society by women who have worked in the home for many years, and still do.

Most of the mines in Wales have closed now, and women are employed outside the home in smaller numbers than in England, and for less pay. However, there has been a big shift in working patterns in Wales—particularly following the end of the heavy industries. We must continue to develop and deliver policies in Wales that will enable women to take their place in the new Wales.

We are starting to do that in many different areas, two of which are child care and health. A 1996 survey by Chwarae Teg—an organisation promoting equal opportunities in the workplace—showed that 80 per cent. of women in Wales found it difficult to work because of the lack of child care.

The Government launched the Welsh child care strategy last year. For the first time, a Government have seriously taken on board the importance of child care, both to allow parents to be economically active or to train, and for the good of the children. All research shows that it is good for children to go to nurseries and mix and socialise.

It will be up to the National Assembly to ensure that the strategy is developed to suit the individual needs of Wales. There is a thriving Welsh language playgroup movement, which we have tried to protect this year and will continue to protect next year.

We must also consider the needs of rural areas and the particular problems of acute areas of deprivation. Some parts of Wales will never have thriving nurseries, playgroups or after-school facilities unless a permanent subsidy is built in, because the deprivation is too great to rely on one, two or even three-year funding. We need affordable and sustainable provision, and I call on the Assembly, when it starts in two months' time, to continue to invest in child care and to develop the strategy to suit the needs of Wales.

Health is tremendously important for women, with breast and ovarian cancer being an abiding concern. The most recent reliable age-standardised figures for the

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incidence of breast cancer date from 1992, when the rate for England and Wales together was 107.4 per 100,000, but the rate for Wales alone was significantly higher, at 125.8 per 100,000. That higher incidence is being tackled by the additional funding for breast cancer that the Government have granted and by Breast Test Wales, a regional screening service of very high quality that operates outside the hospital system and delivers a service for healthy women.

One of the biggest issues for the health service is the availability and development of anti-cancer drugs and how to cope with their cost. New drugs to treat ovarian cancer are not universally available in Wales; it is a lottery, with the drugs that women get depending on the area where they live. Each health authority in Wales has been recommended to prescribe and pay for certain drugs—they prolong life for 12 to 14 months—when the doctor thinks it appropriate, but some authorities say that they cannot afford it. The situation is not acceptable and must be tackled. A big breakthrough is being made in anti-cancer drugs but we have yet to work out how to tackle the issue.

I want to end with a tribute to a woman who died of breast cancer in Wales a week ago. Bernice worked hard to support other women with breast cancer, helping them to cope with the upset and strain of the disease as well as campaigning for more research. She lived life to the full until the end.

International women's day is a time to remember all those women, throughout the United Kingdom, who carry on, day after day, looking after children and keeping the wheels of the family turning, coping with many difficulties in addition to paid work or work in the home. This is a day on which to celebrate their achievements and renew our determination to tackle the issues that are their priorities.

8.44 pm

Lorna Fitzsimons (Rochdale): I warmly welcome the second opportunity that I have had in my 20 months as a Member of Parliament to speak in a women's debate, celebrating not only international women's day, but our Government's record on delivering for women. As yet, we are the only party that has given such days for debate, following our practice when we were allowed to choose subjects for Opposition days. That shows our consistent support for women's issues. We have also paid consistent attention to the fact that women are the majority in the population and it is, therefore, naught but common sense to ensure that we engage women in the political debate. Government and Parliament must be seen to be for women and relevant to women.

We have heard much about the difference that 101 Labour women and 121 women Members of Parliament overall will make. My mother often jokes that women will know that they have true equality when mediocre women are accepted alongside the multitude of mediocre men by whom we have been governed—I know that there are plentiful exceptions—for many a decade.

I wish to pay tribute to the strong women in my life, who have been my role models. I am sad to say that I lost my grandmother this year—Queenie Elizabeth Grimshaw. It is obvious that she was born at the turn of the century with a name like that. She was a socialist before my mother was born and gave me a grand old lecture when I was 16 about not presuming that, just because she spoke properly because she wanted to better herself, she was not a root and branch socialist. She organised women-only speaker engagements, training and choirs just after the second world war and ran a home, looking after a disabled mother—my great-grandmother—and two young boys. She knew exactly what grinding poverty was, but she also knew what pride was about. Her older sister, May Banks, is still with us at 98. She went through two world wars and was still doing meals on wheels at the age of 86. She now faces the indignity of developing breast cancer at 98.

Such women have been the backbone of our society and that is why it is important for us to celebrate international women's day. It is not unfashionable. Other hon. Members have talked about feeling awkward about 70s feminism, but it is common sense to examine how Government policies affect women. I want to put on record the abject difference between the approach of the hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May) and that of the hon. Member for Taunton (Jackie Ballard). Labour Members can appreciate the genuine attempt to make both critical and supportive comments by the hon. Member for Taunton, which are evidence of her commitment to women's issues. However, as my hon. Friend the Member for Enfield, North (Ms Ryan) pointed out, the hon. Member for Maidenhead gave us false opposition that did not ring true, given the record of the previous Government during 18 years in power.

In contrast, we had the stark honesty of the hon. Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman), who is honourable in her political beliefs to her fingertips. On many occasions before I became a Member of Parliament, I found myself agreeing with the hon. Lady on the issue of female reproductive rights. Her comments struck a chord with the truly international speech made by my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, West (Valerie Davey) about the correlation—which is so simple that even the International Monetary Fund and the World bank have now cottoned on to it—between educating women and improving the economic circumstances of a country. As the hon. Member for Billericay pointed out, educated women regulate the size of their families. A large group of my constituents come from Bangladesh and that country is having great success in turning around its economy. It is educating women, and thus slowing population growth and increasing prosperity. Neighbouring Pakistan, whose population growth is going through the roof, is only just beginning to realise that if women are educated and given real choices in education and employment, they will regulate the size of their families. That ensures a greater benefit for all the population through growth in the economy.

We need only consider the position of women in the rest of the world to realise how fragile our position is in this country. The programme that this Government have implemented has been much needed for a long time.

As we approach the millennium, I find it sad that Opposition Members, who claim to belong to the party of the family, can say that women, children and families will pay the price for ending bad employment practices and poverty pay. We should be saying that there is no room in a modern society and a prosperous economy for bad business practices, which have probably caused the UK to be the divorce capital of Europe and which have had some impact on our scandalous teenage pregnancy figures.

I pay tribute to the thoughtful and honest speech made by my hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley (Caroline Flint). It is sad that we cannot be honest without being browbeaten by people who do not have everyone's best interests at heart and who refuse to consider the reality of people's lives. Those people try to say that proper sex education in schools will lead to children going off and getting pregnant. They do that already; it makes no sense to argue against education. Around the world, it is clear that there is a downturn in teenage pregnancy and an increase in rates of staying on at school where people are more progressive about sex education,

Young women outstrip men in terms of their educational performance, but they are under-represented in the job market. Why should that be? That is a big question. As my hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley said, as soon as there is a downturn in their interest in school, there is a stark increase in the chances that they will become a teenage pregnancy statistic. We must stop that.

The Government are introducing a much-needed policy, and the Minister dealt thoughtfully with the life cycle of women. She covered the lives that women live, from the time they are born, through the invaluable sure start project to their final years.

It was rich of the hon. Member for Maidenhead to talk about pensions and women. Who got rid of the earnings link, who means-tested pensions and who put the majority of women pensioners in poverty? The last Government did all that. The previous Labour Administration kept the earnings link, recognising that pension poverty was intolerable. Our Government are having to deal with the problems now.

Mrs. May: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Lorna Fitzsimons: We are on a tight timetable and I must go on. Other hon. Members have waited a long time to speak.

I want to put the working families tax credit into context. The lie must be nailed that it is anything other than brilliant news for working women. On the doorsteps in Rochdale before the general election and in every other election in which I have travelled around with a mobile surgery, I saw that the plight of women in poverty who were trapped in social housing on council estates—good though some of it may be, provided as it is by Rochdale council, one of the best social housing providers—arose from the cost of child care and the differential between benefits and low-paid work. They were trapped at home. They did not have choices. For the first time, I can go to them now to tell them that they do have choices. The working families tax credit will make them £17 better off. They will have the choice of being paid the child care costs that they need if they choose to stay in work.

Another myth needs to be nailed on the purse-to-wallet issue. There was a problem, but the Government have solved it to a large degree. The Inland Revenue will administer the working families tax credit, and the man no longer needs to sign the form. The woman can be the main applicant, and the man can be the supporting applicant. Nearly 60 per cent. of recipients are already single parents. In one third of other cases, the woman is the main earner. In the remainder, the family can choose. If the woman receives the form because she is the current recipient of family credit, she can fill it in and receive the working families tax credit.

Some vulnerable women could never receive the benefit because him indoors did not want to declare what he earned as he wanted to go down the pub to swill it all down his neck. Now, the Inland Revenue can phone a woman, and if she can give some details of her husband's employment, the Revenue can make sure that she receives the money if the majority of the information provided is correct. Women previously unable to receive family credit will be able to receive working families tax credit. It can be paid to a same-sex couple or a non-married couple; it is good news. People who have had to work extraordinarily long hours, because this country is the long-hours-for-low-pay capital of Europe, can now stay at home and do homework with their kids. To address the issue raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Stevenage (Barbara Follett) about men offering positive role models, half the reason that such role models are not available is that men are working slave-labour hours for slave-labour wages. They can offer positive role models for work and the work ethic, but cannot be at home to read to their children.

People can now have real choices. The Opposition's claim that the working families tax credit and the child care tax credit will force women out to work is codswallop. Families will have real choices—for example, one family member stays at home, which previously might not have been possible; or the other main earner can work fewer hours. The measures will give real choices. They will give real choices to the people whom I represent in Rochdale where, sadly, there are large numbers of single parents and teenage pregnancies, and we are over-represented in the poverty stakes.

I pay tribute to the raft of women's organisations which this debate acknowledges, and which have bridged the gap between the reality of women's lives and public legislation that has not talked the talk or walked the walk. Women know now that the Government are prepared to listen to them. We are not saying that we can offer a panacea for all ills and that everything is perfect. However, this morning at my town hall, I had the honour of opening the international women's week celebrations organised by the women's working party of Rochdale—a cross-party, multi-denominational group. That was a wonderful celebration of the richness of all the communities of Rochdale, and those women believed that this Government were starting to put women at the heart of Government. I believe that too, otherwise I should not sit on the Labour Benches.

I congratulate my colleagues on the Treasury Bench and I pay tribute to all the women out there who have made my position a reality, in that I am one of the younger women Members of Parliament. The tribute to their work is the fact that, hopefully, more and more women will enter Parliament so that we attain 51 per cent. representation in the next millennium.

8.57 pm

Charlotte Atkins (Staffordshire, Moorlands): I shall confine my remarks to the issue of part-time workers. The Government's decision to implement, through the Employment Relations Bill, the European Commission directive on part-time work will bring women benefits that are long overdue. Those benefits were denied to women by the previous Conservative Government, who blocked the Commission's proposals. That forced the Commission to introduce the proposals under the social

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chapter, which of course the Tories had opted out of. There is now an historic package of measures that will bring new employment rights to millions of people; part-time workers will at last achieve the rights enjoyed by full-timers.

As everyone knows, part-time work is not confined to mums of young children who work to pick up pin money—that is an old concept. The contribution of part-time workers is vital to the household budget and to the whole economy. There are 6.6 million part-time jobs in Great Britain, of which more than 80 per cent. are held by women. There are more than 6,000 part-time workers in my constituency. Most people are happy to work part-time, but they should not be exploited merely because their work fits in with their domestic, caring or other responsibilities. What message does that send? It is that we do not value the caring, family responsibilities that many part-timers take on outside their paid work and that we are not a civilised society. The Government have introduced a national strategy for carers which acknowledges the huge contribution made by carers.

There should be a level playing field for full-time and part-time work, so that the economy can find the most efficient distribution between the two. No economic good can come from making part-time workers a cheap alternative to full-time workers. However, the Opposition do not seem to believe that—certainly not if their record in the Standing Committee on the Employment Relations Bill is anything to go by.

For too many women, part-time work has become synonymous with low pay and insecurity. We have seen the women's labour market polarised between a narrow band of women in professional and managerial posts, and the large and increasing number of low-paid, part-time workers. Poverty pay has generated spiralling benefit bills for the taxpayer and business. It is a transfer from the taxpayer to the sweatshop employer.

Labour's national minimum wage—which is about to come into force—will stop this subsidy to bad employers. It will also put an end to the old Burger King ploy of employing staff for a full shift, but paying them only for the time that they spend serving customers. For too long, that has been the attitude of employers to part-time staff. Under the Tory Government, flexibility became a euphemism for insecurity and exploitation. This Government recognise that the world of work is changing: the nine-to-five, Monday-to-Friday generation is passing and the number of part-time workers has doubled in 25 years. They are the linchpin of the economy; they work in every sector, in industry and commerce.

Part-timers care about their careers as much as full-timers, but many have been denied the opportunity to fulfil their potential. Many are denied access to training and management development. They are viewed as disposable, so companies will not invest in their skills. That is a huge waste of human potential, particularly of women workers. This scandal cannot continue—and it will not under a Labour Government. With equal rights for part-time workers, many more people will take up part-time work. People will be able to move between full-time and part-time work and back again at different stages of their lives without worrying about the impact on their status, seniority, or their pension. It will create a society in which people can broaden their choice between working and engaging in other activities.

I fear that society is becoming increasingly divided. There are families who are work rich and income rich but leisure poor, such as families comprising two parents who work full time—in fact, who work all the hours they can—and have no time for their children. On the other hand, there are families who are not in employment—for example, single parents or couples with children—who are leisure rich, but extremely income poor. Neither side of the divide is ideal: both situations have a devastating impact on family life and both can be helped by the availability of good, well-paid part-time work to relieve the stress of increased costs and the increased time commitment required by family life.

Women's current experiences tell them that they can have a job, but not a career after having a baby. If they want responsible and rewarding work, they must adopt male working hours and employment patterns. With increased rights for part-time workers, we can challenge Britain's long-hours culture and male absenteeism from the home.

9.3 pm

Ms Beverley Hughes (Stretford and Urmston): In view of the time, I shall be brief and concentrate on only one point. However, in so doing, I associate myself with the remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for Enfield, North (Ms Ryan), who referred to the continuing need for this kind of debate about women's issues. I reject the views expressed by some Opposition Members who seem to think that everything has been achieved.

In the past two years, this Government have done more for the interests of many different kinds of women than the Conservatives achieved in the past 20 years. The contributions of the hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May) and her hon. Friends were notable for their complete bankruptcy: they offered nothing by way of ideas or policy to address the real issues facing real women, and proved that they are completely out of touch.

The Government's priorities are to address issues that are important for women, such as work, child care, domestic violence and caring. As we have heard from one or two hon. Members, womanhood and the social experience of women embrace an even wider diversity of issues. Hon. Members have briefly touched on the point that the debate about women must also include issues of older and very old women. I call for the older woman—her past and current experiences—to be central to the debate about women.

Women over 65 are a substantial proportion of the total female population. Women are a substantial majority of the population over 65, and the world of the very old is almost exclusively a woman's world. Despite those facts, older women have been notable for their absence from the debate about the way in which gender shapes experience. As policy makers, we must not tolerate that omission because it will fail not only current but future generations of older women; and as we age, we will find ourselves confined to the rocking-chair that forms part of the stereotype about older women. As we know, such stereotypes hide the truth and mask the diversity and richness in the lives of many older women.

The Conservative party has always had difficulty with the view that people's class, race or gender has an impact on the course of their life. That is surprising when one

considers that nowhere is the impact of gender more clearly demonstrated than in this generation of older women. Their earlier lives were ones of enforced inequality and dependency structured by social values and enshrined in law, and it should therefore be no surprise that those characteristics have been carried into old age. Women are much more likely than men to be very old, very poor, single or widowed, living alone, living in poor housing and so on. Older women are among the most socially excluded people in our society.

We must not let those facts colour the whole picture, because the personal histories and testimonies of older women tell us also that if they are, in some senses, victims, they have not been passive victims. We would do well to remember that today's older women are survivors and that their lives have inevitably involved surmounting personal and social challenges throughout this century. As part of our commitment, older women must be given a central place as we develop ideas and policies for women.

Many older women continue to play vital roles for their families and society. They are the cornerstone of many grassroots organisations; they are the activists in residential homes, and it has already been said that political parties could not do without them. I could easily bring to mind women in my constituency who are in their 70s and 80s and who are still active. They have not arrived at that age without any of the consequences of living that long; they simply carry on regardless. They have arthritis and they are living on low incomes, but they continue to contribute, as they have always done.

Government policy can have an enormous impact on older women. The previous Government's policies, which my hon. Friend the Member for Rochdale (Lorna Fitzsimons) has outlined, made the lives of many older women even poorer and more restricted than they already were. This Government, particularly through their policies on welfare and community care, have already started to introduce reforms that will help older women, including reducing VAT on fuel, guaranteeing a minimum income that will rise with earnings, and helping with winter fuel.

As well as those important economic and welfare policies, we should do more to bring older women into the mainstream of our thinking on policies for women. We can begin to do so in a number of ways. We must challenge the existing stereotypes of old women and validate the contributions that they continue to make to their families and local communities. We must ensure—this is a particular point for Ministers for Women—that the voices of older women are heard distinctly in the listening to women exercise that is now being conducted. We must ensure that Ministers speak specifically to older women, bringing back the issues that they raise. We must ensure that services for older people are delivered in gender-sensitive ways. We know that the way in which many health and social services are delivered is important.

9.10 pm

Ms Hazel Blears (Salford): I am pleased to be able to take part in this debate, and delighted to see so many women Members of Parliament in the Chamber. We do not quite fulfil the definition of girl power; perhaps woman power would be more appropriate.

I welcome the statement made by my right hon. Friend the Minister for Public Health—the Minister responsible for women's issues. It was full of positive proposals to improve women's lives, in marked contrast to the speech of the hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May), who, apart from an obsession with a flexible labour market, had nothing positive to say on behalf of women. I am sorry that the right hon. Member for South-West Surrey (Mrs. Bottomley) is not in her place because I wanted to welcome her to her Front-Bench post. I wonder whether her appointment is part-time, temporary and casual, and she is participating in the Tories' flexible labour market, or whether she is on a full-time contract. Perhaps she will enlighten us later.

This is a serious and very exciting debate, partly because of the policies that the Government are delivering, which will make a real difference to women's lives, and partly because of the tremendous achievements that women in communities throughout Britain and the world have already made. I shall talk about the experiences of women in constituencies such as mine in the inner city, and the way in which the Government's policies are making a practical difference on the ground.

The Tory legacy in areas such as Salford is absolutely horrific. There is mass unemployment, and poverty and ill health are widespread. A woman in Salford is likely to have seven fewer healthy years than a woman in Surrey. A child born in the city today is likely to die five years earlier than one born in a more affluent community. That is the reality for many families in places like my constituency. Tackling the problems of social exclusion is the greatest challenge facing communities such as mine.

Managing money, finding work and trying to improve one's health and make a better life for one's family can sometimes seem like an impossible mountain to climb to many women who struggle every day with all such problems and more, but this Government have brought hope to our cities, and especially women. I pay tribute to the organisations and women in Salford who are so often at the heart of projects which renew and improve our communities.

I have been involved with Salford women's centre since its birth 15 years ago. It is a haven for many women in our city. It provides a range of activities from creative writing and aromatherapy to stress counselling, as well as a mental health drop-in centre, further education classes, high-quality child care and counselling for people with alcohol and drugs problems. Its latest venture, the unity café, is very appropriately named. Women work together, funded through the national lottery, involving young people through the new deal, providing training courses, education, cookery classes, health promotion and healthy eating programmes. It is a perfect example of women working in partnership, taking advantage of all the Government's programmes and initiatives, to make a real difference to women's lives in the community.

The women's centre is part of our health action zone. It is a very practical way in which to deliver health promotion and other health services—not in a traditional clinical setting, but in an environment where women feel comfortable and at ease while taking advantage of health services.

Smoking cessation is a key issue to women in inner cities. I make a plea to the Minister to extend the nicotine replacement therapy programme from one week, as it is in health action zones, to three or four weeks, to give women a real chance to give up smoking. Doing so will probably make the biggest single difference possible to their health and that of their families.

[Ms Hazel Blears]

As well as being in a health action zone, Salford has the benefit of being in an education action zone. We are helping to raise standards and, crucially, the aspirations of our young people, especially young women. The involvement of adults as mentors and role models is helping young people to broaden their horizons and think about careers of which they would never have dreamt. That is vital if we are to expand young women's choices and reduce the number of teenage pregnancies, which is far too high. Such pregnancies blight the lives of women for many years to come. I am delighted that we are also a trailblazer for sure start, which will be fundamental in broadening the horizons and choice of women in my area. That is real joined-up government—health, social services and education acting together for the benefit of women in our communities.

We have made a bid under the single regeneration budget, which will be decided in April. It is about building a sustainable community in our inner city, which has been decimated in recent years. From my experience, women are often at the heart of projects to build sustainable communities. I shall briefly mention two very special Salford women who are an incredible example of the drive, determination and commitment that it takes to make real change.

Mrs. Betty Burton is the driving force behind Apple Tree court, which was recently visited by my right hon. Friend the Minister. It is a grey tower block in the middle of the inner city, once unpopular and hard to let, now a thriving and vibrant community. Working with a dedicated team, Betty Burton has created an oasis in the concrete jungle.

At the foot of the tower block there is a wonderful community garden. The tenants grow flowers and vegetables. I am told that they even grow aubergines—in Salford! Local children learn about nature in the wildflower garden. Pensioners come to the café for good quality, affordable meals. There is a conservatory to catch the sun. There is even a duck pond with ducks. That woman has transformed that community almost singlehandedly. It would not have happened without Betty Burton; I believe that she is a woman who can move mountains.

Mrs. Levy is another of our formidable Salford women. She also lives in a tower block—we have rather a lot of them in Salford. She saw that people in the block had nowhere to go, nowhere to make friends, nowhere to do their washing and nowhere to be in touch with one another, so she decided to create a drop-in centre—a place where people could get to know one another, get welfare rights advice and have the benefit of all the services in the community. She raised the funds almost singlehandedly. She managed to get a grant from John Paul Getty Junior to build a community launderette. That is probably the most unusual grant that the John Paul Getty foundation has ever made. That is real initiative; it is get up and go, and in many cases it is women who have that type of energy. We must ensure that we support and encourage those women to make a difference.

Perhaps there is something about Salford that creates strong women. We are proud to be able to claim Emmeline Pankhurst as a Salford woman.

Women are achieving, but the Government are helping us enormously to do so. The national minimum wage, which has been so disparaged by Conservative Members, will benefit 2,000 women in Salford—many of whom are low-paid part-time workers in the cleaning, catering and retail trades, who are paid £2 to £2.50 an hour. The Opposition have made it plain that they will repeal that legislation, and 2,000 women in my constituency will be worse off if we ever—heaven forbid—have a Tory Government again.

The massive increase in child benefit—the biggest ever—will help more than 9,000 families in Salford to have a better income and a decent life. The new deal and the national child care strategy will be key to tackling poverty, but I suggest to Ministers that a great deal of extra work will be needed if we are to have a national child care strategy.

In an inner-city ward in my constituency, we have only one registered child minder. We must build capacity, ensuring that we have not only child minders but after-school clubs and the full range of facilities for people to key into. In many districts, that provision does not exist, and we have a long way to go to build it up. I know that the Government have the intention and determination to do so, but I remind my right hon. and hon. Friends that, if we are to give every woman access to high quality child care, we must ensure that that provision is universal. As my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, North (Ms Morgan) said, that provision must be affordable and accessible to people on a very low income.

The new deal is very welcome indeed, but I notice that at first it was limited to people out of work and claiming benefit, which meant that 85 per cent. of the eligible people were men and that it was difficult for women to access the scheme. I am delighted that the scheme has been extended to partners, so that more and more women may access that scheme, which will give them a chance to get back to work.

We must ensure that all the social initiatives that I have talked about tonight are properly integrated—properly joined up—so that people, especially women, do not fall through the net. I know that that is a tremendous task for the Government to take on. I believe that the Government are working across Departments, beginning to deliver opportunities that can transform women's lives, but one of our biggest tasks is to convince women that they can take up those opportunities—to help them to have self-esteem, confidence and a belief in their ability to succeed. That, I believe, will be the real difference that this Labour Government make.

9.19 pm

Ms Dari Taylor (Stockton, South): I am pleased to be able to make this contribution on international women's day. I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Minister for Public Health on introducing the debate on delivering for women. In my constituency this most definitely means choice. It means a range of choice, from universal nursery provision and the national minimum wage to good family-friendly policies and the working families tax credit. These are all incredibly valuable measures, and my constituents are talking about them and have high expectations from them.

My constituency has been celebrating international women's day and I shall talk about that gently while wearing my defence hat. As many in the House

know, I have been keenly involved with the armed forces for some time. When I visited Bosnia and Srebrenica I was taken by the fact that our armed forces are not only the stabilising but the building-up force in that torn country. We may find ourselves doing exactly the same thing in Kosovo. I say that because the Labour Government have widened opportunities for women in the armed forces, and I want that to be celebrated as widely as all other measures. When the Labour Government took office, only 47 per cent. of all the positions within the armed forces were available to women. Now, more than 77 per cent. of positions are available to them. That is valuable.

Two of our women are controlling frigates. That is a sign of things to come. I want to join up the way in which I celebrate the involvement of women—the serious development of women within the armed forces and the use of their talent—with a small group of people who are active in my constituency. The group is called Women's Aid and its members too have been in Srebrenica. Four of them described themselves as ordinary women with nothing very special about them to suggest that they could open the doors and get into Srebrenica. On hearing of the hideous happenings that were taking place in that area, however, they decided that they wanted to play a part.

These four women operated an organisation called Hands for Friendship. They managed to get the funds for a lorry and they filled it with medical provisions, blankets, books and anything else that they thought would be valuable. These are four ordinary, everyday women. They drove across Europe and they found themselves at the border with the passport people saying, "No, I am sorry, you can't come in. There is no way we can allow you in." They begged, pleaded, cried and stayed at the border for two nights and two days until eventually they broke down the reserve of those on the border and they were allowed in.

The women went into Bosnia and then they went on into Serbia. They went into areas that were especially dangerous. Nobody would guarantee their safety and nobody would protect them because they could not do so. Such women are to be celebrated.

The four women managed to get to Tuzla. They wanted to be with the women of Tuzla, who were remembering the massacre that had occurred there. Let us remind ourselves that, overnight, 10,000 men disappeared—murdered, and not even buried. They were left strewn on a mountainside. The ordinary women of Tuzla wanted one thing only, and that was to bury their dead. They wanted to find their sons and husbands. These four ordinary women said, "We will help you in any way we can." The women of Tuzla wanted to get to a small place called Dulici where they knew that many of their men were probably buried in mass graves. Again, the four women had to go through terrain that was unknown and isolated. They were threatened with ambush. They were stoned and shot at, but they stuck with the Tuzla women and walked the journey.

The Russians said, "No, there is border control and you cannot go through." The British, too, said that they could not go through. However, they pleaded. The Tuzla women said, "They are our menfolk and we have a right to kneel at their graves. Please let us through." Eventually, the women were let through. Those are women whom we should always celebrate—ordinary women, women who were so poor that they had no shoes and barely more than the clothes that they stood up in. They wanted to do what is only decent—to say a prayer over the graves of their loved ones.

I must tell the House that I am incredibly proud of the women of my constituency, particularly Naseem Akhtar. I am sad to say that ultimately the women were turned back. They did not make it to Dulici and had to go back to Tuzla. They cried, they were heartbroken, but they had done their best.

On international women's day, when the House has remembered so much that is valuable, we know that the women and the families in our communities will value so much of what the Labour Government are doing. It is appropriate that we remember that throughout the world there are women who are not even capable of articulating such an agenda. It is meaningful to them, but it is totally outside their grasp. I hope that in celebrating women's lives and the roles that we play, we will remember the women who are fighting so hard in other countries, in desperate situations, to define rights that we consider inviolable in our own country.

9.26 pm

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley (South-West Surrey): This has been an extremely interesting debate. There has been some selective memory, a great deal of propaganda and a great number of words. I shall try to do justice to some of the contributions that we heard today.

The first speaker from the Back Benches was the right hon. Member for Camberwell and Peckham (Ms Harman). She spoke about the importance of universal, affordable child care. Many others spoke about universal, affordable child care, as though that was something new and different, which was actually in place. I must tell the House that in my constituency there is absolutely no difference between the affordable child care today and that which existed before 1 May 1997.

Before that, there was a great increase in child care places. A large number of out-of-school children's initiative places were created by my right hon. Friend the Member for South–West Norfolk (Mrs. Shephard). She introduced nursery vouchers and tax relief on workplace nurseries. As a result of the Children Act 1989, each area had to develop a child care plan. The suggestion that the position was new and totally different on 1 May 1997 is not one with which I entirely identify.

The right hon. Member for Camberwell and Peckham also spoke about power-sharing and the importance of change within Government. I can understand her doing that. At her time, there was an editorial in *The Economist* which stated:

"Bringing more women into Parliament is, of course, an achievement in itself"—

I pay credit to it. The editorial continued:

"But there is not yet much sign that the advent of Blair's babes represents a decisive breakthrough for female politicians. . . Because Mr. Blair has made it brutally clear that Labour back-benchers are expected to toe the line set by the party leadership, few of the new intake of women have had a chance to make much of an impression in Parliament."

[Mrs. Virginia Bottomley]

The document "Delivering for Women—Progress so far" is an extraordinary series of trite comments. We read that

"Crime blights the lives of victims"—

not too controversial there. We are told that

"A decent environment is our legacy to our children"

and that

"Efficient transport is vital to our economy and our quality of life".

There are many other bland, trite comments. Perhaps more sinister, given the way that the Government do business, is the definition of the Cabinet. The right hon. Member for Camberwell and Peckham may have some sense of this. The Cabinet is defined as

"A group of senior Ministers appointed to advise the Prime Minister. A collegiate approach is adopted."

That is the new and quaint definition of the Cabinet, which I discovered in "Better for women, better for all". I think that it is despicable for women and appalling for all. I consulted the Library, which provided as one definition of "cabinet":

"A piece of furniture for display."

I could see that it could be for display. Another definition was:

"A committee formed of the most important members of the Government chosen by the Prime Minister or President to be in charge of the main Government Departments."

Women are being flattered, but essentially fobbed off with the Government's publications.

The hon. Member for Taunton (Jackie Ballard) talked about a number of important issues such as separate taxation and the possible adverse effects on women of the Welfare Reform and Pensions Bill—the comment that paid caring is valued more by the Government than unpaid caring is frequently repeated. She also commented on the use of family-friendly policies in the House of Commons. I would deplore any further reduction in the number of opportunities for Back Benchers to get their points over. We have a tyrannical Executive who will do anything to reduce the number of opportunities for Parliament to scrutinise their actions.

The way in which Parliament has been diminished and insulted during the past couple of years is disgraceful. Thursday afternoons used to be extremely busy, but hon. Members would be lucky to see three cars in Speaker's Court now. The place is deserted by Thursday evening, which is a great sadness and a great disgrace.

Lorna Fitzsimons: Would the right hon. Lady support any moves towards a more civilised balance of hours—which, I believe, is what the hon. Member for Taunton (Jackie Ballard) was suggesting—rather than a reduction? Does she realise that we are not doing fewer hours because of what I hope is the permanent modification of Thursdays? We have reordered Thursdays to achieve a more civilised working environment.

Mrs. Bottomley: The difficulty is that the greater the number of days on which the Government cannot be held to account, the greater the number of opportunities they have to be ruthless and manipulative and to avoid high profile occasions. When the Government came to power they immediately initiated the longest holiday that Parliament has ever known; there was a Government who were longing to get on with their business.

The hon. Member for Bristol, West (Valerie Davey) spoke on a subject to which I hope to return at greater length. She talked about the women's day of prayer, international women's day and Jubilee 2000. I hope that she will support the concerns of the Churches in respect of the Government excessively politicising the millennium celebrations and the dome. The Government rubbished those issues when they were in opposition and they have politicised them in government. It is extremely important that Church leaders have the opportunity to register what the millennium celebrations are about and to achieve real changes on the commitments of Jubilee 2000.

My hon. Friend the Member for Lichfield (Mr. Fabricant) made a splendid speech in which he covered many areas and identified the issue of playgroups, which has been repeatedly raised with me. Playgroups face real problems such as the loss of jobs for women as a result of the minimum wage and the loss of choices for parents. He also mentioned the possible 90,000 job losses in the hotel, retail and textiles sectors as a result of the minimum wage and the £39.3 billion tax on business resulting from the Government's actions.

The key point is that a prosperous, effective and flexible market will create jobs for women. That is why, so spectacularly in the past 20 years, women in Britain have achieved levels that they had never previously achieved and have had opportunities at work that were never previously open to them. There is more to be done, but the dramatic transformation over the past 20 years—at work and particularly in education—has been formidable.

Much of the Government's document is, in effect, a paean of praise to the steps taken by the previous Government. There has been a dramatic transformation involving women in higher education, where there are more women than men, as well as GCSE results, A-level results and achievements at every level. My hon. Friend the Member for Lichfield said that Labour Members have Barbie doll policies; one could say only that the Under-Secretary of State for International Development would be known as their Ken.

The hon. Member for Halesowen and Rowley Regis (Mrs. Heal) talked about violence against women. That area is of great importance, but she seemed unaware of the steps that were taken before 1 May 1997 such as the White Paper on protecting the public, changes in respect of sex offenders, the establishment of an interdepartmental group on domestic violence and a public awareness campaign. I looked back at "A Guide to Services for Women", which was produced in 1993 and has a great section on domestic violence. These are difficult and intractable problems, and there is no room for complacency, but the idea that words on their own can deliver change is naive and irresponsible.

My hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Mrs. Lait) made a splendid speech, and I identified with a number of elements in it. My first job was working for the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field). At the time, we were fighting bitterly to save family allowances for women. The Labour party has always been dominated by the trade unions and the "man at work", and there was a real battle. I went to the headquarters of the Transport and General Workers Union to try to persuade the union to

support the campaign. I am pleased to say that one of the most able advocates at the time was Molly Meacher. Together we campaigned long and hard.

This is a battle that is never finished, and now, with the working families tax credit, we have it again—the move from the purse to the wallet. As we await tomorrow's Budget statement, we are faced with the threat of the taxation of child benefit, which would be a deplorable and retrograde step. It would penalise couples when the wife stayed at home and the husband was earning, say, £35,000 a year, as opposed to couples both of whose members were working, earning perhaps £20,000 or £25,000 each.

More importantly, child benefit is the way in which we register the existence of children in our society. The move away from child tax allowances meant that everyone benefited in the same way. The point about child tax allowances was that the better off were given more advantage in return for their responsibilities. Turning the clock back would be an act that women would never forget, and for which they would never forgive the Government.

My hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham spoke of the increasing irrelevance of some of the debate, given the perhaps more worrying alienated group of young men. As she will know, her concern is shared. In her Green Paper, "Our Healthier Nation"—not to be confused with our White Paper, "The Health of the Nation"—the right hon. Member for Dulwich and West Norwood (Ms Jowell) spoke of anxieties about suicide. I was pleased that her ideas about the priorities for health improvement were so similar to the ideas that she had inherited. After all, imitation is the sincerest form of flattery.

The hon. Member for Keighley (Mrs. Cryer) mentioned all-women shortlists. It would take a great deal to persuade my party of their desirability, although we would certainly all agree that the party should do more to encourage more women to join us.

Given all the discussion of role models that we have heard, and the welcome tributes from many Labour Members to women in their constituencies who have played an important part, I felt that I must quote a recent newspaper headline:

"Maggie is the boss of all role models".

Certainly, the achievements of Margaret Thatcher, as our first woman Prime Minister, and those of the first woman Leader of the House of Lords, Lady Young, are extremely important developments—although, like others, I wish that those developments had been reflected in the presence of more women in Conservative constituencies.

Miss McIntosh: Do you agree, Madam Speaker, that a great omission on the part of the Government has been their failure to recognise the role model that you have been to all of us, in Parliament and outside, as a very distinguished lady in politics? Perhaps the Minister will make amends in her winding-up speech.

Mrs. Bottomley: I cannot cope with that, Madam Speaker.

Much has been made of the new deal for lone parents. My hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May) dealt with that admirably: there has been a 3.8 per cent. success rate, at a cost of £200 million. I am disappointed that the hon. Member for Keighley did not refer to some of the international human rights issues which I hope to mention, and which have been extraordinarily lacking in today's debate.

My excessively generous hon. Friend the Member for Vale of York (Miss McIntosh) stressed the need for a distinction between fact and fiction. How right she was. She went on to identify an issue that I am delighted to hear the Government have supported equally and that was crucial in achieving many changes for women: Opportunity 2000.

I take great pride in having led the national health service into Opportunity 2000: the Department of Health was the first Government Department to enter the initiative. Unlike the Government's documents, on joining Opportunity 2000, the NHS set explicit targets on how many more women consultants, women managers, women accountants and women on health authorities and trusts we were seeking. There was a dramatic increase in the number of women on NHS trusts and health authority boards.

Among those who we were able to use that as a springboard to great career success were Baroness Jay, Leader of the House of Lords, Baroness Hayman, Baroness Dean—all people whom I took pleasure in appointing—the Liberal Democrat colleague of the hon. Member for Taunton, Julia Neuberger, and many others.

If there has been widespread shock over the behaviour of the new Government, it has been about their particularly partisan appointments to many of the health authorities and trusts.

Mr. David Maclean (Penrith and The Border): And regional development agencies.

Mrs. Bottomley: And regional development agencies. Having personally been involved in the selection and appointment of so many people, particularly women who went on to great success in the Labour Government, I am qualified to comment.

I am particularly pleased to hear that Dame Rennie Fritchie has been appointed the commissioner for public appointments. She was a distinguished regional chairman and she was central to the development and unrolling of Opportunity 2000 in the NHS. She is a great advocate of family-friendly and practical employment policies. I want to register her contribution.

The point about Opportunity 2000, which was launched by my right hon. Friend the Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major), but led by the business community, was that it worked with people. It was about encouragement and setting goals. It was not coercive. It was not bullying.

The hon. Member for Stevenage (Barbara Follett) was the designer of Emily's list. I am sorry that she did not refer to advice for women through the list. Nor did she refer to her experiences in South Africa. The role of women in South Africa today is something that I want to address.

My hon. Friend the Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman) spoke on the important issues affecting older women. I speak not just from self-interest. I hope that hon. Members will have the opportunity to look at the university of Manchester's Pennell initiative,

[Mrs. Bottomley]

again chaired by Dame Rennie Fritchie, which examined coronary heart disease, breast cancer, depression, bone disorders and social isolation among older people.

Older people are equally worried about the raiding of social service budgets, the inability to deliver a carer strategy, the fudging on the royal commission on the long-term care of the elderly, the mess and complexity over pension reform and, above all, the loss of the tax credit on dividend share income.

I regret not being able to identify all the others who have spoken admirably during the debate, but I need to speak about international women's day. We celebrate 50 years since the universal declaration of human rights. The Secretary-General's message to us all today is most important. We can look with some pride at the remarkable achievements so far. He said:

"We entered a century where women had the right to vote in a mere handful of countries; we leave one where the vast majority of countries have universal suffrage. We entered a century where women were practically excluded from decision-making; we leave one where the participation of women at senior levels of leadership, national and international, is no longer questioned."

But it is a world where, in Afghanistan, India, east Jerusalem, South Africa, China, Yemen, Peru, Ethiopia, Ghana and places throughout the continents, women have no human rights. There is continued bride burning, female infanticide, genital mutilation, appalling domestic violence, and a lack of participation in the political process.

Today's debate has been unforgivably self-centred. We have focused on issues in which dramatic progress has been made in Britain, as if the rest the world scarcely existed. I especially commend the work of the British Council—of which I am vice-chairman, and honoured to be so—which is doing practical, important and courageous work in all those countries. The Foreign Affairs Select Committee has just reported on human rights and asked the British Council particularly to address its concerns; the concerns of women will be foremost among those.

This has been an important debate. This century, we have made great changes in the United Kingdom. Our task and priority now should be to deal with the plight of women around the world.

9.45 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Ms Margaret Hodge): This has been a thoughtful and wide-ranging debate. We have reached some agreement across the political divide on the issues of importance to women in Britain today. In a sense, that in itself was telling, for—as my hon. Friend the Member for Stevenage (Barbara Follett) said—women often bring a welcome and different approach to politics. I think that we have demonstrated the truth of that statement in our discourse today. On both sides of the House, the speeches by hon. Members—with one or two less notable exceptions by Opposition Members—have shown that we can identify common needs and priorities without engaging in sterile political banter.

There are, of course, differences in substance between the parties. Conservative Members oppose the minimum wage, whereas Labour Members warmly welcome the impact that it will have, especially on the 1.3 million women who will benefit from it. We differ from Conservative Members on a national child care strategy. They have traditionally believed that child care is a matter of private concern for families, with the state intervening only when the child is at risk, whereas we think that there is a proper role for the Government in creating a child care infrastructure that will better promote the interests of children and families.

We differ also on family-friendly employment. Our new Bill will establish a statutory right to unpaid parental leave, a better package of maternity rights, a right to time off in emergencies and stronger rights for part-time workers. All those measures will not only benefit society overall, but make a real practical difference to women's lives. The Conservative party opposes all those measures.

This has been an excellent debate, in which we have heard some eloquent and emotive arguments. It has also been fascinating to hear right. hon. and hon. Ladies give the female perspective on key aspects of Government policy. I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Member for Camberwell and Peckham (Ms Harman) for the contribution that she made during her time in office in addressing many issues of importance to women. I assure her that we shall consider seriously the issues that she raised today.

I welcome the speech by my hon. Friend the Member for Salford (Ms Blears), who talked about how our policies, right across Government, have impacted on women in her constituency.

The hon. Member for Taunton (Jackie Ballard) made a constructive speech, mentioning the consideration that we should give to proposals from the Equal Opportunities Commission. We shall be responding to those proposals. However, we shall not—as the hon. Member for Beckenham (Mrs. Lait) intimated—be suggesting that we should abolish the Equal Opportunities Commission.

Several speeches—including a sincere one by my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, West (Valerie Davey), and a passionate one by the hon. Member for Vale of York (Miss McIntosh)—dealt with the international dimension of today's celebration. My hon. Friend the Member for Stockton, South (Ms Taylor) also dealt with the international dimension. I should tell the hon. Member for Vale of York that my noble Friend the Minister for Women is today at the United Nations, speaking on the status of women. We therefore do take our international responsibility seriously.

Hon. Members spoke about the importance of women's representation, both in this place and in other arenas. I particularly welcome the speech by my hon. Friend the Member for Keighley (Mrs. Cryer), who described to the House how abolition of the hereditary principle in the House of Lords will help to push us up the European league on representation of women.

I was very struck by the thoughtful and important speech by my hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley (Caroline Flint), who showed a telling understanding of the problems faced by teenage mothers. I tell the hon. Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman) that we shall be making proposals on programmes dealing with teenage pregnancies. We think that the issue is so important that it is being addressed, across Government, by the social exclusion unit, with the support of the women's unit.

Several hon. Members have talked about the importance of our child care policies and our family-friendly policies. My hon. Friend the Member for Halesowen and Rowley Regis (Mrs. Heal) described the difference that they made to the lives of her constituents. My hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, North (Ms Morgan) stressed the importance of our policies, which were also mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Keighley. My hon. Friend the Member for Stevenage talked about the importance of the child care strategy and how she wanted an end to women being forced to choose between the children whom they love and the jobs that they need.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stretford and Urmston (Ms Hughes) and others raised the crucial issue of older women. That is a central part of the strategy that we shall be delivering. Our ideas and policies for older women will be developed through a listening programme by the women's Ministers and those responsible for the programme of listening to older people. I was also delighted to hear my hon. Friend the Member for Rochdale (Lorna Fitzsimons) celebrating female role models.

The hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May) raised concerns about the working families tax credit. The Conservatives do not understand its effects. It will benefit more than 400,000 low-income families, helping many women. Transferring money from the purse to the wallet is not an issue, because those who benefit from the tax credit can choose how it is paid.

The Conservatives' opposition to the minimum wage is nonsense, given its importance to women. The minimum wage is not the cause of the closure of playgroups. Recent pre-school closures have been a direct result of the previous Government's policies on nursery vouchers. The idea that we should have child care on the cheap by exploiting women working in that most important role of giving a good early start to our children is outrageous.

Mrs. May: Does the Minister accept that the Pre-School Learning Alliance has said that hundreds of pre-schools have closed as a result of this Government's policy on the provision of early-years education? Does she further accept that if the introduction of the minimum wage means that the cost of child care through pre-schools becomes so great that people cannot afford it, those pre-schools will close?

Ms Hodge: The Pre-School Learning Alliance blames the previous Government for the closure of thousands of pre-schools. The working families tax credit and the child care tax credit component will ensure that workers in pre-schools can be paid the decent wage that they deserve.

Some argue that it is unnecessary to focus on an agenda for women and that it is simply a gesture of political correctness. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Enfield, North (Ms Ryan), who said in her strong contribution that such people are wrong. Of course, policies that benefit women will benefit everyone—better schools, better health services and better community safety—but if we do not consider the issues facing women in our unequal society, we shall fail to achieve the fair and inclusive society that we want.

The lot of women has massively improved over the past 25 years. Girls now out-perform boys at school. We have also made great strides in higher education. In 1970, twice as many men as women took a degree. Now men and women enrol as students in equal numbers; ever more women now work. In the past 10 years, the proportion of working-age women in the labour market has increased, while the proportion of working-age men has declined. Most dramatic has been the increase in the number of mothers in work whose youngest child is under five. That figure has gone up by 10 per cent. in the past 10 years. More than half the mothers of children under five now work.

Life has become easier in the home. No longer do we have to spend hours at the kitchen sink scrubbing the dirt off the potatoes, and most modern washing machines can cope with woollens without shrinking them. However, those advances have brought new needs that are particular to women and new issues that affect not just women, but all of us. At the same time, old inequalities still persist. Women still earn 20 per cent. less than men—often for doing an equal job. Even at 18, when girls have done better than boys at school, they earn 6 per cent. less.

The glass ceiling persists, with only 4 per cent. of directorships in companies being held by women—and those are mainly in marketing and human resources, not in finance or industrial production. Although we are all delighted that there are more women in the House, the proportion is still only one in five. However, three out of four of those working in clerical or secretarial jobs are women.

One in four women will, at some time in their lives, experience domestic violence—an issue raised by many, including my right hon. Friend the Member for Camberwell and Peckham, the hon. Member for Taunton and my hon. Friends the Members for Bristol, West, for Halesowen and Rowley Regis, for Keighley and for Enfield, North.

A responsible Government, knowing these facts, must address the issues implicit in them. That is just what we are doing—and doing successfully. At the same time, the welcome changes have brought new challenges. More women work, but many are working part-time. In fact, four out of five part-time workers are women, and the rights for part-time workers that we are introducing are crucial for women. With more women at work, affordable, accessible and high-quality child care is vital.

I do not know where the right hon. Member for South-West Surrey (Mrs. Bottomley) has been but, in the first two years of the new Labour Government, we have created more real child care places than the last Government did in 18 years. Our national child care strategy recognises the needs of mothers who choose to stay at home, as well those who need to—or choose to—work.

For many of us, our needs and concerns are the same as they always were. We still bear most of the responsibilities in the home. Even with school-age children, we are the ones to sort out everything from homework to the dentist's appointment; from making sure the children get to their sports activity after school to rushing them to the accident and emergency department when they fall and bang their heads. We are the ones most likely to care for sick, disabled or elderly relatives. We have to juggle our lives and our time to cope with pressures.

That is why the Government's emphasis on encouraging a better balance between work and home is so important. That is why we are committed to ensuring

[Ms Hodge]

that paid employment is more compatible with family life. It is not corporatist Britain, as suggested by the hon. Member for Maidenhead—it is common sense that brings bottom-line benefits to businesses and to families.

I am proud of our record in government. In a mere 21 months, we have achieved immeasurably more than the Opposition achieved in a miserable and interminable 18 years: a national child care strategy; a minimum wage; the working families tax credit and the child care tax credit; a new deal for lone parents; the biggest ever hike in child benefit; a new minimum income guarantee for pensioners, many of whom are women; the introduction of parental leave; new rights for part-time workers; proposed reforms of the Child Support Agency; £19 billion to improve educational standards; measures to cut crime, reduce the fear of crime and tackle issues of importance to women, such as the giving of evidence in rape trials; a national carers' strategy, with a new £140 million package to help carers take a break; £20 billion for the national health service, with money specifically set aside to speed up both preventive care and the treatment of breast cancer; £40 million announced last week to help phase out mixed wards; and targets to ensure that half the appointments to public bodies are women.

We are listening, responding and doing, and we are addressing those issues which most concern most women. We are not in the business of dictating to women—we are in the business of ensuring that they have a real and effective choice. We know that there is much left to do as we continue to tackle women's inequality and to develop policies to improve all our lives.

As we move towards the new millennium, women's concerns are finally being given the weight and the consideration that they deserve. We may be confident that this Administration will continue to place women at the very heart of Government.

Jane Kennedy (Lord Commissioner to the Treasury): I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion, by leave, withdrawn.

Northern Ireland

10 pm

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Mr. Paul Murphy): I beg to move,

That the draft North/South Co-operation (Implementation Bodies)(Northern Ireland) Order 1999 be approved.

The debate in the new Northern Ireland Assembly on 15 February dealt with some fundamental aspects of the Good Friday agreement. Members of the Assembly discussed the civic forum and how it would be best for the First Minister and Deputy First Minister to appoint members to it. They debated how the British-Irish Council might perform in ensuring that relations between the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland, the Isle of Man and the Channel Islands, and the new devolved Administrations, can work in the future.

Members of the Assembly dealt with the 10 Departments of the Executive that are to run Northern Ireland after devolution. The House of Commons approved the order setting up the 10 Departments of State in Northern Ireland, as did the other place some weeks ago. Today, we are dealing with what was known during the talks process as strand 2 of the agreement. We are dealing with what is termed the North-South Ministerial Council—a body based in many ways on the European Council of Ministers—which is to deal with areas of co-operation between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.

The agreement specified areas in which co-operation may occur, and those areas were extended and debated in the Assembly on 15 February—they include transport, tourism, the environment, agriculture, education and health—although the details are to be decided by the Council itself.

The order provides the statutory basis for the six agreed so-called implementation bodies, to deal with inland waterways; food safety; trade and business development; language; and aquaculture and marine matters. The details are in the Library for hon. Members to consult.

The order deals with how the bodies will operate, including details on their functions; annual reports and accounts; grants; staffing; and other issues. It is important for the House to realise that after devolution the British Government will have no role in the day-to-day operation of the bodies.

The two Governments were charged by the agreement with drawing up the legislation and the treaty, which is in schedule 1 of the document and was signed by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland's Foreign Affairs Minister in Dublin this morning. All the details on the implementation bodies and the treaty itself are the result of intensive negotiations before Christmas, ending in the early hours of 18 December, after Christmas, and indeed right up until only yesterday.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Inverclyde): Part VII of the order deals with aquaculture and marine matters. What is the likelihood of the implementation body engaging in matters relating to the common fisheries policy or fish farming?

Mr. Murphy: My hon. Friend doubtless heard me when I said that the way in which the bodies will operate

will depend on the Northern Ireland Assembly and on the Republic. It is important that there will be an opportunity in the British-Irish Council for people from the Scottish Parliament, from the Welsh Assembly, and of course from Westminster, to discuss matters of common concern, including fishing. The European side will of course remain a matter for the Ministers from the sovereign states. The appropriate Minister for agriculture and fisheries in Northern Ireland will play his or her part in discussions on fisheries.

The negotiations continued until yesterday. That explains the relative lateness of the documentation, which right hon. and hon. Members might normally have expected to receive earlier. I apologise to the House for the lateness, but these are unusual circumstances and times. We have discussed the issue through the usual channels and, of course, much of the detail is already in the public domain and has been discussed and debated in the agreement itself, in the various meetings of the Northern Ireland Assembly and in documents that the right hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) and the Deputy First Minister have circulated to all parties in Northern Ireland in the past few weeks.

Another reason why we are dealing with the matter today is that the Government pledged to complete all the necessary legislative preparations for devolution, and all the issues in connection with the agreement as far as they affect devolution, by 10 March. That we have now done, if the House approves the motion—as I presume it will—and if the other place approves it tomorrow. The only step then remaining will be for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to judge whether it appears to her, as it says in the agreement,

"that sufficient progress has been made in implementing the Belfast Agreement, to permit the transfer of powers to the new Assembly."

That transfer would be the devolution order itself, which will be debated by this House and the other place.

Dr. Godman: My hon. Friend mentioned the British-Irish Council. If that body is to have a fixed locus, I can think of no better city than Glasgow. The Nordic Council has a fixed locus, with a secretariat of some 70 people. I know that Liverpool has a good case, but I do not believe that Belfast, Dublin or London has a case. It should be Glasgow—does my hon. Friend agree?

Mr. Murphy: I would get into terrible trouble if I agreed anything on the British-Irish Council and its secretariat. Stranraer, the Isle of Man, Liverpool and Cardiff have all expressed an interest, and we shall have to wait and see. It is a matter for the council itself and the two Governments to discuss.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State indicated that she would be ready to call a meeting of the Assembly as early as 10 March to allow the so-called d'Hondt procedure to be run. As hon. Members will know, that procedure would trigger the formation of the new Assembly's Executive. She has made a further announcement about that matter today. She announced that in her consultations with Northern Ireland parties she heard differing views. Some wanted the running of d'Hondt to be delayed and others wanted it to go ahead immediately. All those who support the agreement remain committed to achieving full implementation of all its aspects as quickly as possible, and all the parties said that they wanted to move forward on an inclusive basis.

In the light of the differing views, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has decided that 10 March would not be the best time to run the d'Hondt procedure. She has concluded that if it were to be run, it would not produce an effective Executive on which both communities would be represented. Indeed, some parties feared that running d'Hondt this week might even collapse the process. My right hon. Friend also recognised that the decision could not be put off indefinitely. Therefore, she announced today that she would call a meeting of the Assembly to run the d'Hondt procedure no later than the week beginning 29 March. That is the week of Good Friday, which is the anniversary of the agreement. That will give the parties the time and space to find a way forward. Many of the Northern Ireland political leaders will be visiting the USA. There will be opportunities to build confidence and to talk informally in preparation for an intensive round of discussions on their return to Belfast.

Many of us find such an announcement disappointing. However, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has made clear, we can, with determination and courage, take the next steps towards bringing the agreement to fruition. We will work closely with the Irish Government and all other supporters of the agreement to find a constructive way forward.

It is against that background that the House is considering the order. It will put in place the new implementation bodies, which are an important piece of the new infrastructure under the agreement. The bodies will operate fully in accordance with the terms of the agreement as is spelled out in the treaty attached to the order. Ministers in the North-South Ministerial Council who are responsible for the various bodies—or any additional bodies that they may decide to establish by future agreement—will be fully accountable to the Assembly and to Oireachtas.

Mechanisms to ensure proper accountability and transparency were included in the Northern Ireland Act 1998. They include the requirement that the Executive Committee and the Assembly should be notified of the dates and agendas for meetings of the ministerial council. Northern Ireland Ministers will be accountable to the Assembly for their actions in the council, just as they will be for their other responsibilities.

By law, Assembly Ministers who participate in the council will be required to act in accordance with the decisions of the Assembly or the Executive Committee. Northern Ireland Ministers will also require Assembly approval for any decisions that go beyond their defined authority. Any agreement in the council that requires new legislation will require the support of the Assembly. No agreement to establish a new implementation body can come into operation without the specific approval of the Assembly.

We have a balanced package of measures to enhance co-operation, north and south. The bodies will operate within a clear framework of democratic accountability as defined in the agreement, supporting legislation and the procedures of the Assembly. The bodies, and any others that may be agreed in the council, will provide a foundation for close co-operation between the Northern Ireland Administration and the Irish Government.

The order provides the statutory basis for the six agreed implementation bodies. In my view, and, I am sure, in the view of both the people of Northern Ireland and the

[Mr. Murphy]

House, it is an important part of the path towards a political settlement in Northern Ireland which will, we all hope and pray, lead to peace. I commend it to the House.

10.13 pm

Mr. Andrew MacKay (Bracknell): We support the order, and we shall not divide the House on it. We support it for a variety of reasons. First and foremost, it was an important part of the Belfast agreement, and it is essential that all aspects of that agreement should be implemented in full. It is a matter of deep regret to Members on both sides of the House that certain aspects of the agreement are not being implemented at present.

I completely accept the Minister's apology for the lateness in our obtaining the documentation. The negotiations went on throughout the weekend, and we were satisfied with the key text. I shall quote briefly from it to record the important definition that gives us comfort that the order is the right way forward. It states that the arrangements—

"an Assembly in Northern Ireland, a North/South Ministerial Council, implementation bodies, a British-Irish Council, and a British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference and any amendments to British Acts of Parliament and the Constitution of Ireland"—

are

"interlocking and interdependent and that in particular the functions of the Assembly and the North/South Council are so closely inter-related that the success of each depends on that of the other".

I know that the Minister will agree that that is a point worth underlining.

I have always favoured proceeding with all other aspects of the agreement, especially the north-south bodies, so that there could be absolutely no excuse for the lack of decommissioning of illegally held weapons. We want a clear message to emerge from the House tonight that the two Governments and all the constitutional parties in Northern Ireland have fulfilled their responsibilities in full; and that there is now no reason why there should not be a devolved Administration in Northern Ireland. Only one thing holds that back: that Sinn Fein-IRA have still not started to decommission their illegally held arms and explosives—not one gun nor one ounce of Semtex has been handed in.

The reason why I was pleased to learn over the weekend that the two Governments and the constitutional parties had reached a clear agreement on setting up the north-south bodies is that doing so removed any last hurdle or excuse that allowed Sinn Fein-IRA to say that they could not decommission yet because they were still waiting for this, that or the other, or because they were not convinced of the good faith of the British Government, the Irish Government, the Unionists, the Social Democratic and Labour party, or whoever they wanted to blame at that point. Once the order has been passed by the House of Commons today and by another place tomorrow, there will be no excuse.

The eyes of the world will be on Sinn Fein-IRA, watching to see whether they really meant what they said and signed up to on Good Friday last year; whether they have really renounced violence for good; and whether they will decommission their illegally held weapons. If they do not decommission, in my view and that of my hon. Friends, it is not possible for the Northern Ireland Executive to be set up. It is not right or proper in a democracy for people to take ministerial office, with all the responsibilities that such a duty entails, while continuing to hold illegal weapons without any suggestion that they will be handed in. It would be quite unfair to expect constitutionally elected politicians who have never taken part in violence to take part in an Executive with such people.

I conclude by underlining the fact that the buck now stops with Sinn Fein-IRA. They must commence decommissioning, and the process must be verifiable and genuine. Only when that happens can we have a devolved Administration in Northern Ireland, which many of us believe is long overdue.

10.18 pm

Mr. David Trimble (Upper Bann): As the Minister said, the order and the associated treaty give effect to agreements that were made between the parties in the Northern Ireland Assembly on 18 December, although they were not formally approved until 15 February because of some outstanding business.

In their effect, the order and the treaty achieve something rather unique. Co-operation between states is a common feature of western Europe today, and co-operation between the two parts of Ireland has gone on for decades—indeed, the key elements were developed under the previous Stormont Administration. However, the treaty and the order go further in that they create implementation bodies—bodies in international law—to which each jurisdiction transfers functions as a means of carrying on a scheme of co-operation. There are six different areas of co-operation. The concept formed a central part of the agreement, we worked out the detail of the schemes in December and we are now giving effect to them. Therefore, the order marks a significant step forward in the implementation of the agreement, and embodies one of its chief characteristics.

Most of the documentation, which is lengthy and detailed, simply fleshes out the detail of what was agreed on 18 December. The 18 December documents are in the order, and further memoranda flesh out the situation in greater detail. There was difficulty with the particular legal concepts used and I am glad that, following much discussion, we got it right. However, it is interesting to note that the Northern Ireland Assembly will not have the power to create such bodies in the future. It may propose schemes for future co-operation, but only the House and the Government can exercise treaty-making powers. That is a rather cumbersome, roundabout way to proceed, but I think the Government are reluctant to create precedents that might be applied elsewhere in the United Kingdom.

We had one significant difficulty. It has been suggested in some quarters that the process would result in the creation of some freestanding bodies that would not be accountable or subject to any sort of veto or direction and would somehow continue if anything happened to the agreement. I am glad to say that it is clear from the agreement that that is not so. Article 8 of the treaty is sufficient to dispose of such claims, and the preamble to the treaty makes the situation absolutely clear.

As the Opposition spokesman, the right hon. Member for Bracknell (Mr. MacKay), said, the agreement states that all the arrangements—in particular the Assembly, the North-South Ministerial Council and associated

schemes—are "interlocking and interdependent". One relies upon the other. The relationship between the particular bodies created by the order and the North-South Ministerial Council is also made absolutely clear. Hon. Members will find in each of the documents a sentence that states that, in exercising its functions, the body will act at all times in accordance with any directions—whether of a general or specific nature—given by the North-South Ministerial Council. That demonstrates the correct relationship between the bodies and the council.

The Minister quoted from material in the agreement that shows clearly the relationship between the council and the democratic bodies: the Assembly of Northern Ireland and the Oireachtas in the Irish Republic to which accountability then flows. This structure maintains democratic accountability and ensures that the operations will proceed in a way that is genuinely beneficial to both parties.

There is a continuing problem that was not apparent when we made the agreement on 18 December. Hon. Members will see it referred to on page 39, which deals with aquaculture and marine matters. We thought that we could include provisions regarding the Commissioners of Irish Lights but, subsequent to 18 December, it became clear that some quite complicated matters were involved. Hon. Members will see those references in paragraphs 7 and 7.1 on page 39, which state that the existing arrangements will continue until such time as more general United Kingdom and Republic of Ireland legislation can be brought forward.

The question remains as to what is the best way to cope with this issue. I was interested in some earlier comments about the British-Irish Council because I suspect that it might present a solution to the real practical problems that we encountered when addressing the question of lights. That matter might be best handled—as it is at present—on a British Isles basis. The British-Irish Council could be an effective way of dealing with the issue. That matter will be carried forward in further discussions within the North-South Ministerial Council and the British-Irish Council.

As the Minister said, our general approach has been to move as quickly as we can. Although it has taken from 18 December until now, we have spent that time doing serious work in order to produce all the material. It has been our intention throughout the past few months to move as quickly as possible to the point where we can say that everything that we can do to give life to the institutions of the agreement has been done. We have now reached that point. My colleagues in the Ulster Unionist party and I—and, to some extent, the House—will be able to say after tonight that everything we can do has been done.

All the institutional and structural arrangements provided for in the agreement, which are necessary for the North-South Ministerial Council and the British-Irish Council, will be put in place and ready to go live as soon as the necessary conditions are present. That point relates to the one outstanding issue in the agreement on which there has, as yet, been no progress. I refer to the commitment of the paramilitary-related parties to the agreement to achieve the total disarmament of paramilitary groups. There has been no progress by any of those parties that have endorsed the agreement.

The one act of progress, which coincidentally took place on 18 December, was the first act of decommissioning by the Loyalist Volunteer Force, a precedent that was very welcome. The paramilitary parties to the agreement have, as yet, done nothing to implement the commitment that they made nearly a year ago. Until they do, there will not be sufficient confidence in the community to enable the agreement to proceed—nor ought it to proceed, when we consider simple justice and defence of the democratic principle. An important principle is at stake here—that of ensuring that we are proceeding on a sound basis that will ensure peace and democracy for the future.

I hope that it will be possible for that further step to be taken, sooner rather than later. I regret the Secretary of State's statement today. We tried very hard last week to have everything ready for 10 March, and as the Minister has said, discussions continued throughout the weekend. The order has been tabled and is being debated tonight so that everything will be ready for 10 March. It was therefore disappointing to hear the Secretary of State announce this afternoon that 10 March did not matter any more and that the Government will just forget about it. That demonstrates a slightly mistaken approach.

The Secretary of State should maintain the posture, as should we all, that we have the institutional arrangements sorted out, so from tonight, each and every day, we are ready to take whatever further steps we can as soon as the necessary confidence-building measures occur. To announce, as the Government have done today, "We shall not bother because we have given up hope for this week and we'll forget the matter for another couple of weeks," is the wrong approach and undermines the efforts that we have been making in the past week.

I hope that the Secretary of State will think again about the approach to adopt in these matters and focus on the need for confidence-building measures to be taken. We must focus pressure on those who are refusing to act, wasting time and delaying progress, because as from tonight, everything that can be done from our point of view has been done. We hope that the arrangements will work out well in practice—experience, of course, will determine that—but the arrangements are flexible and can be developed and altered in the light of experience.

I look forward to the time when we can operate this part of the agreement together with all the other parts and, through them, change people's view not only of north-south co-operation but of how society operates in Northern Ireland. At the end of the day, we must remember that the arrangements provide the potential to transform circumstances in Northern Ireland and give life to those hopes that were engendered nearly a year ago by the Belfast agreement.

10.29 pm

Mr. Lembit Öpik (Montgomeryshire): The Liberal Democrats also welcome the order. Politics is as much about processes as anything else. To put it another way, "It's not what you do, it's the way that you do it." That lesson has clearly been learned by the British and Irish Governments, judging by what is being presented to us today.

If we compare the situation now with that of 14 years ago, when the last great effort in cross-border co-operation—the Anglo-Irish agreement of 1985—was

[Mr. Lembit Öpik]

implemented, we realise that co-operation between London and Dublin was the exception, and now it is the rule. Direct involvement with the parties in Northern Ireland was rare then, but now those very parties are leading the process. Back then, the public were shut out of decision making; now, they are decision making—through the referendum and election last year, which continue to determine policy this year. Those are crucial changes, and they have made the settlement process possible. Part of the Good Friday agreement included the repeal of the 1985 agreement. Can the Minister give any details on a possible time scale for that repeal?

The message, "It's not what you do, it's the way that you do it", must not be lost on Sinn Fein. To some extent, the question is not whether the IRA decommissions, but how—particularly when it starts and its time frame for fulfilling that requirement. If it starts now and finishes by April 2000, the consequences will be far better for everybody, including the republicans, than if it starts a year from now.

The official Opposition have once again highlighted the impatience that many of us feel when some, including the right hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble), are working so hard to make the agreement work, yet there is no sign whatever of the IRA decommissioning. Of course, we will all continue to wait until decommissioning begins, although the worry about whether it will happen at all concerns us most. I think that Gerry Adams knows that very well. We are optimistic, but can hardly be blamed for becoming impatient for some progress on decommissioning.

The order is very detailed and thorough. We are glad that it has been worked out so thoroughly, especially concerning the bodies on food safety, trade and business development, and with regard to special European Union programmes, which have been drawn up very specifically indeed.

I would like to raise two other points with the Minister. First, every politician knows that the most important person in any office is the secretary. To control someone's diary, their post and their phone is effectively to control their life. The second most important person is the person who pays the secretary. That vital role needs to be remembered in funding the new bodies.

The order makes it clear that six new bodies are to be funded by money allocated by the Northern Ireland Assembly. The agreement between the two Governments announced today suggests that they should be funded in accordance with the provisions of the multi-party agreement, on the ground that it constitutes a necessary public function—as set out on page 11 of the order. How will the balance of funding between the Belfast Assembly and the Dublin Government be addressed?

Presumably the two bodies should put in something like equal amounts, otherwise one may have undue influence on the day-to-day operation of one or more of the sixbodies. Is that the plan? By allowing the Belfast Assembly to choose how much it allocates, we may be giving it power to pay the secretaries more or less than Dublin. I am suggesting not that the Belfast Assembly should not have such a power, but that it should consult Dublin before it decides how much to pay. I can see frictions developing if that has not been clearly established. Similarly, I urge Dublin to consult Belfast on the matter.

Secondly, I am glad that the body dealing with language is to cater for all languages as well as Irish. It is good that the rich diversity of culture and heritage on the island of Ireland is so celebrated. Will any other languages be specifically catered for? There are more than 5,000 people from ethnic minorities in Northern Ireland, and no doubt more in the Republic. Some of those, such as the Chinese community, may wish to benefit from help in conserving or promoting their language. Can the functions of the language body be extended to help such people? May I stress that this is not special pleading on behalf of the Estonian community in Northern Ireland, or, indeed, the four or five people who still speak Estonian on the island.

We often hear the phrase, "The devil is in the detail." On this occasion, it would be more appropriate to say that the Minister is in the detail. His formulation seems sensible, consistent and empowering. That does not necessarily make him a saint, but it does clearly make him a very important player in the process. I praise him for the sure-footed and consistent way in which he has brought matters forward.

Despite the very assiduous efforts made by many people, including the right hon. Member for Upper Bann, in attempting to achieve the important breakthroughs for which we were hoping by 10 March, it is probably smart to delay the procedure. Having said that, we have a very clear date—29 March—by which we must have made some progress. The clock is ticking. The reprieve is not a big one, but it gives us a chance to make this process work without the pressure that we may have felt over the preceding few days.

I have got to believe that, as the Minister says, with determination and courage, we shall reach agreement. Surely, now that we have come so far, we can get the last little bit sorted out. There are some hard times now, especially for those who have yet to show some good will with regard to decommissioning, but just think of the good times to follow. I, for one, am hoping for a happy Easter.

10.35 pm

Mr. Kevin McNamara (Hull, North): Like the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Mr. Öpik), I am looking forward to a happy Easter. I hope that it will materialise.

I welcome the order and the implementation bodies. They are very important for their symbolic and practical effects on the communities in Ireland, and especially for the nationalist community in the north of Ireland, which will no longer feel cut off from the rest of the island of Ireland.

The implementation bodies are very practical, and yet one wonders why other implementation bodies were not involved. Of course, one does not always know what is included under an umbrella such as food safety. There is BSE in both parts of the island; would that have been covered by it? Does trade and business include all-Ireland tourism and the possibility of a Northern Irish tourist board?

On the issue of food and food safety, remarkably, although we are happy to talk later about aquaculture, we are not prepared to talk about an implementation body for agriculture—and yet it would seem that farmers in both parts of Ireland have far more in common with one another than they have, for example, with the far richer

farmers of England, with its large farms and large estates. Although some of the hill farmers may have some fellow feeling with many of the smaller farmers in Ireland, there is a real problem.

Rural depopulation is also a real problem in both parts of Ireland. It is difficult for small farms to maintain families when other smaller rural industries have not been built up to an extent that would enable farmers to work part-time on their farms and to supplement that income with sufficient income from other sources. There are limits to what one can do with bed-and-breakfast and other, perhaps somewhat more imaginative, schemes, but that is not reflected in the agreement.

The right hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) said that from these small beginnings, other things might develop, and perhaps some of these issues will develop in that way. I hope that they will, because on many of these economic issues, the two parts of Ireland have more in common with each other than they have with this island. They could benefit from further European Union programmes, as they are benefiting at present on both sides of the border.

Much has been made of the extent of progress so far. Like everyone else, I should like to see the Executive in operation, and I should like to see the Assembly meeting and debating, but there are problems on both sides. The right hon. Member for Upper Bann has a problem in how far his party is prepared to go in accepting Sinn Fein into an Assembly. Sinn Fein, equally, has a difficulty in the problems and the questions that it is being posed by Unionists in the Assembly about how far it can go. I believe that neither side really understands the other's problems. Certainly, the right hon. Member for Upper Bann has a fixed position, from which he would find it difficult to move. I understand that.

Equally, the representatives of Sinn Fein have their difficulties. They claim that they cannot move on decommissioning because they do not control the decision making. That is something that some people doubt, but I think that we must take some of those statements at face value and in good faith. However, it is patently obvious that they are concerned that if three bullets, or whatever, are given up under decommissioning, that will be seen as an act of surrender.

It might be argued that that is not the case, and that it is a gesture, a magnanimous step forward or a sign. However, sadly, that is not how the representatives of Sinn Fein see it. Further, they are concerned that if a concession is made, it will mean that there will be not a trickle, as has been happening, but a flood of volunteers moving from supporting the Provisional IRA to bodies such as Continuity IRA and the Real IRA, which are outside the process and do not accept the agreement. It is a very difficult situation for the Official Unionists and for Sinn Fein, and we must understand that on both sides of the argument.

We all hope that movement can be made by both sides. Perhaps the meeting in Washington after the St. Patrick's day celebrations will result in a damascene conversion by both the right hon. Member for Upper Bann and the Member for Belfast, West (Mr. Adams). We do not know. However, we know that if people continue pushing, asking one side or the other to do something that is not within its power to deliver and accusing it of being in bad faith because of that, we shall be in a difficult and dangerous position.

I hope that at the meeting on 29 March, we get progress, and that the parties on either side will, to use current parlance, go to the wire, or go to the precipice and then draw back. I hope also that no one involved will seek to push either side over the precipice. That would be a recipe for disaster for all the people of Northern Ireland, for the island of Ireland and for all these islands.

10.43 pm

Mr. William Thompson (West Tyrone): There have been many political developments in Northern Ireland over the past year. There is no doubt that the agreement that was reached caused much division within Northern Ireland, and particularly within the party of which I am a member.

I have always taken the position that I oppose the agreement and that when the agreement is being implemented, I must, out of conscience, reject that implementation. Therefore, I must disagree with the implementation bodies that it is proposed to set up under the agreement.

I believe, of course, that the terrorists should be so defeated that they will be unable to carry out any more of their acts. That, ultimately, is the only way to defeat terrorism, whether it comes from republicanism or from the Unionist side of the divide.

I believe that the agreement is a device to try to persuade paramilitaries that they will get something of what they want. It is thought that if they get some of what they want, perhaps they will desist from their paramilitary activities. I believe that, rather than making them desist from paramilitary activity, the agreement is more likely to encourage them to keep at it. Therefore I have not supported the agreement, nor will I.

I feel that by setting up the cross-border bodies, the agreement gives us, to a great extent, joint sovereignty in Northern Ireland. At least three of the six implementation bodies will have considerable power. The food safety implementation body will have a long list of powers. If that body gets off the ground, will a food safety agency for Northern Ireland be needed, or will the food safety implementation body take over that function? Perhaps the Minister will tell us.

The powers of the trade and business development body seem to be extensive, as do those of the special EU programmes body. I note that the bodies seem to have different types of government. There are to be three boards—one for trade and business, one for language and one for marine matters. However, the food safety board will only be advisory.

The other two implementation bodies—inland waterways and special EU programmes—will be run by chief executives, similar to the way in which agencies are currently run. As far as I can see, we have little control over agencies, and we do not have much control over boards. What we are setting up are six more quangos. It will be difficult for the Assembly to control their activities.

As we have heard tonight, the implementation bodies are likely to grow and acquire more powers, and we are likely to have more implementation bodies. Indeed, the agreement that was signed referred to 12 implementation bodies. Only three are included among the initial six, so we can be sure that those who wish to detach Northern

[Mr. William Thompson]

Ireland from the United Kingdom will be pressing hard to get as many more implementation bodies as they can. Slowly but surely, Northern Ireland will start to be eased out of the United Kingdom.

I cannot say much more that is useful about these matters. I have taken my stand and I must maintain it. I know that some people are disappointed that nothing dramatic will happen on 10 March. I never thought that anything dramatic would happen on that date. I shall be surprised if there is any progress on an Executive on 29 March. Those who believe that an Executive will be set up in Northern Ireland who will work and provide good government in Northern Ireland are living in a dream. I do not believe that it will happen.

Mr. Gerald Bermingham (St. Helens, South): If the hon. Gentleman's stand is set in stone, what can anybody ever do to shift the stone? Unless people begin to give and take, there can never be a solution.

Mr. Thompson: Unionists are not against co-operation with the Republic of Ireland. One thing that I dislike about the implementation bodies is that they are always mentioned in respect of north and south. I do not believe in north and south; I believe in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. There is no reason why we cannot have good co-operation between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, but we do not need implementation bodies such as these.

We are to have those implementation bodies only because we are trying to buy off the terrorists and make them believe that they are going down the way to achieving what they are aiming at—a united Ireland. I do not see why I should encourage them in the process in which they think they are involved.

10.51 pm

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Inverclyde): Although his case is not one that any of us accept, the hon. Member for West Tyrone (Mr. Thompson) argues it honestly. He is exceedingly pessimistic about what he considers to be the likely failure of Assembly representatives to control quangos. Amidst all that gloom, he ought to express a bit of optimism about the calibre of the representatives and what I reckon to be their determination to control quangos. That is how I see the Scottish Parliament and people who will be elected to it.

Although there are pronounced differences, there are numerous similarities between Scotland and Northern Ireland, and we in Scotland see the quangos coming under more critical examination from the Members of the Holyrood Parliament. I would hope that the same will eventually be the case for the Assembly in Belfast. The hon. Member for West Tyrone is too pessimistic in that regard. He can be gloomy at times in his prognostications, but let us have a wee bit of optimism as well—the kind of optimism that we are showing vis-à-vis the Scottish Parliament.

I was struck by a couple of comments that were made by the right hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble)—

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): My hon. Friend described the speech of the hon. Member for West Tyrone as honest. No doubt it was, but was not it also highly dangerous? The alternative to the agreement is almost certainly what we saw last night on BBC 2: tit-for-tat atrocities—one committed by the IRA followed by another committed by some loyalist murder gang. Those who oppose the agreement live in Northern Ireland and represent Northern Ireland constituencies, so they know better than we do that we will go back to the terror and counter-terror of 25 years if the agreement is destroyed on the ground.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Before the hon. Member for Greenock and Inverclyde (Dr. Godman) responds to that intervention, I should say that we must return to a discussion of the order before the House.

Dr. Godman: I am grateful for your admonition, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I agree with much of what my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North (Mr Winnick) said in his brief intervention. Might I say that I was struck by the fact that everyone who has spoken in the debate has referred to how the decommissioning impasse affects all those other developments? I compliment my right hon. Friend the Minister and his ministerial colleagues on the work that they have done to move us this far.

I was also struck by the toughly worded editorial on decommissioning in today's edition of *The Irish Times*, which says that

"from the beginning the IRA has not moved a millimetre. In contrast, the Ulster Unionists have time and again indicated their willingness to seek compromise. At Oslo, Mr Trimble made it clear he was not seeking a surrender of weapons to the RUC or the British army. Mr Ken Maginnis spoke a fortnight ago of giving the IRA 'wriggle room'."

It would be interesting to hear a definition of "wriggle room".

The editorial continues:

"This weekend again, Mr Trimble has declared that if the IRA sends 'a signal' to General John de Chastelain and if the general conveys that to him, then the process will go forward."

Like everyone else, I sincerely hope that such a signal will be given.

Let me ask a couple of practical questions, which are prompted to some extent by what the right hon. Member for Upper Bann had to say. Paragraph 2.1(b) of part 4 of annexe 1 states that

"the views of Northern Ireland Ministers"

will be

"represented to the British Government to contribute to the UK's negotiating strategy"

on topics relating to structural funds. I have made my views clear to Foreign Office Ministers—in a very public way; I have not been leaking. I have said that, in the negotiations concerning enlargement, it is necessary to ensure that the peace initiative is maintained, whatever happens to the structural and cohesion funds. I have made that known to my right hon. Friend the Member for Gateshead, East and Washington, West (Ms Quin), the Minister responsible for European affairs, in two public formal evidence sessions of the Foreign Affairs Committee. I have also said that the international Ireland fund must be retained.

I think I am right in saying that the north of Ireland and the Irish Republic are divided 80:20 on the peace initiative. That initiative must continue. The way in which

objective 1 status is defined means that Northern Ireland falls outwith the criteria. I think that there is a specific criterion of 76 per cent. of gross national product per capita, but given the exceptional circumstances of Northern Ireland it is very important for the campaign to be conducted by our Ministers. I believe that there is a role for those on the body that we are discussing in relation to the negotiations that will continue in Brussels over the next two or three years.

The word "concordat" arises in this context. Ministerial colleagues of the First Minister will need to play a decisive role in the negotiations. It is possible that they will be unable to negotiate on the peace initiative, the international Ireland fund and objective 1 funds; but those Ministers—those represented on this implementation body—will have an important part to play in UK-wide negotiations with other member states of the union on the retention of those important funds. None of us must lose sight of the importance of the European Commission's structural fund plans to Northern Ireland.

I said that I would be brief, but let me say a little about marine matters. I was struck by what the right hon. Member for Upper Bann said about the Irish lights. He is right: historically, there has been a remarkably good relationship between our system and the system pertaining in the Irish Republic. I had hoped that a recent order for a ship for the Irish republican lights would be won by a shipyard on the lower Clyde, but it was not to be. I believe that another ship is on order, which I hope will come our way—but I must stop such parochial pleadings.

An important development is taking place in respect of the development of such a body. The document that we have been given says that both United Kingdom and Irish legislation will be required in order for a body to become the general lighthouse authority for the island of Ireland.

The hon. Member for West Tyrone (Mr. Thompson) would perhaps say that that was another quango, but let me assure him that the lights as they operate in mainland Britain, in Northern Ireland and in the Irish Republic perform a useful service highly efficiently. I would expect that efficiency to be maintained, as is mentioned in the document, under the new general lighthouse authority. I look forward to the legislation being introduced in the House. As someone who represents a maritime community and who has a concern for Northern Ireland, I would want actively to engage in the matter.

I asked a question relating to the British-Irish Council. One or two of my colleagues thought that I was being facetious when I said that Glasgow would be an excellent locus for the secretariat of such a body. I say again that the Nordic Council has a fixed locus, with a secretariat of about 70.

It is all right the Minister saying that Stranraer and the Isle of Man are campaigning. I put my cards on the table. If there is to be a fixed location for the British-Irish Council, with respect to the hon. Members for West Tyrone and for East Londonderry (Mr. Ross), it cannot be in Belfast. It cannot be in Dublin or London. Glasgow is an excellent choice. My hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Maryhill (Mrs. Fyfe) will no doubt agree with me without intervening in my short speech. Liverpool has a case, but it has to be Glasgow, as the Lord Provost has suggested recently. The Minister needs to take that special pleading on board, as do all.

The document refers to rivers and their tributaries. The development of aquaculture could be an important subject—the right hon. Member for Upper Bann suggested it—for the British-Irish Council. We have much to learn from each other in relation to fish farming. Serious mistakes have been made in Scandinavia and in Scotland. I hope that, if the aquaculture industry is to develop in Northern Ireland, the people involved can avoid some of the mistakes that we have made in Scotland. Where those marine matters are influenced by a reformed common fisheries policy, we have again to think in terms of a concordat relating to maritime matters being developed between Ministers of the Assembly and Ministers in Whitehall.

11.4 pm

Mr. William Ross (East Londonderry): The hon. Member for Greenock and Inverclyde (Dr. Godman) said at the outset that there was quite a lot in common between Northern Ireland and Scotland. That is true in many ways. A great deal more in common will rear its head over the next few years as the Scottish National party increases its strength. He will find out then what nationalism in the Northern Ireland context and the Scottish context really means in political terms. His education is not complete, but it will be.

Like everyone else, I have received the documentation fairly late in the day. I have had an opportunity to glance through it. I must confess that I am not yet clear as to how the bodies are formed, how many persons will be on the bodies and how they are to be chosen. Undoubtedly, the Minister will clear up those matters for me in his reply.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) was clear that the quasi-autonomous national Government organisations that will be created will be under Assembly control. That will depend on whether the Assembly is controllable enough to agree on what should be done with the quangos; I am not so sure that it will be. There is a slight chance of friction on the matter. Ultimately, it will all depend on whether the IRA will co-operate in surrendering its weapons. I see precious little sign of that.

The particulars of the agreement, on page 10 of the documentation, state that

> "an Assembly in Northern Ireland, a North/South Ministerial Council, implementation bodies, a British-Irish Council, and a British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference and any amendments to British Acts of Parliament and the Constitution of Ireland . . . are interlocking and interdependent and that in particular the functions of the Assembly and the North/South Council are so closely inter-related that the success of each depends on that of the other".

My right hon. Friend the Member for Upper Bann said that, if the Assembly fell—or if it never comes into operation, for whatever reasons—the cross-border bodies would cease to exist or never come into existence. Interestingly, when the subject was discussed during passage of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, the Minister was rather coy about it. I hope that he will not be quite so reticent about it today, and will confirm that my right hon. Friend's comments on it were absolutely accurate. Many people in Northern Ireland are fed up with fooling around at the edges of the issue and should like to have a very clear statement on it from Ministers.

[Mr. William Ross]

I should like to deal with the matter of inland waterways—the four functions of the

"management, maintenance, development and restoration of the inland navigable waterway system"—

which are mainly, but not only, canals, and chiefly for the tourist trade, either internal or external.

The order mentions the Shannon-Erne, the Ulster canal, the wider Shannon-Erne system and the other waterways—such as the Royal canal, the Grand canal, and the Barrow and Lagan systems. Interestingly, it includes also navigation on the lower Bann. The lower Bann is a long, long way from the border. Although it is a major waterway and has considerable potential for the tourist trade, I cannot understand of what interest it might be in the implementation of any cross-border body. If the Republic wished to be difficult about the matter, it could starve the river of any sums that need to be spent on it, to the benefit of its own areas and the cross-border areas. As the lower Bann runs through a chunk of my constituency, I should not take very kindly to that happening.

When I looked up the order's references to repeals and transfers, I discovered that the new bodies will be taking on liabilities—such as the liability of compensation—powers of land entry and certain powers in fisheries. It is clear that the longer-term intention is to take control of all inland waters that could be used for navigation. In many ways, and for a number of reasons, I find that prospect disturbing, especially as there will be three regional divisions—northern, western and eastern. Perhaps we could be told exactly which areas each of the subdivisions will cover, and why it is necessary to have the subdivisions.

The inland waterways body will have all the powers "necessary or incidental" to the exercise of its functions. The powers are not specified, but I think that they are probably stated in preceding legislation. I noted that the Water (Northern Ireland) Order 1999, which the House recently passed, is mentioned in the order. The new body would assume control of various aspects of that order—such as the power of the Department to carry out works, canal schemes, powers of maintenance, waterways, general powers of the Department, provisions of the drainage order, and all the rest of it. Those are wide powers. When they are applied to the Foyle area and Bann navigation, considerable sums of public money could be involved. Many people will not be happy with a quango controlling them. They are already quangoised to some extent, but the existing quangos at least have elected members and members of local councils.

The hon. Member for Greenock and Inverclyde referred to aquaculture and marine matters. That aspect of the order is interesting and involves the Foyle Fisheries Commission, which has a long history. I made a speech on it in the House some years ago. If hon. Members are interested in the body's roots, they should look up that speech. It is a cross-border body that was set up to protect the game fishing, mainly salmon fishing, in the Foyle, which is a valuable commercial and angling fishery.

The order says that the powers are to be extended to Carlingford lough. I do not know of any salmon rivers or game fish rivers of any description flowing into Carlingford lough. I do not know the area well, but I do not remember many of my game fishing friends taking expeditions to that area. I do not see the point of that. It must have something to do with navigation and lights. Some navigation aids in Lough Foyle have always been under the control of the Londonderry harbour authority.

Lough Foyle is not a suitable place for the development of aquaculture and salmon farming because it is shallow. It is a valuable wild salmon fishery and it would be crazy to do anything to damage it. We know what has happened to sea trout in the west of Scotland and down the west coast of Ireland and the problems of salmon farming in Norway. There have also been recent infestations in salmon farms in Scotland. We do not want any of that; we have seen quite enough of it. I apologise to the Scots, but I should prefer it if they kept it at home.

Dr. Godman: That is my point. Any body with responsibility for such shallow water should refuse all licence applications for any kind of fish farming.

Mr. Ross: We do not need the cross-border body to do that. The Foyle Fisheries Commission is perfectly capable and has dealt with that.

The Foyle has quite a large shell fishery; we also have the largest eel fishery in Europe. All those matters, formerly internal to Northern Ireland, will now be cross-border matters. The new body is to have 12 members. An earlier draft said that there were to be three from the Republic and the Carlingford area and three from Northern Ireland, with the same proportions in the Foyle fisheries organisation. The Foyle is currently run by civil servants from Belfast and civil servants from the Republic. At least that was 50:50. Now the Unionist population will be in a minority of four against eight. Some people may say that that is a good deal, but I say forget it. It is a dangerous situation.

Those who are anxious about the powers over discharge can look them up in this year's Northern Ireland water order. We are handing over to the new body all powers over discharges into the river system in one of the most valuable salmon fisheries in Northern Ireland—indeed, one of the most valuable in these islands. The new quango will not be able to do a better job than has been done in the past. The Foyle Fisheries Commission is not one of my favourite bodies, but it has improved recently because it has some money. I fear that the proposals are a retrograde step and I do not welcome them. It is foolish of the Government to pursue them.

I could say a great deal more about food safety. My hon. Friend the Member for West Tyrone (Mr. Thompson) has mentioned some of the issues. There are issues relating to trade and business and how a language body will be nothing but an attempt to increase the use of Irish Gaelic. That has not worked in the Republic since 1920.

Mr. Trimble *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Ross: My right hon. Friend may shake his head, but most of the money will go to the not very many people who wish to learn the language. Minority languages are a residue of the past—they are dying and being superseded by modern languages. The languages of the future are the languages of technology—English, German and Japanese. Minor languages can be sent off to the academics,

universities and historians, who may want to look at ancient history. As far as useful everyday trade is concerned, forget it—no one really cares.

We are running out of time, and I want the Minister to have time to reply—although I could say a great deal more on a matter which I do not like any more now than I did 12 months ago.

11.15 pm

Mr. Paul Murphy: With the leave of the House, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I shall reply; there is much in the debate to reply to. First, I thank the right hon. Member for Bracknell (Mr. MacKay) for his support today, and for accepting my apologies for the way in which we have had to rush the documentation.

The right hon. Gentleman referred—as did the right hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble)—to the interdependency of the bodies in terms of the agreement. Both were right—it was clear in the talks, and in the agreement itself, that the agreement is a package. The success of the agreement depends on the success of all the different parts of the package. It will work only if all the institutions and parts of the agreement work as well. That is why paragraph 5 of the declaration of support and the preamble to the treaty have embedded the principle in the treaty and the accompanying order.

As all of us have said throughout the process, the Government are not planning for failure—that is not an option. We have said that if there is no Assembly, there will be no North-South Ministerial Council. Each depends upon the other.

It is clear that the implementation bodies could not continue to function as envisaged in the agreement. Arrangements for the Executive functions that they carried out would have to be reviewed. For example, the Foyle Fisheries Commission has been operated as a cross-border body for many years, and doubtless will continue so to do.

Mr. Thompson: The Minister qualified what he said about the implementation bodies when he said that they could not continue in that form. Does that mean that the Government could continue them in a different form?

Mr. Murphy: I said—pretty clearly, I thought—that where there are examples of cross-border co-operation that have operated for many years and will do so in the months ahead, the Government will look at sensible arrangements by which that co-operation would continue. The North-South Ministerial Council, to which the bodies are accountable, would disappear if there were no Assembly. Similarly, the bodies envisaged in the agreement would disappear.

The right hon. Members for Bracknell and for Upper Bann referred to the importance of progress on decommissioning. With the exception of decommissioning—the Police Commission and the Criminal Justice Commission are due to report—progress has been made. The Assembly has been set up, with 108 Members elected to it; the north-south bodies dealt with today have been agreed; the British-Irish Council has come into effect; the civic forum has been established; constitutional change has been agreed in the Republic of Ireland; the Human Rights Commission has been set up; and we are advertising for the appointments to the Equality Commission. In addition, 240 prisoners have, under the agreement, been let out of the Maze prison. A great deal of the agreement has been established.

The right hon. Member for Upper Bann said that the order marked a significant step forward, and he was right. He also emphasised, rightly, the interdependency of the different parts of the agreement, and the important issue of confidence between political parties and communities in Northern Ireland. We must enter negotiations on the basis of confidence as the remainder of the month progresses. The right hon. Gentleman was right to say that the arrangement is unique in Europe and possibly the world, but it was very important for the agreement.

The hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Mr. Öpik) referred to funding arrangements and to the 1985 agreement. That will cease to have effect on the entry into force of the British-Irish agreement on devolution day. He asked whether other languages would be dealt with, in addition to Irish and Ulster Scots. That is clearly a matter for the North-South Ministerial Council. I cannot guarantee that there will be an Estonian language body, but I am sure that his various points will be taken into account. He also referred to the importance of decommissioning, which will clearly be a priority for the parties over the next couple of weeks.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) welcomed the order because of the symbolic effect on the nationalist community, and he is absolutely right about that, but the order is significant because of the effect of the bodies on the whole of Northern Ireland, whether nationalist or Unionist. The bodies will improve the quality of life of women and men throughout the island of Ireland.

Tourism in Northern Ireland is dealt with uniquely by a publicly owned limited company. There is provision for co-operation between Northern Ireland and the Republic on the common agricultural policy, animal and plant health policy research and rural development. As the months and years go by, it will be a matter for the North-South Ministerial Council whether it wants to extend the roles of implementation bodies in those areas; at present it does not.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hull, North rightly referred to the difficulties that people in Northern Ireland experience in their own communities. Those difficulties are not confined to one side or the other. There is no doubt that political parties and leaders—not least, the right hon. Member for Upper Bann—have to understand what matters to their own supporters and ensure that they can take people with them. That applies to both sides of the equation.

The hon. Member for West Tyrone (Mr. Thompson) said that there was a division in Northern Ireland concerning the agreement. There is indeed: 72 per cent. said yes and 28 per cent. said no. That is the division in Northern Ireland. I do not agree with his view on the Good Friday agreement. People voted for implementation bodies, which by no means constitute joint sovereignty.

There is nothing wrong with having different types of boards, as long as they are properly accountable. Control over the boards is far better if they are accountable to an elected body of 108 people from Northern Ireland,

[Mr. Murphy]

representing other people in Northern Ireland, than if they are accountable to me, a south Wales Member of Parliament.

The agreement was based on the principle of consent. Talk about the bodies growing into a united Ireland, and all the rest of it, does not square with the concept of consent. The fears are unjustified. It is up to the people of Northern Ireland to decide on their constitutional future, and that is the clear basis of the agreement.

My hon. Friend the Member for Greenock and Inverclyde (Dr. Godman) brought his Scottish experience to bear. He talked about how quangos in Scotland will be more accountable to the Scottish Parliament than they are to the Scottish Office today. That applies to Northern Ireland as well.

My hon. Friend talked about the editorial in *The Irish Times* and rightly said that no one is talking about surrender when decommissioning is discussed. No one wants surrender of anything. We are talking about fulfilling the terms of the agreement. The independent commission on decommissioning under General John de Chastelain will play a hugely significant role.

My hon. Friend also referred to the work of the European Union body that has been set up. It will work alongside UK Ministers, and Irish Ministers when appropriate. He referred to the significance of the First Minister, the Deputy First Minister and the Administration in Northern Ireland in months to come, in the negotiations for European funding. I can tell him and the House that the First Minister, the Deputy First Minister and myself visited Brussels and Bonn recently, where we presented the case for Northern Ireland. That case will continue to be presented by the right hon. Member for Upper Bann, the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon) and myself on every possible occasion. After devolution, Ministers will be appointed within the Northern Ireland Administration who will have responsibility for that. Those of us in the British Government will work alongside those Ministers to ensure that the best deal is obtained for Northern Ireland.

The hon. Member for East Londonderry (Mr. Ross) obviously does not like the order very much. The details of the new bodies are available for him to examine. He referred to interdependency and we all agree with him on that, but I cannot agree with his view on the Celtic languages. I would like him to visit my constituency in south Wales, which is very much an English-language constituency but where Welsh is now being taught to every pupil, whether or not they have Welsh-speaking parents. There is nothing wrong with the great diversity and richness of different languages and cultures, whether in Northern Ireland, Wales, the Republic of Ireland or elsewhere. Indeed, there is a growing demand. I was in the Isle of Man recently, where Manx is being taught to the children, even though it has ceased to be used as a language for some time. That enriches our culture and our lives.

There is overwhelming support in the House for the order. It sets up strand 2 of the agreement and brings into effect the north-south arrangements that are an integral part of the Good Friday agreement. Those arrangements, and the other matters that I have mentioned, will ensure—I sincerely hope and pray—that between now and Easter the people in Northern Ireland, through their political leaders, will find the solution and enable devolution to go ahead. I commend the order to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That the North/South Co-operation (Implementation Bodies) (Northern Ireland) Order 1999, which was laid before this House on 8th March, be approved.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

NORTHERN IRELAND

That the draft Northern Ireland (Modifications of Enactments—No. 1) Order 1999, which was laid before this House on 22nd February, be approved.—*[Mr. Jamieson.]*

Question agreed to.

PROTECTION OF CHILDREN BILL [*MONEY*]

Queen's recommendation having been signified—

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Protection of Children Bill, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of—

(a) any expenditure incurred by the Secretary of State under or by virtue of the Act; and

(b) any increase attributable to the Act in the sums payable out of money so provided under any other Act.—*[Mr. Jamieson.]*

11.27 pm

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): I would have thought that on an occasion such as this the Minister might have sought to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because this is the opportunity for the House to consider the financial implications of a private Member's Bill that has received its Second Reading. As I recall, none of the financial implications of the Bill was examined on Second Reading, and that makes this money resolution debate that much more important and germane as it gives the House the opportunity to examine in more detail the financial implications of the Bill.

I have glanced through the Bill and identified four areas of potential additional expenditure that it may require. I shall examine each in turn so that the Minister has an opportunity to let the House know what the financial implications are so that it can take a view. The first area is, self-evidently, costs arising in the Department of Health. That issue arises immediately from clause 1, which states:

"The Secretary of State shall keep a list of individuals who are considered unsuitable to work with children."

I presume that there will be a cost implication within the Department of Health in the maintenance of such a list. That is especially true as one examines the provisions of clause 2, which lays a number of responsibilities on the Secretary of State, including determining the references, provisionally including individuals on the list, inviting observations and confirming an individual's inclusion on the list. All of those activities imply a process within the Department of building up and maintaining the list and

suggest that an underpinning of bureaucracy and officials will be required to fulfil all the different functions outlined. It would be useful to hear from the Minister about the extent to which his Department will require additional officials to carry out the responsibilities laid on it by clause 2.

I shall come later to the tribunal, which I suspect will add the biggest single extra cost. First, the next additional element of cost arises from clause 5, which refers to the additional grounds for prohibiting or restricting employment with regard to the Department for Education and Employment. I had some passing experience of these matters when I was responsible for List 99 at the Department for some years.

I believe that clause 5(2)(c), which refers to

"the grounds that the persons concerned are not fit and proper persons to be employed as teachers or in such work as is mentioned",

considerably widens the scope that has traditionally been available through List 99—always a relatively narrowly focused mechanism that was rightly concerned with ensuring that people who had committed some offence would, after due consideration by the Department, be put on the list and barred from teaching.

I suspect that clause 5 gives rise to the possibility that much wider consideration will be needed, and that implies considerable additional effort by the Department and its officials. What extra cost does the Minister believe will fall on the Department for Education and Employment over and above the cost of the existing List 99?

The next heading that I have identified as involving almost certain additional expenditure falls within clause 8, which is titled:

"Searches of both lists under Part V of Police Act 1997".

The clause describes additional new requirements, which implies additional costs for the police service. Those costs should be laid before us so that we may consider them.

I have identified three distinct areas of additional cost in the Department of Health, the Department for Education and Employment and the police.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. John Hutton): Has the right hon. Gentleman read the regulatory impact assessment that accompanied the Bill, and which dealt with all those issues?

Mr. Forth: I am grateful to the Minister for being helpful so far into the debate. He might or might not accept a bit of friendly advice from me—if he had done the House the courtesy of rising to move his money resolution and explaining what lay behind it, he might have truncated the proceedings. If he wants to do it back to front, that is entirely up to him. Whether or not I have read any document is neither here nor there. *[Interruption.]* This is a debate, and it is the occasion on which the House of Commons has an opportunity to consider these matters.

Mr. Keith Bradley (Treasurer of Her Majesty's Household): Idiot.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord): Order. The House must listen to the right hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Forth: If the hon. Member for Manchester, Withington (Mr. Bradley) is moved to shout "idiot", he will not help his colleagues, who are anxious to get home. Each time he says "idiot", he will add a considerable number of minutes to my speech. I invite him to think a little more carefully before he does that again because he will earn no brownie points from his hon. Friends.

I shall now address briefly—albeit not quite as briefly as I had originally intended—the main item in the Bill that is likely to cause extra expenditure. The provisions for the tribunal must surely require considerable extra expenditure, not only because of the requirements set out in the clause, but because of those that are usefully set out in some detail in the schedule to the Bill. It would be helpful if the Minister were to explain in some detail the possible elements of expenditure.

Not only does the schedule contain the usual provisions that one expects in setting up a tribunal—provisions relating to the president, the panels of persons, the process of appointment and so on—but there are provisions relating to meetings and training, which one might have thought would require a considerable amount of on-going bureaucratic commitment, to say nothing of provisions relating to staff and accommodation required by the tribunal and also to remuneration and expenses. The schedule helpfully spells out that:

"The Secretary of State may pay to the President, and to any other person in respect of his service as a member of the Tribunal, such remuneration and allowances as the Secretary of State may, with the consent of the Treasury, determine."

I accept that that is clearly a provisional arrangement, but even at this stage the Government should be able to give us some idea of the scale of remuneration and expenses for the tribunal that they have in mind. I doubt whether even the Government would want to embark on such a project without any idea of the costs it entails.

Mr. Andrew Lansley (South Cambridgeshire): Ministers believe that the costs of an appeal tribunal can be met within current provision for Departments—the regulatory impact assessment mentions a figure of £500,000 shared between the Department of Health and the Department for Education and Employment. However, my right hon. Friend shares my perception that the fact that costs can be met within current provision does not mean that they should not be subject to scrutiny and explicitly approved by the House.

Mr. Forth: Like my hon. Friend, I always thought that that was the point of a money resolution. It appears to have escaped Labour Members, but my hon. Friend and I share the view that a money resolution debate is a vital part of the mechanism for the proper scrutiny and consideration of a Bill—especially given that it is a private Member's Bill and none of the matters currently being considered were touched on during Second Reading. The fact that figures may or may not exist in a document is no excuse for them not to be properly considered on the Floor of the House and put on the record. That is why the Minister's contribution should be helpful.

On the matter of attendance allowances, the schedule to the Bill states:

"The Secretary of State may pay such allowances for the purpose of or in connection with the attendance of persons at the Tribunal".

That could become a substantial item of expenditure, depending on the view taken by the Government of the volume of business that the Tribunal might attract and the

[Mr. Forth]

number of persons who might attend the tribunal and be paid attendance allowances. Past experience of tribunals supports the assertion that such allowances will become a substantial sum.

The money resolution almost certainly contains a wide range of potential additional expenditure: departmental expenditure in two Departments of State; probable expenditure on the part of the police service; and, not least, expenditure resulting from the activities of the tribunal. The House will want to hear the Minister's remarks on all of those items before it is fully satisfied that the expenditure is properly undertaken in connection with the purposes of the Bill. The House will then want to consider whether or not to approve the money resolution, having only recently given the Bill a Second Reading.

11.40 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. John Hutton): I must correct the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) on one point. He expressed concern that I had not moved the money resolution. It is normal for money resolutions to be moved by Ministers, but I should point out that Government Whips are Ministers.

Much of our time tonight could have been spared if the right hon. Gentleman had read the regulatory impact assessment. It is quite clear from his contribution that, unfortunately, he has not had the opportunity to read the assessment, in which we set out in some detail most of the issues that he raised in the House this evening. He will certainly be aware of the purpose of the Bill and what it seeks to do because he took part in the Second Reading debate only last week. We welcomed his contribution then, as we do tonight.

I shall try to respond to some of the right hon. Gentleman's concerns about the money resolution. The Bill creates an obligation upon the Secretary of State to maintain a list of individuals deemed unsuitable to work with children and allows other organisations to refer names to the Department of Health list in certain circumstances. As the right hon. Gentleman knows, there is presently no statutory requirement on child care organisations to refer to the list or to check names against the present Department of Health consultancy index. The Bill will change that arrangement. Once included on the list, the individual concerned will be prevented from obtaining employment in certain positions.

Additional costs associated with the establishment and operation of the appeals tribunal will fall on the Department of Health and the Department for Education and Employment. The tribunal will hear all appeals from people in the child care and health service fields against inclusion on the Department of Health list. It will deal also with appeals from List 99, which is a similar list operated by the Department for Education and Employment.

The right hon. Gentleman was correct in identifying that extra costs will fall on the Department of Health in operating a scheme which, due to the expansion that we envisage, will process an increasing number of checks. I assure the right hon. Gentleman and the House that those additional costs will be met by the Department from within existing budgets, and therefore are not affected by the terms of the money resolution.

However, costs will be incurred by the creation and administration of the tribunal system, to which the right hon. Gentleman referred. The estimated costs associated with the appeals tribunal, which we have identified, are set out fully in the regulatory impact assessment, and we estimate that they will be in the region of £500,000.

The purpose of the Bill is clear and simple: it introduces the mechanism of an appeals tribunal and widens accessibility and scope. Both of those aims have been broadly welcomed by all child care organisations and by the House, which gave the Bill an unopposed Second Reading. In simple terms, the money resolution that we are debating will authorise the necessary expenditure relating to the establishment of this new appeals tribunal, and I urge the House to accept it.

Question put and agreed to.

PETITIONS

Conscientious Objection

11.43 pm

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): I have the honour of presenting a petition in support of the right conscientiously to object to the military portion of taxes.

The petition states:

"To the Honourable the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled.

The Humble Petition of residents of the United Kingdom,

Sheweth that at present though Parliament recognises the right of individuals to conscientiously object to personally fighting in combat, there is no right at present for a citizen who, for religious or moral reasons, objects to having the monies they pay in taxes used for military purposes, to pay that money into a separate fund that would be used for the promotion of peace. We believe that at the beginning of a new millennium Britain should both recognise the right to conscientiously object to taxation for military purposes and take a pivotal role in order to promote peaceful conflict resolution worldwide.

Wherefore your Petitioners pray that your honourable House inquire through its committees into the establishment of a Non-Military Security Fund, to which the military portion of people's taxes could be diverted, if they so desired. The fund's central aim would be to fund non-violent conflict prevention, resolution and management.

And your petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray, &c.

This petition is presented on behalf of Mr. Jon Nott and supported by 612 other people from all parts of the country. I welcome and strongly support it. I ask the Government and the House to consider it because the greatest form of security in the world is gained not through military presence, but through the elimination of conflict and poverty and the causes of conflict.

To lie upon the Table.

11.45 pm

Mr. Neil Gerrard (Walthamstow): I wish to present a petition in identical terms to that presented by my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn). It is in the name of Mr. Rowson and 1,037 other people from my constituency and other parts of the country. There are people who hold strong moral and religious beliefs that stop them taking part in violent activity—that has been recognised in the right of conscientious objection

since 1916—but many of them believe also that they should not be forced by the taxation system directly to fund military action. They want to be able to use their taxes to fund peaceful settlement of international conflicts. I present the petition and offer my support for it.

To lie upon the Table.

11.46 pm

Mr. John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington): I wish to present a petition in exactly the same terms as the previous two petitions. It is on behalf of David Hillman and 473 other signatories. On the day when the Government announced that in future they will link aid to ensuring that disarmament occurs in the third world, the right of conscientious objection should be recognised in this country. Many of the signatories are therefore convinced that their taxation should not be spent on weapons of destruction.

To lie upon the Table.

Trawlermen (Compensation)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Kevin Hughes.]*

11.47 pm

Mr. Alan Johnson (Hull, West and Hessle): Almost 23 years ago, promises were made in this House to distant water trawlermen who were being made redundant by the Government's agreement with Iceland which ended the so-called cod wars by setting a 200-mile fishing limit around the Icelandic coast. On 28 June 1976, the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food said:

"We shall discuss with the unions and employers the feasibility of an arrangement for compensation for those fishermen directly affected by the settlement who, because they do not have regular contracts of employment, are denied the benefits they might otherwise have received under the redundancy payments Acts."

The Opposition Front-Bench spokesman said later in that debate:

"We are glad that the Minister acknowledges that, because of the nature of their occupation, fishermen will need some special and additional arrangements beyond what is contained in the redundancy payments Acts".

That gave the special scheme cross-party consensus. Later in the debate, the Minister said:

"On redundancy, I cannot be more specific: that will be a matter for the Department of Employment. It will have to identify the people affected, but it has been agreed in principle that a special scheme will be needed."

Later, in response to a young MP for Hull, East, called Mr. Prescott, the Minister said:

"The Government have decided, after discussions with the trade unions and with the employers, that there will be a special redundancy scheme which will be favourable to those fishermen who are not covered by previous legislation."—[*Official Report*, 28 June 1976; Vol. 914, c. 27-33.]

Promises were made and they were nothing less than the men concerned deserved. They were courageous; they went out in the most difficult conditions, and distant water fishing was the most dangerous of occupations. They worked in Arctic conditions beyond the north cape bank, and the mortality rate was 14 times that for coal mining.

During the second world war, trawlermen, like other fishermen, played a major part in the allied victory, at a high personal cost. Since the debate to which I have referred and, indeed, since the first debate that I secured in this House in 1997, we have learned the extent to which distant water trawlermen were used by the intelligence services during the cold war. Despite such service to their country and their perilous occupation, none of the promises made by the Minister were kept. The men were wrongly classified as casuals—casual war heroes, casual cold war heroes. Men who had spent their working lives at sea were dismissed as being unworthy of any help. They received no retraining, no resettlement, and not a penny of compensation.

Whole communities in Hull, Grimsby and Fleetwood—I am pleased that my hon. Friends the Members for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell), for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) and for Cleethorpes (Shona McIsaac) want to speak in this debate, and I have given them permission to do so—were made worthless by a Government decision. The Icelandic Government even offered the British Government quotas that were almost equal to that being caught—at that time, British fishermen

[Mr. Alan Johnson]

were catching about 130 million tonnes—which would have kept the industry going, but, as part of the agreement, the British Government refused.

Compensation was paid by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food to trawler owners to decommission their ships. More than £100 million was paid to trawler owners—not one penny of which went to the men. That is very important, because the criteria under which that money was paid was made absolutely clear in a letter on 12 March 1996 from MAFF to another supporter of the campaign, the former Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath). MAFF said:

"Both Labour and Conservative Governments offered compensation to vessel owners to alleviate the position that the industry found itself in through the loss of these fishing grounds following the imposition of the 200 mile limit. The vessel owners, in particular, found themselves with considerable assets that could no longer be used. "

The trawlermen had considerable assets that could no longer be used, too: their skill, energy and courage.

The MAFF letter went on to say, very interestingly:

"No restrictions were placed on vessel owners as to the use of any grant monies received, nor was there any requirement to compensate crew members."

Millions of pounds were paid to trawler owners, but not a penny was paid in compensation to the trawlermen, despite the promises that were made.

The way in which distant water trawlermen have been treated is nothing short of a national disgrace. Left to fight alone, they formed the British Fishermen's Association, and pursued a series of cases through the courts in the 1980s. Eventually, in 1983, the men won a case in the High Court. The victory established that they were employed staff and never casuals. Even then, the Government's response was entirely inadequate. The special scheme still did not materialise. Instead, the Government argued that their only obligation was to provide the minimal terms of the redundancy Act to those trawlermen who would been "expressly discouraged" from pursuing industrial tribunal cases because they were told that they did not qualify for payment. That had two disastrous consequences.

First, a two-year continuity rule was applied. That is in the national redundancy scheme, and might be okay in factories and many other industries, but it had nothing to do with the way in which the trawlermen worked. They worked in a scheme—it was run by the Department of Employment—but it meant that they had to leave on whatever ship was in port at the time. They had continuity in the scheme, but the way in which their industry worked meant that they could not have continuity otherwise, especially for two years with any one employer. As a result, men who had served at sea for 30 years received a few hundreds pounds.

Secondly, the criteria set by the Government paid nothing to men whom the British Fishermen's Association had supported through the numerous cases that it took and lost during the 1980s. In the final perverse aspect of the Government's decision, they said that those men had not been misdirected because they had pursued industrial tribunal cases. Therefore, they received nothing—not one penny, even from the ex gratia scheme.

The result of the most recent general election provides the opportunity for the party of Government in 1976 belatedly to meet the commitments made at the time. On 5 November 1997, with colleagues and members of the BFA, I met the Minister of State, Department of Trade and Industry, my hon. Friend the Member for Makerfield (Mr. McCartney). A MAFF official was present at that meeting. We made it clear that we wanted a new scheme. The Minister said that he would raise the matter with colleagues at MAFF.

In the subsequent six or seven months we were heartened by the response. We felt that we were making progress. Indeed, we were given great encouragement by letters from the DTI. One, from May 1998, said:

"As we both recognise, what the BFA are seeking is actually a new scheme of more general compensation for the loss of employment in their industry"—

absolutely right, and similar to what the trawler owners received—

"rather than a reopening of the old ex-gratia payment arrangements which had a specific and limited purpose, and I am of course continuing to pursue this matter with Elliot Morley at MAFF."

MAFF replied:

"Ian McCartney and I have been reviewing this issue and will be meeting shortly to consider the position. We will then arrange a further meeting with you and other MPs concerned."

Even the Prime Minister, in response to a petition, signed by 15,000 people, presented by the BFA in June 1998, wrote to me and said:

"I understand that Ian McCartney has since been in discussion with Elliot Morley at MAFF and that they intend to invite you and the BFA to another meeting shortly to consider the matter further."

That was July 1998. Since then, there has been no activity at all; there has been silence from the Government Departments.

In summary, promises made by MAFF have not been kept. Millions of pounds have been paid to trawler owners as compensation for the loss of their fishing grounds, but not a penny of compensation has been paid to the trawlermen who lost their livelihoods. I believe that, under the previous Government, MAFF paid something like £30 million to Spanish fishermen for the loss of their licences in 1996, but nothing has been paid by MAFF to British trawlermen who lost their livelihoods.

Time is running out for those men. We ask the Minister to ensure that what appears to be a game of pass the parcel between Departments stops. We ask for the promised meeting to be arranged quickly and we ask that that claim be settled, so that distant water trawlermen have some belated justice and dignity after being so appallingly mistreated by successive Governments over the past 23 years.

11.57 pm

Mrs. Joan Humble (Blackpool, North and Fleetwood): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Hull, West and Hessle (Mr. Johnson) on securing this important debate and allowing me the opportunity to speak, albeit briefly. I also congratulate the British Fishermen's Association on fighting such a long campaign to secure compensation for its members.

I especially single out Peggy Whittacker, who chairs the Fleetwood branch of the BFA. I do so deliberately because today, on international women's day, it is

important to remember the role that women had, and still have, in fishing communities such as Fleetwood—wives and mothers, they were left behind for weeks at a time to raise children, look after the home, pay the bills and wait in the hope that their husbands would return safely from one of the most dangerous jobs in the world. We are talking about whole communities and about families, not just about the men who went out on the boats.

However, I would not like to underestimate how dangerous the job was. My hon. Friend the Member for Hull, West and Hessle outlined the dangers. When I speak to men in Fleetwood who fished the waters around Iceland, they tell me horrific stories of cold, ice, fierce seas and frostbite. Those men and their families deserve compensation for the loss of their jobs and livelihoods.

There is now a chance to rectify the broken promises of the past. While vessel owners received handsome compensation, the men received nothing—no training, no help, no compensation. For a large number of Fleetwood men, the original injustices of the 1970s were made worse by the failings of the previous Government's ex gratia scheme. Many of them were share fishermen. They were employees in every sense of the word. They paid tax and national insurance; they saw themselves as employees. But because of the rules imposed by the 1993 scheme, they found that they could not claim. Most of the men who were distant water trawlermen in Fleetwood could not claim and did not benefit, and even those who did received a paltry amount for the long, long years that they spent on the seas. To make things worse, these men are dying off. Even since September 1998, nine men who would qualify within the scheme supported by the BFA have died. How many more have to die before something is done about this matter?

Time is running out. The trawlermen and their families have been treated as third-class citizens for too long. They are looking to the Government to right the wrongs of the past. Just as I back workers at GCHQ, miners and other groups including trawler owners, I fully back the trawlermen in their cause. I look for a positive response from the Government. If there is a more deserving cause, I would like to know what it is. It is about time that we responded positively.

12.1 am

Shona McIsaac (Cleethorpes): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Hull, West and Hessle (Mr. Johnson) on securing the debate. I thank him for allowing me to contribute to it.

We cannot imagine while we are in the Chamber the hardship that the trawlermen endured at sea. We probably cannot imagine either the pain with which their bodies are racked these days as a result of many years fishing in distant waters. We promised them 20 years ago to compensate them for losing their jobs. We are here tonight to ensure that justice is done at last.

My father was off Iceland in 1976. He was not on the trawlers but serving on HMS Russell to protect the fishing fleet during the cod wars. Even with more than 20 years' service in the Royal Navy behind him, my father was appalled at the conditions in which the trawlermen worked. We have heard a little about that already tonight—for example, the 18-hour days, the temperatures that the men endured and the nature of the job, which made it far more dangerous than mining. In addition to the hardships that they were enduring at sea, there was hardship at home. Their home lives were largely dissipated by a working pattern that meant about three weeks at sea and then only three days at home.

All those years of working in such an environment is taking its toll. The ex-trawlermen who are still with us have ailments such as arthritis, bronchial conditions and heart disease. When people say that the price of fish has been high in human terms, they are certainly not kidding.

My father sailed home on HMS Russell to the security of a job, but the men of our distant water fleet sailed back to redundancy and a bleak future. They were promised compensation but it never came. We have heard that the trawler owners received a tidy packet in compensation but, as ever, the trawlermen, the workers, got nothing.

In August 1996, my right hon. Friend the now Deputy Prime Minister, visiting me in Cleethorpes, told my local newspaper, the *Grimsby Evening Telegraph*:

"It's been an absolute scandal. Owners were paid large sums of money to decommission fishing vessels, but none passed on to the trawlermen themselves."

My right hon. Friend added:

"I am an ex-seaman. When there were redundancies in other areas, the seamen were properly compensated. But fishing was not only the hardest of these professions, but has been the worst treated, too."

I shall refer to only a few of the many men in my constituency who worked in that hardest of professions, who lost their livelihoods and have now lost their health. They are still waiting, 20 years on. There is William Webb of Thornton crescent in Cleethorpes. He worked in Icelandic waters until the jobs dried up in 1978. He says:

"There was no chance of getting a job. There were so many men and so few jobs left."

Since then he has suffered several strokes. He can hardly walk. He has severe arthritis. Bob Sinclair of Berkeley road in Humberston worked for 30 years until the firms packed up after the cod wars. He has since had both hips replaced. He suffers from osteoarthritis in his spine, hips, knees and ankles.

Finally, Jimmy Gale of Healing says that he feels luckier than some. Two ships that he left temporarily to take Christmas breaks sank, killing many of his colleagues. He describes the job in these terms:

"It was the last legalised slavery in the country."

In a way, it was slavery, and like slaves, the trawlermen were given nothing. They have been cast aside and forgotten. Tonight we want to see justice done. Let us have no more talking. To coin a famous phrase, it is now time to do.

12.5 am

Mr. Austin Mitchell (Great Grimsby): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Hull, West and Hessle (Mr. Johnson) on the courage and perseverance with which he has pursued the matter. I assure him and my hon. Friend the Minister that the Members for the great former distant water fishing ports will not rest until compensation is provided on the lines proposed by the British Fishermen's Association for the trawlermen who lost their jobs when we packed up fishing in Icelandic waters in 1976.

As my hon. Friend said, the trawlermen were promised compensation, retraining, new jobs, and support for the industry. The promises were lavish; none of them was

[Mr. Austin Mitchell]

fulfilled. Instead, the men were dumped on the shore, and they did not even get the statutory redundancy money, because they were deemed to be casual workers and therefore entitled to nothing.

That view was proved wrong by Humphrey Forrest of the Humberside Law Centre in the Atkinson Dickenson *v.* Hellyers case, which showed that the trawlermen were not casual. As a result of that proof, they got minimal redundancy 16 years late, but they got no compensation for the loss of their jobs, their future and their industry. Had it been realised in 1976 when they lost their jobs that they were not in fact casual, they would have got compensation for their jobs at that time, as car workers, steel workers and miners did. The trawlermen would not have had to cash their pathetic pensions just to survive.

Distant water fishing was the only British industry that was run down without any compensation at all for those who worked in it. There was lavish compensation for the owners, running into millions. The owners hit the jackpot, but the fishermen did not even get the lemons to put on the soles, as a result of the death of that industry. It is a scandal for which we can now make only partial reparation, but we should make it by paying them compensation on the terms set out by the British Fishermen's Association. That will pay our debt to those who suffer still from the industrial diseases of fishing—dermatitis, white skin, weeping scabs, arthritis, injuries, loss of limbs and loss of fingers—which were deemed then in fishing to be acts of God, not grounds for compensation.

We can pay our debt to those who lost their pensions because they had to withdraw the money, as they had nothing else to exist on when they lost their jobs. If they did not work again, as many did not, they were not able to accumulate a SERPS pension to comfort them in old age, so they are now relegated to poverty in old age as a result.

By paying compensation, as we must, we can pay our debt to those who worked in Britain's most dangerous industry, where death and injury were their constant companions as they did Britain's business in great and distant waters.

I can tell my hon. Friend the Minister that in 20 years of fighting the case, I have heard all the excuses. They do not wash. The men were employed, not casual workers. As such, they had a right to compensation, which we should pay now and fulfil our moral responsibility to them a quarter of a century late. They were treated appallingly. We owe them decent treatment and justice. We must pay them what they are owed.

12.9 am

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Elliot Morley): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Hull, West and Hessle (Mr. Johnson) on securing tonight's debate, and on the way in which he and my hon. Friends the Members for Cleethorpes (Shona McIsaac), for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) and for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) have argued the case on behalf of the fishermen whom they represent in their constituencies.

The importance of the debate is reflected by the fact that my hon. Friends the Members for Greenock and Inverclyde (Dr. Godman), for Brigg and Goole (Mr. Cawsey), for Hull, North (Mr. McNamara), for Waveney (Mr. Blizzard), for Scarborough and Whitby (Mr. Quinn), for Tynemouth (Mr. Campbell) and for Birmingham, Northfield (Mr. Burden), and the hon. Member for St. Ives (Mr. George) are present. I am surprised that no Member of the official Opposition is present to listen to this important debate.

I and my colleagues in other Departments responsible for the fishing industry naturally have a great deal of sympathy with the situation of the fishermen who lost their jobs as a result of the loss of fishing opportunities when the United Kingdom was excluded from Icelandic fishing grounds 20 years ago. Indeed, I moved to Hull as a student in 1971, when the fishing fleet was at its peak.

We fully appreciate the extremely arduous conditions that the people concerned had to face in what was then, and still remains, one of the most difficult and demanding ways of earning a living. We are also conscious of the role of the industry in providing a much valued element of the nation's diet and the wider contribution that many seafarers have made to the defence of the nation's interests, which my hon. Friend the Member for Hull, West and Hessle rightly pointed out.

The role of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in the events following the loss of the Icelandic fishing grounds was in making payments to vessel owners as direct compensation for the loss of fishing opportunities. There is no surviving evidence that any enforceable conditions were attached to those payments. As has been said, owners were free to use that compensation as they chose.

A decommissioning scheme was operated between 1983 and 1986 under which a number of the vessel owners who were affected received payment for decommissioning or for converting their vessels to oil support vessels, but there were certainly no requirements at all on participating owners to make any part of their grant available to the former crews of those vessels. That could certainly be criticised, but it was part of the regulations at the time.

I should also correct my hon. Friend the Member for Hull, West and Hessle: there has been no payment of £30 million to Spanish trawlermen in respect of the loss of fishing opportunities. That matter is still being pursued through the courts and the Government have not conceded any liability at this time.

Considerable time has elapsed since those payments were made and there is no evidence that the legitimate initial recipients acted improperly in any way. However, it is clearly possible to continue to debate the question whether the policy was correct, particularly in the light of the knowledge that we now have about the subsequent evolution of the fishing industry, and the National Audit Office was critical of the later decommissioning scheme and the way that that money was used at that time.

In respect of compensating the crews of the vessels, it was always intended that those payments would be a matter for employment rather than fisheries policy. In his statement to the House on 28 June 1976, Fred Peart, the then Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food made it

quite clear that the question of redundancy payments to the people affected was not a matter for his Department. He said:

"On redundancy, I cannot be more specific: that will be a matter for the Department of Employment. It will have to identify the people affected, but it has been agreed in principle that a special scheme will be needed."—[*Official Report*, 28 June 1976; Vol. 914, c. 30.]

My hon. Friend the Member for Hull, West and Hessle has already pointed that out.

Those responsibilities, which formerly lay with the Department of Employment, rest with the Department of Trade and Industry. Thus it is clear that any question of redundancy payments to trawlermen has always been considered as a question of employment policy rather than one for Fisheries Ministers.

Consequently, although I and my ministerial colleagues in MAFF stand ready to play our part in responding to the case that has been made by my hon. Friend the Member for Hull, West and Hessle and my hon. Friends, the final decision on whether to meet the trawlermen's claims is ultimately one for my ministerial colleagues at the DTI. However, I will convey to them the depth of feeling within the House and that which I know exists in the communities affected. I will also convey the strength of feeling that has been so clearly articulated by those hon. Members who have spoken in the debate. I might add that I fully share and support those feelings.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at thirteen minutes past Twelve midnight.

House of Commons

Tuesday 9 March 1999

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND THE REGIONS

The Secretary of State was asked—

Homelessness (London)

1. **Ms Karen Buck** (Regent's Park and Kensington, North): What progress has been made in establishing a designated unit to tackle homelessness in London. [73412]

The Minister for Local Government and Housing (Ms Hilary Armstrong): The new London rough sleepers unit will be operational from 1 April. It will have the tough target of reducing the number of people sleeping rough in London by two thirds by 2002. Louise Casey, currently deputy director of Shelter, will head the unit.

Ms Buck: Has my hon. Friend had an opportunity to study "Safe in the City", a research report which identifies the 10 risk factors associated with youth homelessness? Is she aware that the South Kilburn estate, into which I look from my front window, is associated with the highest youth homelessness in London? Can she assure me that support will be given to the agencies, including not just housing authorities but schools and GPs, which aim to cut youth homelessness by tackling its causes?

Ms Armstrong: The "Safe in the City" project is funded by one of the largest single regeneration budget grants ever given—£6 million. It specifically examines the causes of youth homelessness and targets the most vulnerable areas in London. I helped to launch the research report to which my hon. Friend refers. It gives us clues as to what should be done with vulnerable children, who may be as young as 11 or 12. The new unit will work with us to make sure that we prevent vulnerable young people from becoming homeless. That is the most effective way to tackle youth homelessness. I am determined that we will work with all organisations to meet that end.

Mr. Nigel Waterson (Eastbourne): Was it really necessary to waste thousands of pounds advertising for a so-called streets tsar to head the unit? Does the Minister remember that the previous Government managed to reduce dramatically the number of rough sleepers on London's streets without the need for a £90,000 tsar? Should not that money be used to change people's lives, not to create more bureaucracy?

Ms Armstrong: Exactly the opposite is happening. We are cutting through the bureaucracy to make sure that the most vulnerable in London get the assistance that they need to ensure that we reduce rough sleeping by two thirds by 2002. That is an incredibly tough target. It involves Government Departments working effectively together, and it demands that we work effectively with the voluntary sector. One person co-ordinating those efforts will, I believe, make a real difference. I hope that the Opposition will join us in our determination to cut the number of rough sleepers and to do whatever the House can to ensure that the problem does not return.

Mr. Andrew Love (Edmonton): Recently, my local authority, the London borough of Enfield, carried out a spot survey and discovered, somewhat to its surprise, 14 rough sleepers. In the borough's budget for the coming year, it has allocated an additional £1 million for homelessness. Will my hon. Friend remember the outer London boroughs and the difficulties that they are beginning to face in dealing with homelessness?

Ms Armstrong: We know that homelessness is not just a problem in inner London. It is prevalent across London and throughout the country. The Government are taking tough action—throughout the country, but particularly in London—to meet the target. I assure my hon. Friend that we are considering applications from across London and the rest of the country in our determination to reduce the number of people sleeping rough in our cities.

London Underground

2. **Mr. John Wilkinson** (Ruislip-Northwood): When Transport for London is planned to assume responsibility for London Underground. [73413]

The Minister for Transport in London (Ms Glenda Jackson): Transport for London will take over London Underground on completion of the public-private partnership.

Mr. Wilkinson: Does not that remarkably brief answer betray the fact that the Government have totally failed to fulfil their pledges to the electorate of London, both at the general election and in the campaign for the referendum on the Greater London Authority last year? Were not the Government guilty of issuing a false prospectus, inasmuch as they are unable to say when the private sector will take over the infrastructural assets of London Underground, which is necessary to provide the finance to modernise the system? We have increasing strikes and increasing fares, but no real progress.

Ms Jackson: Madam Speaker, my reply to the hon. Gentleman was in response to your diktat on speedy replies.

The hon. Gentleman's supplementary question was a million miles from the facts. I am sure that, as a member of the Committee considering the Greater London Authority Bill, he is aware of that. The Government have made it abundantly clear that we will not be driven by

empty political ideology, as was the previous Administration, and that we will not be tied by an artificially imposed deadline. Completion of the public-private partnership will be based on best value, in terms not only of taxpayers' money, but of delivering a high-quality underground system to the people of London.

Mr. Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington): Can the Minister confirm that the timetable for the public-private partnership has slipped to at least 2002, as suggested by today's *Financial Times*? Can she also say how the Government will fund the investment in the tube that is needed in 2000 and beyond, given that that budget has been reduced to zero?

Ms Jackson: The timetable for the public-private partnership has not slipped and it is regrettable that the hon. Gentleman has to support his arguments with mere speculation reported in a once-admired newspaper. In respect of the public-private partnership, I repeat that the Government will be driven by ensuring best value for taxpayers' money and best value for a high-quality service to Londoners.

Mr. Richard Ottaway (Croydon, South): First, can the Minister clarify the confusion about London Underground fares? Who is right—the Minister, who says that fares will rise by 1 per cent. in real terms until 2001, or London Underground, which says that they will continue to rise until at least 2002? Secondly, will she recognise that, by the Government's admission, not the admission of a newspaper, public money may be needed to subsidise the partial privatised underground—*[Interruption.]* Public money may be needed to subsidise the partial privatisation of the underground, and that has thrown the whole process into chaos. Is not the public-private partnership simply a maintenance contract propped up by the taxpayer? It is not a third way; it is not a second way; it is the return of old Labour.

Ms Jackson: Given the number of times that the hon. Gentleman has asked that question, I should have thought that he would be able to deliver it without any kind of stumble or pause. He is aware that I cannot answer for London Underground. I certainly stand by what I have said about fares and I repeat, yet again, that the Government have made it abundantly clear that we will not be driven by empty political dogma or by an artificially imposed deadline. The completion of the public-private partnership will be dependent upon what is in the best interests of Londoners and of taxpayers and upon what will deliver the best service for Londoners.

Eastern Regional Development Agency

3. **Mr. Bob Blizzard** (Waveney): If he will make a statement on the Eastern regional development agency in relation to *(a)* its location and *(b)* its budget. [73414]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Mr. Alan Meale): Decisions on the location of an RDA are matters for the agency itself. Initially, the eastern region corporate headquarters will be in Cambridge, with sub-offices in Bedford, Norwich and Bury St. Edmunds. RDA budgets for 1999–2000 will be announced shortly. The agency's budget for 1998–99, covering administration resources only, is £350,000.

Mr. Blizzard: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply. In view of previous answers to me from my hon. Friend the Minister for the Regions, Regeneration and Planning and from my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister, in which they expressed their belief in decentralisation within the regions, does my hon. Friend share my dismay at the decision to locate the headquarters of the eastern region RDA in Cambridge? Should not the agency lead by example and set itself up in an area that is in need of regeneration rather than at a place that has full employment? Does he share the frustration of those in the north and the east of the region? Having argued for so long for improved roads, we have been told that the RDA can be situated only at a place within a good road network.

Mr. Meale: I thank my hon. Friend for bringing that matter up yet again; hon. Members are well aware of the long campaign that he has mounted. I repeat that the agency will determine its own location, but I will let the chairman of the RDA in the eastern region know what has been said.

Mr. Andrew Lansley (South Cambridgeshire): Is the Minister aware that the choice of Cambridge as the location for the RDA will be welcomed? Less welcome is the fact that the Government have appointed to those bodies a large number of Labour party appointees, in the east of England and across the country. Will he explain why good nominations, such as those of business-aware candidates in the east of England, were rejected in favour of Labour appointees with local government backgrounds, but no business development experience?

Mr. Meale: I must confront the hon. Gentleman on that. The membership of the local government section in the eastern region comprises two Labour members, one Liberal and one Conservative.

Mrs. Anne Campbell (Cambridge): Does my hon. Friend recognise the importance of high-tech developments in and around my constituency, and the crucial part that the regional development agency can play in ensuring that not only the region but the whole country benefit from such developments? Situating the RDA in Cambridge will provide it with an opportunity to spread high-tech industry beyond Cambridge, so that all parts of the region benefit.

Mr. Meale: I thank my hon. Friend for her question. The Department is aware of the proposals that have been made. They will be subject to considerable discussion, but we shall bear in mind what my hon. Friend has said when, in due course, we deal with the matter.

Mr. David Prior (North Norfolk): Can the Minister tell us why we need the development agency?

The Minister for the Regions, Regeneration and Planning (Mr. Richard Caborn): Because of the economic deficit.

Mr. Meale: As my hon. Friend says, we need the agency because we have an economic deficit following 19 years of misrule by the last Government.

Sport and Recreation

4. **Shona McIsaac** (Cleethorpes): What action the Government intend to revise planning guidance on sport and recreation. [73415]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Mr. Nick Raynsford): My hon. Friend the Minister for the Regions, Regeneration and Planning announced to the House on 29 July last year that planning guidance on sport and recreation—PPG17—would be revised. We intend to issue the draft for public consultation later this year.

Shona McIsaac: I welcome my hon. Friend's reply, but will the guidelines fulfil the Government's stated commitment to ending the loss of playing fields, thus ending the scandal that was perpetrated under the last Government—the flogging off of playing fields left, right and centre for development? That shows what a sham their green credentials are.

Mr. Raynsford: My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to the scandalous loss of playing fields that resulted from years of neglect under the Conservative Government. We have already acted to halt that by requiring, under a new direction, all proposed changes of use of educational playing fields to be referred to the Secretary of State when the Sports Council objects. That will provide further safeguards, on which we intend to build in the forthcoming draft planning guidance.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): May I bring some balance to the ministerial approach to the matter? Many Conservative Members have done their damnedest—their utmost—to preserve school playing fields. Does the Minister accept that the emphasis on development in existing towns and cities, and building on brown-field sites, pose a risk? Will not playing fields that become partly "redundant" be at risk unless the Government—whatever party may be in power—decide that school playing fields should for all time be an asset to public recreation, games and leisure?

Mr. Raynsford: I readily accept that the hon. Gentleman has rightly fought to prevent school playing fields from being taken and developed. I wish that he had been more successful in persuading his own party to follow his line when it was in government. The present Government are determined to act, which is why we have passed the new direction that gives the Sports Council more influence, and allows referral to the Secretary of State in all cases in which there is a threat of loss of educational playing fields. That is the most effective step that can be taken to safeguard school playing fields. The hon. Gentleman is right to draw attention to the threat.

Railway Infrastructure

5. **Mrs. Rosemary McKenna** (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth): If he will make a statement on the level of investment in the UK's railway infrastructure. [73416]

The Minister of Transport (Dr. John Reid): I made it clear at the national rail summit on 25 February that the Government would be looking closely at Railtrack's annual network management statement—due to be published at the end of this month—to establish whether the company's proposed investment was sufficient.

Mrs. McKenna: Does my right hon. Friend agree that Railtrack's profits are too high, and that proper investment in the rail network would put more freight on to the railways and give passengers a better service? Given that the bulk of Railtrack's money comes from public subsidy, does it not have a responsibility to the users of railways, as well as to its shareholders?

Dr. Reid: I am sure that my hon. Friend is right and that the whole House feels strongly that Railtrack has to meet the needs and expectations of the public and railway companies on investment in the infrastructure. The regulator has concluded that Railtrack's returns have been excessive. The Government will be looking to the regulator to establish a structure of charges that imposes incentives on Railtrack to invest properly in the network.

Mr. Michael Jack (Fylde): I am sure that the Minister will rejoice with me about the recent signing of the contract between Virgin Rail and Fiat Ferroviaria for £750 million-worth of tilting trains for the west coast main line—investment that would not have taken place without privatisation. Will he use his best endeavours to ensure that Railtrack maintains its part of the deal by investing in the new track infrastructure and signalling system, so that we may all enjoy the benefits of the new tilting trains?

Dr. Reid: I am always suspicious when I am exhorted by a Conservative Member to rejoice, rejoice, but on this occasion we can look forward to investment in the west coast main line. It is badly needed. Of course, we should accept that, under privatisation, investment has gone up, fares have come down on average, largely because the Government regulate them, and passenger numbers have gone up dramatically. However, the right hon. Gentleman, along with the rest of the House, will be aware that there has been a serious downside—punctuality and reliability levels are not acceptable. We have said that we want year-on-year improvements on that. Therefore, we welcome any investment, increase and improvement in services to passengers.

Mr. John Cummings (Easington): Is my right hon. Friend aware of the huge increase in passenger journeys on the east coast line, something which is creating severe overcrowding? Does he agree that uncertainty over the present franchise is inhibiting the necessary investment to cure that problem? When will he be in a position to advise the House as to the future of the present franchise?

Dr. Reid: There is no doubt that the increase in passenger numbers has put undue strain on the capacity of both the railway system and rolling stock. I am glad to be able to tell my hon. Friend that some 2,300 new pieces of rolling stock are scheduled by 2002.

On the question of franchises, we have made it plain that we are prepared to be a flexible and constructive partner with the railway companies if they deliver on investment and performance. However, we have made it equally plain that, when it comes to franchise

renegotiations, any company that is not delivering the service that passengers are entitled to expect will not have a long-term future in the industry.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (North Essex): May I make it clear that we will support the right hon. Gentleman in his efforts to improve punctuality and reliability?

I thank the right hon. Gentleman for acknowledging that privatisation has brought about a quantum increase in the number of passengers carried on the railway and that Labour inherited a £20 billion investment programme as a result of Conservative policies. Has he given any thought to where he would have got the money if we had not privatised the railway? Would it be like the tube, where there is no investment at all and only life-support finance because the Government cancelled plans for the tube?

Dr. Reid: Since I became Minister of Transport, I have been prepared to accept that investment in the railways and passenger numbers have gone up, and fares have come down; the hon. Gentleman will find that in the record very often. I hope that he accepts that the downside of privatisation was a complete fragmentation of the industry, with 25 companies operating on different timetables, fragmented information systems, overcapacity and overcrowding on many routes, and unacceptable lack of punctuality.

Through regulation and the strategic rail authority, we are trying to improve punctuality and we look for year-on-year improvements. If the hon. Gentleman is saying that Conservative Members are behind us on that, I welcome it. I am sure that we all do. We look forward to him joining us in ensuring that railway companies discharge their responsibility to the public and improve the service, which, in too many areas, has been dismal.

Train Operating Companies (Performance)

6. **Mr. Desmond Browne** (Kilmarnock and Loudoun): What steps he is taking to assess the views of railway passengers on the performance of train operating companies. [73417]

The Minister of Transport (Dr. John Reid): At the national rail summit, on 25 February, we made it clear that service to passengers is paramount—which is why we are undertaking a national passenger survey.

Mr. Browne: It will not have escaped railway passengers' attention that it took a Labour Government to put their interests first. Undoubtedly, the majority of railway operators will be intending to act positively in response to the message that was delivered to them at the national rail summit. However, what message does my right hon. Friend have for companies that do not intend to respond positively, or fail in responding positively, to that message—by failing to pull their socks up and deliver the services that passengers rightly demand and are paying for?

Dr. Reid: I should send two messages to such companies: first, that they do not have a long-term future in the industry; and, secondly, that the central criterion of the performance on which the judgment will be based is the passenger himself or herself: the passenger has to be king when we judge the value of rail services. We are therefore introducing a national passenger survey—to ensure that we have a standardised form of assessment throughout the industry, so that we may discover exactly what passengers think of individual companies and of the industry overall, and so that we may supplement the very important role that is already being played by the rail users consultative committee. We very much welcomed the consultative committee's presence at the railway summit, and I hope that the majority of progressive companies also welcomed it.

Mr. Michael Colvin (Romsey): Is the Minister aware that most of my constituents are railway passengers, and that they have a high regard for train operators who have invested in new rolling stock—so that my constituents may be treated as passengers and not like cattle? When he is considering the award or renewal of franchises, will he consider granting a 10-year franchise, so that train operators have greater encouragement to make, and are able to amortise, long-term investment in new rolling stock?

Dr. Reid: We have already clearly stated our view that we shall be flexible and constructive in our attitude towards the renegotiation of franchises. However, we act as the champion of passengers. Therefore, if any railway company wants access to the market—which is what the franchises deliver to railway companies—it will have to deliver benefits to us for passengers themselves. We shall be flexible on a range of issues in renegotiating franchises, but, ultimately, railway companies themselves will have to deliver to passengers a much better service than they have hitherto delivered. We require annual improvement. The litmus test of improvement will be whether passengers receive the performance that they deserve.

Mr. Robin Corbett (Birmingham, Erdington): If my right hon. Friend needs to know what passengers think about rail services, may I invite him to talk to those who have booked first-class tickets on Virgin from Euston to events at the national exhibition centre, near Birmingham—but cannot get a seat? He could speak also to those who turn up at Erdington station, on the Central railway line, just after 8 o'clock in the morning—to try to get to work on time—but regularly find that trains that are supposed to be running do not arrive. What can he do to turn promise into performance, and complaint into improvement?

Dr. Reid: We have already made a start. Until November 1998, the railway companies themselves were exclusively competitive and there was no network approach. In November, the Deputy Prime Minister and I brought the companies together to deal with the consequent problems of congestion and delay. It was agreed that there would be 800 new drivers and 500 pieces of new rolling stock over the next 12 months, and that there would be a joint Railtrack-railway companies initiative to tackle congestion black spots. For the first time, the whole industry acted together. We not only built on that action at the summit, on 25 February, but shall return to it year on year. We made it absolutely plain that current levels of punctuality, reliability and overall

performance are unacceptable, and that the Government intend to ensure that there are year-on-year improvements in performance.

Mr. Cynog Dafis (Ceredigion): Is the Minister aware that there is deep dissatisfaction at the chronic delays on the Great Western service to south Wales, Cardiff and beyond? Trains that arrive on time are now the exception rather than the rule. Although a great deal of fault lies with Great Western, does not Railtrack also have much to answer for and are not delays often caused by deficiencies in the infrastructure? Can the Minister assure us that we will get the investment that is needed? It would probably be preferable to the large-scale investment that the Welsh Office envisage to upgrade the M4 and build a new road to Cardiff Wales airport.

Dr. Reid: The range of views expressed by hon. Members on both sides of the House testifies to the fact that there are problems throughout the nations and the regions of Britain. I repeat that the current standards of reliability and punctuality are unacceptable. As for future investment, Railtrack is due to invest about £17 billion between 1997 and 2007. However, as the regulator has made plain, more investment is necessary because the money that Railtrack distributes in dividends is inordinate compared with the risks taken. The regulator is considering that, as will the strategic rail authority, and the Government are keen to see it implemented.

Regional Chamber (East Midlands)

7. **Mr. Vernon Coaker** (Gedling): What assessment he has made of progress in establishing a regional chamber in the east midlands. [73418]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Mr. Alan Meale): I am currently considering the east midlands chamber's application for designation under the Regional Development Agencies Act 1998 and hope to be able to make an announcement soon.

Mr. Coaker: I thank the Minister for that reply. Although I welcome the new regional structures that the Government have put in place, will my hon. Friend ensure that the new bodies address the economic and social needs of small pockets of deprivation, such as Netherfield in my constituency, as such areas are often missed out when economic regeneration is discussed?

Mr. Meale: I thank my hon. Friend and pay tribute to his sterling work over a number of years, particularly in his constituency of Gedling. However, single regeneration budget SRB5 is not yet ready to be announced—when it is, it will be discussed on the Floor of the House. I note that the borough of Gedling, in partnership with Nottingham city, submitted a successful bid in single regeneration budget round 3 and that Netherfield was included in the proposals. I am sure that people have noticed that and want to build there.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard (South-West Norfolk): Will the Minister explain to the House the principle that has resulted in the east midlands regional development agency having no representative from the county of Lincolnshire? Is it that Lincolnshire is the largest county in the region or that it is the most rural, or perhaps that it is Conservative controlled? Does he intend to apply the same principle to the establishment of the east midlands regional chamber?

Mr. Meale: If the right hon. Lady were to do some simple mathematics, she would realise that when a body comprises four representatives from an entire region, it is impossible to have a representative from every single council. The best people for the job have been chosen to represent fully the region.

Brown-field Land

8. **Mr. Gerry Sutcliffe** (Bradford, South): What steps he is taking to ensure more housing development on recycled brown-field land in Yorkshire and Humberside. [73419]

The Minister for the Regions, Regeneration and Planning (Mr. Richard Caborn): We published our proposals for regional planning guidance in planning policy guidance note 11 on 15 February. It requires the regional planning forum for Yorkshire and the Humber to establish a target for housing development on previously used land that underpins and reflects our 60 per cent. national target.

Mr. Sutcliffe: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply which will be most welcome in Yorkshire and Humberside where we must meet a dramatic housing need. Is not that in stark contrast to the Opposition who neglected housing need and failed to provide real incentives for recycling brown-field land? Will my hon. Friend ensure that the regional development agency in Yorkshire and Humberside has an economic strategy for bringing such land back into use?

Mr. Caborn: I welcome those comments. When the Conservatives were in government, they left policy on household growth and the development of brown-field sites in a mess. However, we shall work through the issue and make a reasonable job of it. The regional development agencies will work closely with the planning authorities to ensure that there is joined-up thinking on land use, transport and economic planning so that we get a bigger bang for our buck.

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Surrey Heath): Does the Minister recognise that one of the important issues relating to recycling brown-field land in Yorkshire, Humberside or anywhere else is the definition of the protections that English Nature provides? He may be aware that there appears to have been a reinterpretation by English Nature—or perhaps by the Department—of what "substantial effect on wildlife" means. I should be grateful if the Minister could tell me about that reinterpretation. If not, will he write to local authorities in Yorkshire, Humberside and everywhere else in the country to say whether that phrase has been reinterpreted to mean a substantial adverse effect?

Mr. Caborn: I shall write to the hon. Gentleman. There has been a reinterpretation. When we took power,

there was not even a land use register designating what brown-field sites were, so it is a bit much for the Conservatives to complain. At the end of this month, we shall know for the first time what brown-field land we have and what state it is in.

Helen Jackson (Sheffield, Hillsborough): Does my hon. Friend agree that the flip-side benefit of building housing on brown-field land is the protection that that offers to green-field and green-belt sites that are under pressure? In parts of northern England where urban and rural areas sit so closely together, will my hon. Friend ensure that the benefits of brown-field development are matched by increased resources and powers for local authority enforcement bodies to protect the green belt?

Mr. Caborn: Very much so. As my hon. Friend has said, we need a sustainable policy, which the Government are pursuing. The issue is not just household growth, but sustainable transport policy, the use of brown-field sites and mixed-use development. That all adds to ensuring that we drive the urban renaissance, which will protect the green-belt, and green-field sites.

Vehicle Emissions Regulations

9. **Mr. Andrew Robathan** (Blaby): If he will make a statement on the effectiveness of the Road Traffic (Vehicle Emissions) (Fixed Penalties) Regulations 1997. [73420]

The Minister for Transport in London (Ms Glenda Jackson): The new measures, currently confined to seven local authorities, have resulted in a welcome reduction in the proportion of vehicles failing to comply with prescribed emissions limits. We are currently reviewing the trial and will announce future plans shortly.

Mr. Robathan: As I understand the regulations, part of the point is to stop drivers keeping the engine running when they are not going anywhere, such as those just keeping themselves warm. Will the Minister consider taking action to ensure that drivers in Westminster, where we all walk around all the time, do not sit in their cars creating emissions and polluting the atmosphere? As a start, will she ensure that all Government Departments instruct Government drivers to switch off their engines in such circumstances, which they currently fail to do within the Palace of Westminster and in the streets of Westminster?

Ms Jackson: On the last part of the hon. Gentleman's question, we shall most certainly do as he asks. I am sure that my hon. Friends have heard what he has said. A driver who leaves the engine running can already be given a fine of £20, which rises to £40 if it is not paid within 28 days. *[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. Conversations are much too noisy. The House must come to order. We cannot hear each other speaking at the Dispatch Box.

Brown-field Land

10. **Mr. Barry Sheerman** (Huddersfield): What steps he is taking to increase the amount of assistance given to local authorities to regenerate brown-field land sites in their areas. [73421]

Hon. Members: Come on!

The Minister for the Regions, Regeneration and Planning (Mr. Richard Caborn): I was waiting for my hon. Friend the Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman) to ask his question.

Madam Speaker: It is too noisy. We cannot hear.

Mr. Caborn: I totally agree. The problem is all the noise coming from the Opposition Benches.

The Government support local authority regeneration initiatives through a range of programmes including the single regeneration budget, the new deal for communities and the land reclamation programme of English Partnerships, as well as through the revenue support grant. We plan to spend £4.6 billion on regeneration programmes over the next three years.

Mr. Sheerman: My hon. Friend will know that I share his belief that the regenerative power of brown field can change the landscape of this country, especially our towns and cities. Is he aware that we need proper incentives to get local authorities moving in partnership with all the other new agencies, such as the regional development agencies? Is it not about time that he took off the velvet gloves with some local authorities, which still have not sent back their registration of brown-field land in their areas?

Mr. Caborn: There has been an improvement in returns from local authorities. I hope that we shall be able to give a comprehensive appraisal of the brown-field sites that are available for development when we produce the land use data bank by the end of this month.

Mr. Simon Burns (West Chelmsford): Does the Minister accept that the Government could have assisted local authorities if they had been quicker in providing their revised PPGs? Does he further accept that, if the draft PPG3 had been revised more quickly, fewer green-field sites would have been lost to building—as some still will be? Can he explain today why it has taken so long to provide draft revision of the guidance? When does he expect the draft guidance to be published? I assume that it will be shortly. More importantly, when does he expect the consultation thereafter to be completed, and the draft guidance to become actual guidance?

Mr. Caborn: As soon as the Government release draft planning guidance, it is immediately material to any inquiry. We are moving systematically through the land use planning system and bringing it under a sustainable policy in which transport, economic planning and land use planning are brought together. That is what the regional planning guidance PPG11 was about. We will now modernise the system systematically. PPG3 will be out in

the next few weeks, and we have thought carefully about it. I hope to be able to publish it, and it will become material to inquiries as soon as we produce the draft guidance.

New Deal for Communities

11. **Mr. Michael Connarty** (Falkirk, East): What assessment he has made of the implementation of the new deal for communities. [73423]

16. **Ms Margaret Moran** (Luton, South): What assessment he has made of the implementation of the new deal for communities. [73428]

The Minister for Local Government and Housing (Ms Hilary Armstrong): We are delighted that people living in 17 of the most deprived neighbourhoods in England have seized the opportunity presented by our new deal for communities to confront the problems that they face. Across Government and across the country, we will continue to work closely with communities as they develop plans to deliver lasting change.

Mr. Connarty: Is my hon. Friend aware that communities welcome in particular the move from the short-term projects of the previous Government to the sustainable improvements of this Government? She will recall that the document that launched the scheme talked about Britain and drew from good practice throughout the UK, including Scotland. Will she ensure that lessons learned from the new deal for communities will play a part in continuing dialogue with the Scottish Office and the Scottish Parliament, to ensure that we work together throughout Britain to deal with the scourge of social exclusion?

Ms Armstrong: My hon. Friend is right. There is great support out there for a more long-term, strategic approach to the problems, involving local people identifying problems and finding solutions to them. I can assure my hon. Friend that we are determined to learn the lessons, and we will do that for the whole country—including Scotland. I am in discussions with right hon. and hon. Friends at the Scottish Office so that we can all learn the lessons from the early round, and make sure that every deprived community in Britain benefits from those lessons.

Ms Moran: What plans does my hon. Friend have to integrate the new deal for communities with other Government programmes? She may be aware that my constituency benefits under the Labour Government—unlike under the previous Government—from several programmes, including the new deal for regeneration; single regeneration budget 4 and, we hope, 5; and a health action zone. Will she assure us that we will have joined-up government programmes, so that the community in Luton can get maximum value from all of them?

Ms Armstrong: My hon. Friend is right: it is very important that not only the additional money going to an area, but the mainstream money works effectively to tackle the problems that communities and citizens face. We will take careful steps to ensure that we know what is going on, and that people locally can know and understand the breadth of work that is going on and how it can be most effectively applied. They will benefit from Government working with them to tackle their problems.

Mr. Andrew Rowe (Faversham and Mid-Kent): Does the Minister accept that, over the past 30 years, progress in community development strategies in this country has been pathetic, whereas it has been remarkably effective overseas? Will she ensure that the lessons that have been learned all over the world are repatriated here so that we can make some serious progress?

Ms Armstrong: I have to be careful, because I used to be a community worker and I do not want anyone to think that I am seeking to gain advantage from the Government's recognition that we cannot change communities without working effectively with the people in them. We have lessons to learn from elsewhere. We want to learn them and to ensure that people in the communities with which we are working have the opportunity to learn from others, share experiences and get the very best deal.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): I recognise that the new deal for communities is designed to tackle the problem of urban blight, which so many rotten Labour authorities have caused over such a long period, but what guarantee can the Minister offer us that there will be no slippage whatever in the timetable, and that the pathfinder partnerships that have submitted bids will be told whether they are successful in July 1999?

Ms Armstrong: I invite the hon. Gentleman to read the report of the social exclusion unit on the most deprived communities in our country. The report acknowledges that Government, both nationally and locally, have sometimes been part of the problem, not the solution. The Conservative Government were massively part of the problem.

British Waterways

13. **Dr. Doug Naysmith** (Bristol, North-West): What response he has received from British Waterways to the recent announcement of increased resources; and what indication British Waterways has given him of how those resources will be used. [73425]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Mr. Alan Meale): British Waterways has enthusiastically welcomed the Government's extra investment, which will enable it to reduce its £90 million backlog of urgent safety-related maintenance.

Dr. Naysmith: Does my hon. Friend believe, as I do, that the South West regional development agency will have a part to play in encouraging the use of inland waterways?

Mr. Meale: I know that my hon. Friend has a long history of interest in British canals and waterways. I agree that the economic strategy for our waterways needs to be tied into the strategy of the regional development

agencies. I have written to the chairmen of all those bodies asking them to meet me, and that will happen very shortly.

Mr. Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): That answer will cut no ice with canal users in Staffordshire. Does the Minister realise that his boss, the Deputy Prime Minister—who, I understand, is currently scuba diving in the Seychelles—has overridden an inspector's report so that the Birmingham northern relief road will cut straight across the Lichfield-Hatherton canal? Will he call on the right hon. Gentleman to return from his holiday and do something about that?

Mr. Meale: Once again, the hon. Gentleman is wrong. Ministers had a telephone conversation this morning with the Deputy Prime Minister and he is still in India. I assure the hon. Gentleman that due regard was paid to proper procedure during the consultation that was carried out on the Birmingham northern relief road, and a judicial inquiry was held. People from British Waterways, especially those in Staffordshire and elsewhere, are enthusiastic about the Government's recent announcements and we have letters to prove that.

Strategic Rail Authority

14. **Mr. Tony Clarke** (Northampton, South): When he expects to set up the proposed strategic rail authority; and if he will make a statement. [73426]

The Minister of Transport (Dr. John Reid): The shadow strategic rail authority will be operative from 1 April, under the leadership of Sir Alastair Morton. The Bill to set up the strategic rail authority proper will be introduced as soon as legislative time allows.

Mr. Clarke: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for that response; my hon. Friends and I believe that the sooner we have the SRA the better. Will my right hon. Friend comment on the role that the SRA, its shadow and his Department can play in strategic planning and, in particular, in protecting access to the main line for local services? In my constituency, Silverlink Trains is concerned that access to the west coast main line, following its modernisation, could be restricted by main line operators trying to seize as much track time as possible.

Dr. Reid: As my hon. Friend will realise, and as I said earlier, one of the grave problems caused by privatisation of the railways is the fragmentation of the system. The strategic rail authority, in its shadow form, and later in its proper form, under Sir Alastair Morton will be responsible for establishing a network-wide strategic vision and implementing policies on the ground that will contribute to the network nature of our railway system. Whatever benefits have derived from privatisation, the vast majority of people are well aware of the problems with punctuality and reliability, and the fragmentation of the network that has been a serious impediment to the sort of railway system that we want to build. The SRA will have a crucial role in rebuilding the system.

Mr. Tim Boswell (Daventry): While various investments and some co-ordination may be desirable, how much extra investment will derive from the creation of the SRA?

Dr. Reid: The hon. Gentleman will be aware that it is not the purpose of the SRA to invest yet more taxpayers' money. The level of subsidy that we currently give is tolerable, but it is due to reduce. Enough taxpayers' money was wasted by the previous Government when they sold off Railtrack at a rock-bottom price, thus losing almost £2 billion. The purpose of the SRA is to bring back some network-wide capacity to our railway system, and to give some long-term strategic vision to it. That will be a primary role for the SRA and I am sure that it will be one of its successes.

Mr. Boswell: When?

Dr. Reid: The answer is in the short, medium and long term. We have now engaged with the railway companies and with Railtrack. We will see year-on-year improvements in performance and we will be back every year to see that improvements are delivered for the passengers.

Dr. Alan Whitehead (Southampton, Test): Given that 86 per cent. of Railtrack's income comes from carriage charges, does my right hon. Friend intend to ask the SRA, when it has been set up, to examine the present system of subsidy, under which £1.5 billion goes to the rail operating companies, which then pay Railtrack, which does not invest in our rail system? Does my right hon. Friend accept that it might be simpler to give the money to Railtrack with strong investment incentives attached?

Dr. Reid: As my hon. Friend will know, that is a matter for the regulator, whom we have asked to consider the way in which public money is put into our railways through Railtrack. We want to ensure that the blame culture, the history lessons and the transposition of blame from Railtrack to the companies and vice versa come to an end. Passengers want a decent, affordable, accessible, safe and secure railway system. The House wants that too, and the packed House I see around me is surely a testament to how seriously we all take the problem of our railways.

Mr. Matthew Taylor (Truro and St. Austell): It was widely reported in the autumn that the Deputy Prime Minister had won the backing of his Cabinet colleagues for a strategic rail Bill this year, if there was progress with the House of Lords Bill. That progress has happened, but there is still no strategic authority Bill. When will it be introduced, and may we continue to imagine that it will happen during this Parliament?

Dr. Reid: The hon. Gentleman is quite right to say that the Deputy Prime Minister was so persuasive that his colleagues agreed to add to the six Bills that he already had in the Queen's Speech. Should the House of Lords and, in particular, the Opposition prove sensible in finding

a solution to the problem of the early retirement of the House of Lords, we could introduce a Food Standards Agency and a strategic rail authority Bill, but it remains the position that we depend on progress in the other place.

Landfill Sites

15. **Mr. David Watts** (St. Helens, North): If he will enable councils to make the final decisions on planning applications for landfill sites. [73427]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Mr. Nick Raynsford): Final decisions on all planning applications are made by local planning authorities, except for those that are called in by my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister for his decision, or those referred to him on appeal.

Mr. Watts: I thank the Minister, but may I draw it to his attention that he recently approved a planning application for a landfill site next to residential properties in Haydock? The residents believe that decisions on such matters should rest with the local council. Will my hon. Friend reconsider his decision not to allow the final decision to be taken by the local authority?

Mr. Raynsford: No. I understand my hon. Friend's concern about the case that he raised, but it is a fundamental principle of quasi-judicial procedures such as planning matters that they should be subject to a right of appeal. I have looked into the detail of my hon. Friend's case, and I have written to him about it. I am quite satisfied that the inspector considered all matters properly and reached a proper decision, on the basis of which the appeal was allowed. It would not be right to overturn that decision.

Mr. Ian Bruce (South Dorset): Does the Minister agree that one of our problems is that people who create domestic waste are having to export it to other areas? Local authorities must be responsible for burying their own waste if that is how they wish to deal with it. Unless the Government take strict action, they will find that areas such as London will ship their waste to Dorset, and we should rather London kept it to itself.

Mr. Raynsford: The hon. Gentleman makes a valid point about the growing difficulties encountered in seeking sites for landfill. It is desirable to consider alternative ways of disposing of waste, and it is right that we should give more emphasis to recycling and other more environmentally sustainable means of disposal.

Integrated Transport Commission

17. **Mr. Steve McCabe** (Birmingham, Hall Green): If he will make a statement on his plans to establish a commission for integrated transport. [73429]

The Minister of Transport (Dr. John Reid): We are establishing a commission for integrated transport to give Ministers independent advice on the implementation of our integrated transport policy. We intend to announce the composition of the commission shortly.

Mr. McCabe: It is surely common sense to seek improved co-ordination of transport and to ensure that we make the most beneficial use of all modes of transport in an integrated manner. Is not that approach infinitely preferable to the mentality of roads and profits first of the previous Government?

Dr. Reid: Yes, my hon. Friend is right. The White Paper that we published last July was the most significant and radical document on transport for more than quarter of a century. It provided a platform and an agenda for a generation. Under our integrated transport plan, we shall renew our public transport services, provide choice for the traveller and balance economic advantage against environmental impact. I hope that the Opposition will at long last realise that, after nearly 20 years in government, they managed to leave a transport system that failed to give satisfaction or performance to transport users. The Government will not do the same.

Mr. Norman Baker (Lewes): Does the Minister agree that a key requirement of any integrated transport policy is a reduction in road traffic levels? Will he explain why he has abandoned his policy of reducing road traffic and instead adopted a Tory policy of reducing road traffic growth? Does he think that the best way to deal with congestion is to have more vehicles on the road?

Dr. Reid: The hon. Gentleman has managed the double whammy by getting both statements wrong: we have not changed our policy; nor have we adopted the Conservative policy. We have said that we want a reduction in road traffic growth and, as part of that— [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh!"] I know that it is hard for the hon. Gentleman to conceive of two ideas at the same time, but he should let me finish. As part of that, there will be an absolute reduction in traffic levels in certain areas. That was our policy, it is our policy and it will continue to be our policy.

WAYS AND MEANS

Financial Statement

[Relevant documents: The Second Report from the Treasury Committee, Session 1998–99, on the World Economy and the Pre-Budget Report (HC 91-I), and the Fourth Report from the Environmental Audit Committee, Session 1998–99, on the Pre-Budget Report (HC 93).]

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Before I call the Chancellor of the Exchequer, it may be for the convenience of hon. Members if I remind them that, at the end of the Chancellor's speech, copies of the Budget resolutions will be available to hon. Members in the Vote Office.

Introduction

3.31 pm

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Gordon Brown): Today's Budget is a Budget for Britain to succeed in the new economy and to lead in the new century. It is a Budget that builds on strong foundations of economic stability, advances a modern framework of efficient public services and encourages a dynamic Britain of enterprise and fairness.

With this, the last Budget of the 20th century, we also leave behind the century-long sterile conflicts between Governments of the left, who have too often undervalued wealth creation and enterprise, and Governments of the right, who have been too indifferent to public services and fairness.

In contrast, this is a new Labour Budget built on the central idea that our future depends on enterprise and fairness together.

The more enterprising Britain is, the more wealth we create, the higher our standard of public services and our standard of living can be—not just for the few, but for all of us.

The fairer Britain is, the more open Britain is to the talents of all, from whatever class and background, the more enterprising and prosperous all of Britain will be.

Because enterprise and fairness are founded on securing sound economic fundamentals, this Budget will lock in monetary and fiscal stability for the long term.

Because enterprise and fairness depend on modern public services, we are not only providing the £40 billion extra we promised to health and education, but today I will announce more money and more capital investment in schools, hospitals, transport and fighting crime.

And this Budget will implement far-reaching tax reform that will deliver a better deal for enterprise, a better deal for families, and a better deal for work.

Because for too long the tax system has undervalued entrepreneurship and investment, we will cut taxes on enterprise, we will champion the needs of small business, we will introduce a new competition policy and a new computer strategy for Britain.

Because for too long the tax system has undervalued the family, failing to reward those who take on the most important responsibility of all—bringing up children—we will cut taxes for families, helping parents when they need help most.

To recognise the contribution of our senior citizens to our country, the Budget will increase the income of all pensioners.

And because for too long Governments have taken too much in taxes from people who work hard but are not wealthy, this Budget will now reform tax and benefits and deliver tax cuts that reward work and make work pay for everyone in Britain.

So in a better deal for Britain that puts work, enterprise and families first, this Budget will cut tax rates and at the same time boost public investment—and it will do both at the right time for the British economy.

Stability

Two years ago, Britain faced the threat of rapidly rising inflation. So our first priority, and our continuing obligation, has been, and is, to build a solid foundation of economic stability.

We took decisive action in 1997 and 1998 and, as a result, inflation is under control and for the last seven months has been at or around 2½ per cent.

In the 1980s, inflation went as high as 21 per cent. Our forecast is for inflation of 2½ per cent. this year, next year and the year after. For the first time in our generation, Britain can look forward to sustained low inflation.

In our first week in government, we made the Bank of England independent, freeing monetary policy from the politically driven control that, in the last economic cycle, led to 15 per cent. interest rates for an entire year and interest rates at 10 per cent. or more for four years.

Now, because together we are steering a course of stability, long-term interest rates have come down from over 7 per cent. in May 1997 to 4½ per cent. now—our lowest long-term interest rates for 40 years.

And, after five interest rate cuts in five months, saving the typical home owner around £900 a year on their mortgage, Britain now has the lowest mortgage rates in 33 years.

All of this has happened against a background of great uncertainties in the global economy. One quarter of the world is now in recession. World growth has been cut in half. World export growth has fallen even faster. And, as a result of failures in many of east Asia's economies, our exports to them have fallen by more than 50 per cent.

And this year, as trade imbalances worsen, and threats of protectionism grow, it will be even more important to hold to our course of stability. Britain, with other G7 nations, has rightly assumed a leadership role to address the root causes and contain the spread of future global crises.

The storms may come again. But, because of what we have done, our economy is now better prepared to weather them.

With public investment now set to rise and interest rates coming down, both at precisely the right time in the economic cycle, Britain's fiscal and monetary policies—often at odds in previous economic cycles—are now working together to promote growth with low inflation.

I can confirm our growth estimate for 1999 of 1 per cent. to 1½ per cent, which is what I told the House in November, followed by stronger growth—in 2000 of 2¼ per cent. to 2¾ per cent. and then in 2001 of 2¾ per cent. to 3¼ per cent.

DAMAGED ORIGINAL

Despite world conditions, more men and women are in jobs in Britain than at any time in our history, and unemployment in the last year has been at its lowest rate for 20 years. Since May 1997, youth unemployment has fallen by 57 per cent, and long-term unemployment has been cut in half.

And because more lone parents are now in work, the numbers claiming out-of-work benefit—rising for 30 years, over 1 million when we took office—have now fallen by nearly 100,000.

As we entered office, we also inherited a Budget deficit of £28 billion.

We said in our manifesto we would work within the existing spending plans for our first two years.

In our first year, the deficit was reduced by £19 billion.

In my Budget last year, I promised we would reduce the deficit further.

As a result of our prudence, our first two years' spending is £2 billion lower than the spending plans we inherited.

This year, the Budget will be in surplus. The current surplus this year is forecast to be £4 billion. Public sector net borrowing will be in surplus by £1 billion—in contrast to the £28 billion deficit we inherited.

I am determined to continue locking in this fiscal tightening for the years to come so that we continue to meet our fiscal rules and so deliver sound public finances. I have had to offset the impact of slower world growth on corporate tax revenues and lower indirect tax revenues.

But, as a result of sound economic management, debt interest payments next year have been cut by £2½ billion from their previous forecast and, in total, debt interest payments have been cut by £4 billion over the next three years.

Because less of our social security budget is being wasted on paying for past failures in employment policy, social security spending as a whole has not been rising as in previous years. And, over the next three years, social security spending, including unemployment—even after adjusting for the economic cycle—is set to be significantly lower than previously forecast, freeing resources for new help for families and pensioners.

At the time of the comprehensive spending review last July, there were those who said that we could not afford the £40 billion for new investment in health and education and still meet our fiscal rules.

I can report that the entire £40 billion of investment in health and in education will be fully delivered, and will be delivered fully within our fiscal rules. Not only that, but still meeting the test of fiscal prudence, I will today allocate from our capital modernisation fund even more investment for hospitals and schools.

And, still meeting that test of fiscal prudence, I will be able to afford tax cuts to reward work, encourage enterprise and strengthen the family.

Even after all the measures in today's Budget, next year's current surplus is expected to be £1 billion higher than previously forecast and £1 billion more in 2000–01. For the coming five years, the current surpluses are forecast to be—successively—£2 billion, £4 billion, £8 billion, £9 billion and £11 billion.

In line with our golden rule, even under our most cautious assumptions, we are balancing the current Budget over the economic cycle and, for the first time in a generation, we are eliminating the current structural deficit.

We are also meeting the second fiscal rule, that of sustainable investment—a prudent ratio of debt to GDP.

Debt as a proportion of national income has fallen from the 44 per cent. that we inherited to under 41 per cent. this year, and it will fall below 40 per cent. to 39½ per cent. next year, then to 38 per cent, and then to 37 per cent. in 2001–02.

Britain's fiscal position is therefore not only sound today, but on the soundest possible footing for the long term.

For the coming five years, the estimated current Budget surplus totals £34 billion, in contrast with the last Government's deficit over the last economic cycle of minus £149 billion and their doubling of the national debt.

For those who take a special interest in European issues, in particular the Maastricht treaty, I can confirm that Britain is well within the Maastricht criteria.

So, as we cut debt payments and, at the same time, the bills of economic failure, I will further lock in the fiscal tightening that we have achieved over the past two years, I will continue to meet our fiscal rules and I am also able, with my Budget measures today, to boost purchasing power over the next three years by £6 billion at exactly the right time for the economy.

Even after these measures take effect, public sector net borrowing will be lower than previously forecast in each of the next three years—at £3 billion in the coming year and then £3 billion, £1 billion, £3 billion and £4 billion in the years after.

I have often told this House that our prudence is for a purpose. And so, I am now able to announce: a new boost to purchasing power of £6 billion over the next three years as a result of my Budget measures—net tax cuts of £4 billion targeted to working families; and, on top of that, for families and public spending, more than £2 billion of additional public investments.

And I will also today announce major additional allocations from the £2½ billion capital modernisation fund, adding more resources to the extra £40 billion that we have already committed to invest in health and education over the next three years.

Let me turn to the details of measures, beginning with the tax and other reforms that deliver a better deal for enterprise.

Enterprise

To those who argue that getting interest rates down and getting inflation down is enough, I say that stability is the essential foundation, but it is only the foundation. We must build on that foundation for Britain a modern knowledge-based economy.

Britain must make a quantum leap in skills, innovation, competition, information technology and small business. So, today, we are bringing forward seven major reforms for a new enterprise economy open to all.

First, our tax cuts for business.

So that more businesses—large and small—will invest, grow and prosper, so that the many and not just the few will have the chance of starting their businesses, we today cut business taxes and introduce a special enterprise management incentive scheme to reward the risk-takers.

[Mr. Gordon Brown]

When we came into government, corporation tax for companies was 33 per cent. Today, it is 31 per cent. I confirm that, from April, we will further reduce the main rate of corporation tax from 31p to 30p—the lowest rate in the history of British corporation tax, the lowest rate of any major country in Europe, and the lowest rate of any major industrialised country anywhere, including Japan and the United States.

When we came into government, small companies tax was 23p in the pound.

In my first Budget, to encourage enterprise and investment, we reduced it to 21p, backdated to April 1997.

From April this year, the rate will be 20p. Three hundred and fifty thousand companies are benefiting, but I want to do more. I want to create an even lower rate, which will give new incentives for men and women to start their own businesses and work their way up.

I believe that the whole House will want to welcome what I am announcing: a new starting tax rate for small businesses of 10p in the pound. Every company making profits of up to £50,000 will benefit.

The legislation will ensure that the beneficiaries are genuinely those who take risks. And 85 per cent. of the firms gaining from the 10p tax rate will have fewer than 10 employees—the very firms that we most want to see grow; the very firms whose growth will create the greatest number of new jobs.

This is the lowest starting rate for small businesses in the entire history of United Kingdom corporation tax.

Where we inherited business tax rates of 33p and 23p, the rates will now be 30, 20 and 10. I give to all companies—large and small—an assurance not just for a year, but for the rest of this Parliament: there will be no return to the higher rates of the previous Parliament. For the life of this Parliament, the rates will be 30, 20, 10, or lower.

We will cut not only the tax rate but the cost of investing.

I am particularly keen to strengthen the ability of manufacturing industry to invest in new equipment and new technology, with targeted tax advantages for doing so. I recognise the difficulties faced by manufacturing as a result of global instability and the strong pound. And so I will set aside an additional £325 million to allow small and medium-sized companies to write off 40 per cent. of all they invest in the coming year.

In other areas, I am extending the tax allowance for new films made in Britain. And the shipping industry has put to me the case for enhanced training incentives and for a lower rate ring-fenced tonnage tax. While I am attracted to these options, I have to be satisfied that lower tax rates will not become a vehicle for tax avoidance and I am grateful to Lord Alexander for agreeing to conduct an independent study of the national and international issues involved.

Secondly, I propose next a tax reform that will reward risk and stimulate new enterprise at the cutting edge of technology. I want to recruit, motivate and reward Britain's risk-takers—the innovators capable of creating wealth and jobs in the Britain of tomorrow.

In the past, share option schemes, subsidised by the taxpayer, have rewarded those already at the top whose risks are low and rewards already high—such as utility chief executives, often operating in a monopoly environment.

Tomorrow, we will publish details of a very different kind of targeted tax cut for those who are prepared to move from secure jobs to venture their time and effort to create wealth for our country. The new enterprise management incentive will allow the award of equity worth up to £100,000 for success in building the new path-breaking companies our economy needs.

Our capital gains tax reforms will reward committed long-term investment.

For the first time, Britain now has the long-term rate of only 10 per cent.

I now announce the level at which capital gains tax will begin. There is no requirement for me to raise the threshold. But I have decided to do so.

For all individuals, from April, the first £7,100 will be free of capital gains tax. This measure will exempt 10,000 more people from capital gains tax altogether. Britain now has the lowest long-term rate of capital gains tax with the most generous threshold in history.

I now turn to the rate and threshold for inheritance tax. The rate will be unchanged and fewer people will pay the tax as I raise the threshold by £8,000 to £231,000.

Ninety-seven per cent. of estates will now be exempt from tax.

Third, I turn to targeted tax cuts and public investment to put Britain and British enterprise at the forefront of innovation.

I propose a new R and D tax credit, which will give business and small business—the biggest source of innovative ideas—cash help to research and develop their innovations even before they have made their first profits.

At a cost of £150 million a year, this targeted tax cut will underwrite almost one third of research and development costs for small businesses. And Britain therefore now has one of the best incentives for innovation anywhere in the industrialised world.

Scientific innovation, as we know, is a prime catalyst of growth. I want a winner's circle in innovation—inventions in Britain, that are then developed in Britain and manufactured in Britain, creating growth and jobs in Britain.

The seedbed is basic science, so I can announce £100 million new investment in university science laboratories and equipment, and this will be part of our £1 billion plus upgrading of British science.

To transform these British inventions into what we want—British-made products—I propose a 30 per cent. increase in the budget of the university challenge fund. To encourage large companies to invest venture capital in innovative small companies, we will tomorrow publish proposals for a new corporate tax incentive. To ensure the necessary flow of finance to high-risk companies, I am allocating £20 million for start-up funding for high-tech venture capital funds for England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

My fourth measure is a new competition policy. The sharpest spur to enterprise, the ingredient too often missing in our country, is—as we found in our productivity review—competition.

The productivity review has concluded that competition is not only the best stimulus to innovation and efficiency but gives the best prospect of a better deal for all consumers. It is time for more competition and lower prices in basic essentials like the utilities, financial services, indeed the whole range of consumer goods, where too often British consumers are paying far more than they should for what they need to buy.

It is wholly unacceptable that consumer goods can still cost up to twice as much in Britain as in America.

In 1997, so that interest rate decisions would be set for the long-term needs of the economy, the Government made the Bank of England—Britain's monetary authority—independent. Tomorrow, so that competition will be encouraged for the long-term needs of the economy and consumers, the Secretary of State for Trade and industry will set out a new competition policy for our country.

With 20 per cent. extra resources, the Office of Fair Trading will now be charged with a proactive remit to root out cartels and restrictive behaviour. Obstructing investigations will be a criminal offence. Wherever there is monopoly power, we will open up the way to competition and to new entrants.

The Deputy Prime Minister will review competition in airports and in the water industry, starting with industrial and commercial consumers.

The Financial Services Authority will now publish league tables of costs and charges in savings, insurance and pension products, to guarantee a better deal for consumers and to avoid the mis-selling of the past. To help all home owners, all building societies and banks will, for the first time, be obliged to publish reliable price information on mortgages.

Britain will have the most open competition policy the country has seen.

Fifth, to match our small business tax cuts with a new champion for small businesses in government, we will establish for the first time in our country a single small business service, devoted entirely to the needs of small business.

This one-stop open-door service—the small business service—will have new resources to offer loan guarantees, to support innovation, to advise on electronic commerce and deliver, for the first time, an automated payroll service to help new small companies starting out. Small businesses that file their tax returns electronically will be offered a discount.

Sixth, to open Britain's economy to the enterprise of all, we propose employee shares for all. Britain can and must become a democracy of enterprise, that gives all who create wealth a greater stake in the wealth they create.

Under our new programme of shares for all, employees will be able for the first time to buy shares in their own company from their pre-tax income. Every employer will be able to match, tax-free, what each employee buys.

This will be the most tax-advantaged all-employee share ownership scheme that Britain has had. Our only stipulation is that it really must be shares for all, offered right across the company's entire work force.

My seventh measure for enterprise. New targeted tax cuts and public investment to equip all our companies and all our people for what is the newest and most decisive challenge of the 21st century—the mastering in our economy of the new information technologies, from the PC to the internet, from e-mail to e-commerce.

This industry is the greatest driver of world economic growth today. Britain can no longer afford to lag behind America.

So, today, we are allocating an additional half a billion pounds from our capital modernisation fund to launch a £1.7 billion "Computers for All" initiative, a nationwide effort enlisting schools, colleges and companies, public and private sectors together, across the board, so that Britain can lead in the information economy.

Our target is a national network of 1,000 computer learning centres, one for every community in Britain. They will be in schools, colleges, libraries and internet cafes in the high street. It is a whole network of computer learning with one purpose only: that the whole of Britain is equipped for the information age.

Our targets for the new economy are ambitious: within three years, 1 million small businesses able to benefit from e-commerce; 32,000 schools connected to the internet, as a result of the work of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, and 370,000 teachers computer trained; new help worth £20 million making it possible for more teachers to have computers for home use.

Inequality in computer learning today will mean inequality in earning power tomorrow, so to bring more computers into more British homes, we will legislate so that employees will be able to secure computers on loan from their companies as a tax-free benefit.

Anyone left out of the new knowledge revolution will be left behind in the new knowledge economy. So we will pioneer a system under which local partnerships will be able to loan computers and software in the new century, in the way that local libraries loaned books in the past century.

In the new economy, the more individual talent we nurture, the more economic growth we will achieve. The tax system will offer further incentives for people to upgrade old skills and learn new ones.

From this year, 1 million men and women will start to receive £150 to set up their own individual learning accounts. This puts the power to plan and prepare for their careers in their own hands.

In this Budget, we will expand individual learning accounts and open up tax-free learning in computers, in basic skills and advanced skills to millions more people.

We will legislate so that employers will be able to contribute tax-free to the new individual learning accounts.

Employees will also pay no tax on such payments.

And this will be skills for all, because the opportunity to learn must be offered across the company's entire work force.

We need to do more and the Budget will go further, offering discounts for learning.

Any adult with an individual learning account will now be able to claim a discount of 20 per cent., an additional grant of up to £100, on the cost of vocational learning.

For all adults signing up to improve their basic education—including computer literacy—there will be a discount of 80 per cent. on course fees.

[Mr. Gordon Brown]

We will pay for this measure in tax-free learning by phasing out the existing vocational tax relief which, among other things, has been subsidising non-vocational courses like diving and flying lessons. *[Interruption.]* It was introduced by the Conservative party.

This century, Britain has achieved universal free education for children. This Budget introduces the new opportunity for universal education for adults—lifelong learning so that everyone will have the chance to succeed in the new economy.

ENVIRONMENT

As Britain works to lead in the new economy, we must resolve to lead also in respecting the environment.

Our Government's target is to reduce greenhouse emissions by 12½ per cent. by 2010. So today, I am announcing a programme of measures that will cut carbon pollution by 3 million tonnes.

My first proposal alone will reduce carbon pollution by 1.5 million tonnes. The Government have received Lord Marshall's report, for which I thank him, on the role of economic instruments and the business use of energy.

We will now implement Lord Marshall's recommendations and we will introduce a levy on business use of energy from April 2001. And it will be brought in, after further consultation with the industry, on a revenue-neutral basis, with no overall increase in the burden of taxation on business. Because we intend at the same time to cut the main rate of employers' national insurance contributions from 12.2 per cent. to 11.7 per cent.

We also intend to set significantly lower rates of tax for energy-intensive sectors that improve their energy efficiency. Today, we are inviting these companies to submit their proposals. In pursuit of our policies for sustainable development, we will allocate an extra £50 million to encourage business to invest in the new environmental technologies and in renewable fuels.

In line with the fuel escalator first introduced by the previous Government at 5 per cent. above inflation and now 6, petrol duty will rise from 6 pm today.

Vehicle excise duty for smaller cars will, from 1 June this year, be cut by £55—the first cut in the licence fee in 50 years. Other cars' rates are only increased in line with inflation.

I will freeze vehicle excise duty for 98 per cent. of all lorries, and for lorries and buses with clean engines I am cutting the licence fee by up to £1,000.

To encourage a switch to cleaner fuels, last year I promised to give an additional tax advantage to ultra-low sulphur diesel. By the end of the year, almost all producers will have switched to this cleaner fuel. This alone will cut their emissions by 20 per cent. and at a revenue cost of over £400 million, I will maintain this favourable tax treatment for cleaner diesel.

I also propose a reform to reward the use of fuel-efficient company cars and to remove today's counter-productive incentive to drive more miles in order to get bigger discounts. So I start in this Budget with a measure that will cost the company car user with a typical car around £1 a week. This reform—to link tax to emissions—will be implemented finally in 2002 on a revenue-neutral basis.

To reduce pollution, employees from this year will be able for the first time to secure tax-free from their employer the benefit from employer-run or employer-subsidised buses, car-sharing schemes and other environmentally friendly means of transport to work.

Last year, we set up the new rural transport fund. To build on its success in extending the range of public transport services in rural communities, we will increase its funding—and, therefore, its accessibility for rural services—for the next two years by 20 per cent. to £120 million.

To reduce the amount of waste going to landfill, the landfill tax, £10 per tonne in 1999, will in future rise by £1 per tonne per year.

Taking into account all these tax changes and all the changes that I have yet to announce, there will be a net tax cut of £4 billion in this Budget.

FAMILIES

I turn now to policy for families. Children are 20 per cent. of the British people, but they are 100 per cent. of Britain's future. To build that future, this Budget provides a better deal for families and children.

Family life is the foundation of society, and our first principle in society's support for the family is that the interests of children must be paramount.

For the last third of this century, families with children have been losers in the tax system. Their tax burden has risen by nearly 20 per cent. under successive Governments—even though the time when children are growing up is the time when families need tax help most.

So it is time to reform the tax and benefit system to strengthen the family by putting children first.

What is today called the married couple's allowance is in fact neither restricted to marriage, nor restricted to couples; nor is it strictly an allowance. It is in fact a tax credit paid at the same flat rate to married couples, single parents and unmarried parents living together.

Far from recognising marriage, it is now so confused that it can even be paid at twice the rate in the year of separation or divorce. A married couple's allowance that can pay more for separation or divorce cannot be said to uphold the institution of marriage.

The last Government called the married couple's allowance an anomaly and reduced it from 40 per cent. to 15 per cent., cutting its value in half.

If we were now to restrict the married couple's allowance to married couples only, as some propose, we would unfairly exclude, for example, widows with children, and wives who have been deserted and left to bring up their children alone.

So I have responded to many representations and views, including one that said that

"if we were going to phase out the married couple's allowance we should have replaced it at the same time with a new allowance, better targeted on families who really need the help"—

the words of the Leader of the Opposition.

So we will replace the married couple's allowance with a new family tax cut that will increase the amount that goes to help families with children. This children's tax credit will give more—not less—help to families at the time when they need it most, when they have their children and when their children are growing up.

Today's pensioner couples will retain the married couple's allowance. Couples without children, or whose children have grown up, will benefit from other changes I will shortly announce.

The married couple's allowance is today worth £190 to married couples. The children's tax credit, the tax cut for families to be introduced from April 2001, will be worth £416, and, as a result, the typical family with children will be over £200 a year better off.

This tax cut for families represents the first recognition in the tax system for over 20 years of the extra costs of bringing up children. Under my proposals, the tax burden on the typical family will fall to its lowest level for 25 years. I will introduce similar improvements in the working families tax credit and income support for children.

In the Budget last year, I set down the two principles that govern my approach: we must substantially increase support for families with children and we must do so in the fairest way. It is in fulfilment of those two principles that the children's tax credit will be tapered away for the higher-earning family where there is a top-rate taxpayer.

In the light of this reform, my Budget decision is that child benefit will not be taxed for taxpayers on the basic rate, or on the higher rate. As our manifesto promised, child benefit itself will remain as it is, paid to all mothers, rising annually with inflation.

When we came to power, child benefit for the first child was £11.45 a week. Next month, it will rise to £14.40.

It has risen by 25 per cent. since we came to Government—an increase of £150 a year.

I now propose a further increase in child benefit, well above the rate of inflation. It will rise next April to £15 a week for the first child, £780 year. I will also raise the rate for the second and further children beyond inflation to £10 a week.

Support for children as a result of all the measures that I am announcing will be twice as high at the end of this Parliament as it was at the beginning.

With the children's tax credit added to child benefit, families who were receiving £11 a week in 1997 for their first child will be receiving £23 a week, £1,200 a year.

And, taking all our reforms together, the maximum support for the first child will be £40 a week for families when they need it most.

Every child in the country in every family will get more, not less, support under this system—support ranging from £780 a year to £2,000 a year, and every child will receive more year on year.

When we came into power, we found a chaotic, even counter-productive system of child support. It gave far too little help to mothers. It did not provide enough to those who needed it most.

Child benefit had not been increased every year in line with inflation. The married couple's allowance could not fulfil its intended purpose. Income support for children was based on family status, not on family need. Family credit failed to guarantee a living wage for working families. What the benefits system gave with one hand, the tax system was taking with the other.

Our long-term goal is to bring together the different strands of our support for children in the working families tax credit, in income support, in our children's tax credit and so create an integrated and seamless system of child financial support paid to the mother, building on the foundation of universal child benefit.

Already, with the changes that we are making today, we are creating the best system of family support in the history of this country.

I also had to consider the alternative case that has been advocated for a transferable tax allowance for mothers who stay at home. The better deal for mothers who stay at home is what we are doing from October this year—the working families tax credit. A family with two children on £15,000 a year where the mother stays at home would have received nothing under the old system of family credit. Transferable tax allowances, as some propose, would give them £997. Under the working families tax credit, they will receive £1,460.

Where both parents need to work, we will do more to help them to balance the demands of making a living and having children.

With 1 million new child care places now being created and, from October, our new child care tax credit set at a maximum of £70 for one child and £105 for two children, Britain has a national child care strategy for the first time in our history.

From December 1999, all parents will be entitled to three months' unpaid leave for each child.

But currently up to 15 per cent. of working mothers-to-be are not entitled to any maternity pay. That is wrong. Today's Budget will ensure that all mothers in work earning £30 a week or more—90 per cent. of all women in work—are entitled to maternity pay and to 18 weeks of maternity pay. That is family-friendly employment in action.

Every year, a quarter of a million children—even at the minute they are born—are born into poverty. This, too, is wrong.

Our sure start programme for the under-threes, beginning next month, will ensure that the full resources of health visitors, primary care and schools are there to give every young child a better chance.

Today, we are announcing a new sure start maternity grant: Government offering more help to parents, but in return for parents meeting their responsibilities. Help amounting to £200 will be conditional, linked to keeping appointments for child health advice and child health check-ups.

When we came into power, one child in every three in our country was in poverty. With our measures today, 700,000 children are being lifted out of poverty. Families with children are better off. Instead of a past that developed only some of the potential of some our children, the future depends on developing all of the potential of all of our children.

The Elderly

As the Budget creates a better deal for those starting out, the Budget will today provide a better deal for all those who have worked hard all their lives: the elderly. Today, I am announcing new measures that will help all pensioners—help for those who are poor, for those with incomes above benefit level but who are not wealthy, indeed for every retired person and every retired couple, taxpayers and non-taxpayers alike: a better deal in the minimum pension guarantee, in the winter allowance, and on savings and tax.

[Mr. Gordon Brown]

This Government created the minimum income guarantee for pensioners. Today, I can confirm that, next April, that minimum guarantee will be increased not just in line with prices but in line with earnings. As a result of the changes we are making, the minimum income guarantee for the single pensioner will be £78 a week—which is nearly £500 a year, or £10 a week, higher than when the Government came to office.

Pensioner couples will have a minimum income guarantee of over £120 a week—which is nearly £800 a year, or £16 a week higher than in 1997.

As a result of measures already taken—our cut in VAT on fuel, with tougher regulation and the winter allowance—pensioners are saving £108 on their fuel bills; the poorest pensioners have been saving £140.

But I can announce today that we will do more.

The winter allowance is currently paid to all 8 million elderly households, at £20.

I have decided to raise it to £100 for all 8 million elderly households.

And this is not a one-time need or a one-time decision. In future years, the winter allowance will be £100 for all 8 million elderly households.

To help the elderly to get more out of their savings, I have asked National Savings to issue a new National Savings pensioners bond. With the shorter-term deposits that pensioners seek, the new bond will offer the returns that pensioners need.

I have a further improvement: a tax cut for the elderly. I am announcing a reform that will ensure that a total of 7 million elderly men and women will now be outside the income tax system.

For pensioners, I have decided to raise the personal tax allowance in excess of inflation.

Single pensioners will not pay any tax until they have an income of £5,720. Older pensioner couples who both use their personal allowances to the full will now not pay tax until they have income above £15,000.

Therefore, 200,000 more pensioners will not have to pay income tax.

In total, two thirds of pensioners will now not pay income tax.

Taken together, the measures I have already announced add up to an additional £3 billion for the elderly—a better deal for the elderly that makes the typical pensioner household £240 a year better off.

To help pay for that, from today, excise duty on tobacco will rise by the normal escalator: 5 per cent. above inflation. Organised smuggling, which is now a £1½ billion a year racket, will not be permitted to undo a policy on cigarettes that successive British Governments have adopted for good and urgent health reasons. As the Government strengthen their anti-smuggling strategy, we will target new resources to detect, prevent and punish this costly form of organised crime.

And I had a decision to make on beer and spirits. I have decided to freeze the duty on spirits, on beer and on wine at its current level. There will be no tax rise on alcohol this side of the millennium.

I will cut the tax on pools from 28 March by one third from 26.5 per cent. down to 17.5 per cent. On this basis, the pools companies have agreed future funding of around £20 million a year for the Football Trust and the Foundation for Sport and the Arts. Details of this, of minor duty changes and of measures to combat tax avoidance are published this afternoon.

Insurance premium tax will rise by 1p in the pound from 1 July, although 80 per cent. of insurance underwritten in Britain will remain exempt.

On VAT, today I propose there will be no increase in rates and no extension of VAT.

I have decided to make no change to stamp duty on property sales up to £250,000. For property sales above that, the rates will be raised by ½ per cent. from next Tuesday. Ninety six per cent. of home sales are unaffected.

I now turn to our review of charities. A Britain of strong families is also a Britain of strong communities.

Each year, more than 1 million people give up their time in voluntary work.

Millions more give money to our national charities.

The Prime Minister has rightly called for our age to become a giving age.

I want to mark the millennium in the best way by making 2000 the giving year.

In the last Budget, we introduced millennium gift aid.

For every £100 a British citizen donates to third world causes before the end of the year 2000, the Government will contribute £30.

When millennium gift aid is launched on 18 March, I urge British people to give more to those who have too little.

As Governments make their contribution to third world debt relief, all of us can make a contribution to third world poverty relief.

Today, in our consultation document on tax and charities, we propose extending the tax advantages of millennium gift aid. We propose that every charity, national and international, should be able to benefit from this new tax relief.

We propose in future for every £100 a British citizen donates to any charity, through tax relief the Government will contribute £30.

Instead of charities seen in the old way, the rich bestowing favours on the poor, I want a democracy of giving where all those who can, help all those who cannot.

Work

Most fundamentally, the tax reforms of this Budget provide a better deal for the hard-working majority—a ladder of opportunity for those who want to work, a chance to keep more of what they earn and, for all, a fundamental guarantee that work will pay.

Our reforms in national insurance will give employers an overall tax cut of £1.5 billion and employees an overall tax cut on work of £2.5 billion—an average of £130 per year per employee.

This April, as I implement the report by Martin Taylor, I am abolishing the perverse tax on work, the entry fee that every employee has to pay simply to be part of the

national insurance system. From this cut on work worth over £1.4 billion a year, every one of 20 million employees will gain £69 a year from April.

Over the two financial years to follow, I will further align the starting point with that of income tax so that no one will have to pay either national insurance or income tax on the first £87 of their weekly earning. From this tax cut on work worth £1.8 billion a year, every employee will gain £99 a year.

From April 2001 therefore, the lower limit for employees, self-employed and employers national insurance will be harmonised at £87 a week—the same as income tax. As with the lower earnings limit which is rising faster than inflation, the upper limit will rise to £575 and to complete our reforms we will also align employers national insurance and income tax in the treatment of benefits in kind.

I also propose to extend to the self-employed national insurance rights to the full maternity allowance.

Again, to implement the recommendations of the Taylor report, we will align national insurance arrangements for the self-employed closer to those of employees. We will reduce the unfair entry fee from £6.35 a week to £2 and we will set the class four threshold at the same point as the personal income tax allowance. But I will set contributions at a lower rate than envisaged by the Taylor report, at 7 per cent. in contrast with the 10 per cent. employees pay.

Some 230,000 young people are now benefiting from the new deal. Now we must bring in those young unemployed who, for whatever reason, have yet to join.

I say to them, this is our new deal for 1999: there will be better provision but there will be tougher conditions. Our responsibility is to offer training and intensive coaching to help young people get jobs. In return, their responsibility is to come into the new deal, get the skills and prepare to take a job.

We will also help lone parents make the transition into jobs. Benefits will continue when they first start work.

For them and others, the working families tax credit will make work pay more than benefits.

Every working family will be guaranteed a minimum income. It will be introduced in October not at the previously announced rate of £190 a week, but at £200 a week—more than £10,000 a year. No income tax will be paid until earnings reach £235 a week.

This is a tax cut available to 1.4 million families that will help 3 million children in our country.

I propose that, over time, we seek to extend this principle.

The old tax system that we inherited set a personal allowance that failed to ensure that work paid, and also made thousands pay tax even when they were forced to claim benefits.

Not just families but all who work should be guaranteed a minimum income, and this minimum income will be paid through targeted tax cuts and credits. No one who is in work should in future have to go to the benefits office to receive a living income.

We start in this Budget with a minimum income guarantee—a new deal for over-50s returning to work.

Nearly 30 per cent. of men over 50 are outside the labour force—twice as many as 20 years ago.

We need their talents. For those unemployed for six months or more, we will create a new employment credit which will guarantee a minimum income of £9,000 a year, for their first year back in full-time work—at least £170 a week.

And, over time, I want this better deal for work to include help with housing costs—not just help with rent but also help for home owners going back to work. Taking a job should not put them in danger of losing their homes.

Successive Governments have lowered mortgage tax relief from 40 per cent. to 10 per cent. of interest costs and they have frozen the limits at the first £30,000 of a mortgage.

Today the allowance is worth an average of £2.50 a week.

In the last year, mortgage rates have come down significantly and I now recognise that there is a consensus across this House.

I have had many Budget representations and read many contributions to the long-standing debate about the housing market. One of them said that MIRAS has

"outlived its usefulness . . . it should be abolished . . the sooner it happens, the better."

Those are the words of the now shadow Chancellor.

For our part, as we complete the phasing out of MIRAS, we will ensure that families are better off.

We said in our manifesto that we would introduce a 10p starting rate of income tax for individuals when it was prudent to do so.

I repeated in the last Budget that we would introduce the 10p starting rate when it was prudent to do so.

However, I have to tell the House that the 10p rate will not start in April 2000, like other income tax changes we are making today.

It is prudent instead for people to get the benefit of the 10p starting rate now.

So it will take effect in April 1999, a 10p starting rate on the first £1,500 of income, the lowest starting rate of tax since 1962, and it will be delivered a few weeks from today. People will see it in their pay packets in May.

Nearly 2 million people will see their income tax bills cut in half, and take home 90p of every pound they earn.

The new income tax structure will this year be 10, 23, and 40. And income tax allowances, income limits and tax thresholds will rise as usual in line with inflation. The tax rates on savings will remain unchanged.

So this is a Budget with a 10p starting rate of income tax, a 10p starting rate of small business tax, a 10p long-term rate for capital gains tax. The maximum small business tax is now down to 20p and corporation tax for big companies is down to 30p in the pound.

As a result of all the tax reforms we are making, the typical one-earner family on the average wage with two children will be £460 a year better off and a two-earner family on 175 per cent. of the average wage will be £500 a year better off.

[Mr. Gordon Brown]

The tax cuts I have made today are tax cuts to encourage work and make work pay, tax cuts for a purpose. They help all middle and lower-income families. They are tax cuts for the many and they are being made at the best time for the economy.

I can confirm that the share of tax in national income next year will fall. The tax burden on the typical family with children will fall below 20 per cent. for the first time in 20 years, after our reforms.

MODERNISING PUBLIC SERVICES

I have one further set of announcements to make.

After long years of neglect, step by step this Government are rebuilding our public services.

On top of the £40 billion we are already investing in education and health, we can today allocate increased resources for key public services.

We have identified specific areas where step changes can be made through additional investment from our capital modernisation fund.

We are allocating an additional £170 million for crime prevention in areas where crime is highest. The Home Secretary will make a detailed statement on this to the House.

For public transport, in addition to the rural transport fund we have created, we will make a further allocation that will be announced by the Deputy Prime Minister.

For Northern Ireland, today we allocate additional capital spending of £50 million; for Wales, £80 million; for Scotland, £165 million. Full details of the new investments will be given by the Secretaries of State.

The £19 billion we are already providing for education will finance smaller class sizes, more nursery education, better pay for better teachers, our drive to improve literacy and numeracy and we will help 700,000 more young people to go on to further and higher education.

But, so that every child will have that chance, we need specific and targeted help for our inner-city schools. For upgrading their technology, the Secretary of State for Education and Employment will receive an additional £100 million.

And for every school in the country, we will not only invest in new technology. As a result of our prudence in the last year, and following the huge take-up of the additional money provided last year, we are able this month to make another extra and larger allocation for school books: £2,000 to every school in every constituency in every part of the country; immediate new resources of £60 million; a total of 10 million new books in all.

I turn to the health service.

The £21 billion extra money is making possible the largest hospital-building programme since the war; a £1 billion investment in modern technology taking place in the NHS; the recruitment of 7,000 new doctors; 15,000 more nurses; and a fair pay award for nurses.

The Government's new programme, NHS Direct, is a proven success.

And the Secretary of State for Health will announce detailed proposals not only to extend it to all of the country by the end of next year, but to carry NHS Direct right into communities, with a network of health and drop-in centres where people can get immediate advice about treatment.

We have already provided additional resources for upgrading one third of all accident and emergency units that need modernisation.

Today, we can go further.

To enhance in every part of the United Kingdom the health care that people most urgently require, we today make an additional and immediate cash allocation, to be spent in the next 12 months, for the upgrading of every single accident and emergency unit that needs it, in every part of the country.

For this and other improvements that the Secretaries of State for Health, for Scotland, for Wales and for Northern Ireland will announce, I am providing for the NHS almost half a billion pounds of extra investment today.

Throughout the public services, more than £1 billion of additional new investment, on top of the £2 billion that I have allocated to families and pensioners.

Public services in the months and years ahead, safe in this Government's hands.

I have one final announcement.

We promised to get inflation and interest rates under control, to sort out the public finances, to make this the Government of economic competence, and we have.

We promised to invest billions more in health and education, and we have.

We promised we would cut youth unemployment, and we have.

I can confirm to the House that, while rebuilding our public services, our prudence in office also enables us to hold to our pledge made at the election not to raise the basic rate of income tax.

In fact, to reward work and ensure that working families are better off, I will match the new 10p starting rate of income tax this April with a cut from next April in the basic rate of income tax to 22p, the lowest basic rate of tax for 70 years and under this Government.

Today's Budget is a better deal for work, a better deal for the family, a better deal for business. It is for a Britain now united around values of fairness and enterprise. This is a better deal for Britain and I commend this Budget not only to the House but to the country.

PROVISIONAL COLLECTION OF TAXES

Motion made, and Question,

That, pursuant to section 5 of the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act 1968, provisional statutory effect shall be given to the following motions:—

(a) Sparkling cider (rate of duty) (motion No. 2);

(b) Hydrocarbon oil duties (rates and rebates) (motion No. 3);

(c) Tobacco products duty (rates) (motion No. 5);

(d) Vehicle excise duty (increase in general rate) (motion No. 7);

(e) Vehicle excise duty (rates for goods vehicles etc.) (motion No. 9).—*[Mr. Gordon Brown.]*

put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 51 (Ways and Means Motions), and agreed to.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I now call the Chancellor of the Exchequer to move the motion entitled "Amendment of the law". It is on that motion that the debate will take place today and on succeeding days. The remaining motions will not be put until the end of the Budget debate next week, and they will then be decided without debate.

Budget Resolutions and Economic Situation

AMENDMENT OF THE LAW

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That it is expedient to amend the law with respect to the National Debt and the public revenue and to make further provision in connection with finance; but this Resolution does not extend to the making of any amendment with respect to value added tax so as to provide—

(a) for zero-rating or exempting a supply, acquisition or importation;

(b) for refunding an amount of tax;

(c) for varying any rate at which that tax is at any time chargeable; or

(d) for any relief other than a relief which—

(i) so far as it is applicable to goods, applies to goods of every description, and

(ii) so far as it is applicable to services, applies to services of every description.—[*Mr. Gordon Brown.*]

4.40 pm

Mr. William Hague (Richmond, Yorks): I begin, as ever and as usual, by complimenting the Chancellor on his fortitude in delivering a lengthy speech, and there are some things in the Budget that we wish to welcome. I of course welcome the reduction in the standard rate of income tax, which the Chancellor announced with great fanfare at the end of his speech after passing quickly over the abolition of the 20p band, with much less fanfare, earlier in his speech. Labour Members may also wish to know that all the announcements that the Chancellor made about the capital modernisation fund come from a Budget that has already been announced and that they cheered at the time. As the press release that I have just received appears to show, all those figures are from a fund that has already been announced, with no net increase in the total.

As ever, the most interesting thing about what the Chancellor said was what he did not say. He did not say—but it is the truth—that the total tax burden will rise next year as a result of his cumulative decisions. He did not say—but it is the truth—that, as a result of his decisions in three Budgets, this is the third year running in which we will have higher taxes because of the decisions of this Government. Last year, he had imposed higher taxes twice in a row, and that gave him a reputation for higher taxes. After three years in a row, he gets to keep that reputation for ever.

It would not have been apparent from the Chancellor's speech that he has already announced in previous Budgets tax increases for the coming year that add up to £7,200 million, including taxes on pension funds of £5.4 billion, earlier decisions on the married couples allowance of £1 billion and increases in petrol duty of £1.4 billion. *[Interruption.]* Labour Members like to cheer reductions, but they do not like to hear the truth about the increases. There have also been increases in stamp duty of £1 billion. People who have invested in pension funds, people who are married and people struggling to run their cars have already been paying for this Budget and those increases have already been locked in.

The Chancellor said that the Budget is good for families. It is good for families who do not have a mortgage, who are not married, who do not run a car, who do not smoke and who do not save for a pension. For a family like that, the Budget is fine. There may even be

[Mr. William Hague]

a family like that somewhere in the country: it sounds suspiciously like the Chancellor to me. If we add it all up, he has already levied additional taxes of £1,500 for every taxpayer in the country—to which he has made marginal changes today—including increases in income tax in previous Budgets amounting to an extra £200 for a typical married couple with a mortgage.

The Chancellor is now posing as the man who likes to distribute a few little goodies, when he has imposed for the current year a huge rise in taxation. He is the man you meet in a pub who says, "Lend us a fiver and then I'll buy you a drink." He is the pickpocket Chancellor who shakes your hand with a smile after he has stealthily removed your wallet. He is the pickpocket Chancellor, aided and abetted by his next-door neighbour, the artful dodger.

The Chancellor seems to try to deny the facts of the matter. The actual fact of his first year as Chancellor was that he raised the tax burden by £6,000 million. Let him get up and deny that if it is not right. If it is right, he should tell the Prime Minister, because he has only just realised that in the past couple of weeks. In the Chancellor's second Budget, he raised taxes for this year by £7,900 million. He might have said in his Budget speech what the total rise in the tax burden will be as a result of his decisions. He had over an hour. We heard a lot of waffle, but he forgot to mention that line.

It is no good the Chancellor claiming that taxes are not rising. Last week, the Prime Minister finally let the cat out of the bag. He had denied for months that taxes were rising, but last week he looked at his folder and accidentally read out the truth. He said:

"the tax burden will increase".—[*Official Report*, 5 March 1999; Vol. 326, c. 1075.]

What a total betrayal that was from the man who said at the general election that there would be no tax increases at all.

The truth after three Budgets is that the total of taxation is still rising, and the Chancellor did not have the guts to say so in his speech. Nor did he draw attention to other matters that are becoming apparent as we look into the facts that are emerging about his announcements. For example, there is a dramatic fall in the savings ratio. Not only has it fallen from 11 per cent. to 7.5 per cent. over the past two years, but there has been a fall from the Chancellor's own previous forecast, from 9.25 per cent. to 7.5 per cent. The Chancellor said nothing about savings, on which the story of the Government's policy is one of emerging disaster.

The Chancellor will understand it if I say that we must see emerging information about, and figures for, much of what he has announced, because he is not only an expert on stealth taxes, but an expert in giving a stealth speech. Last year, the £3.6 billion hike in corporation tax was described as

"a new instalments system of payments for . . . corporation tax".—[*Official Report*, 17 March 1998; Vol. 308, c. 1100.]

There was, however, no reference then to the tax increase that would result.

In 1997, the Chancellor's £5 billion tax on pension funds was described in the pocket guide to the Budget as "other taxes to encourage companies to invest".

As the director general of the Confederation of British Industry has said:

"There is concern about the accumulation of extra costs which have been imposed on business, of which the biggest was actually the Corporation Tax changes which were very carefully portrayed as a reduction in tax rates but were actually a tax increase, exploiting the fact that the number of people in the world who understood Dividend Tax Credits is remarkably few, which allows the Chancellor to raise taxes while appearing to cut them."

Who knows, then, what will lie behind some of the seemingly innocuous sentences that the Chancellor uttered today? Any apparently nondescript sentence could mean a clobbering for people anywhere in the country—and we heard quite a few nondescript sentences. We already know that, at the same time as the Chancellor is trumpeting tax incentives to help some firms, the Government are damaging businesses across the board with a mass of employment costs, from the social chapter to statutory union recognition and the working time directive.

The Chancellor talks about investment, but we all know that his first Budget introduced a £5 billion tax on pension funds, and that tax has hit investment. We already know that, while he claims to cut taxes, taxes on people and businesses are soaring. We already know that the Government say one thing and do another, take a pound and give back a few pennies. They cannot be trusted to be straight, even on Budget day.

Last week, the Prime Minister said that he wanted our economy to be more like the American economy. One week has passed, and the Chancellor has made his Budget speech. Where is the American dream? Where is the radical plan to reduce welfare bills? So far, the Government have added £40 billion to welfare bills; America is cutting its welfare bills.

Where is the programme to curb union power, or to increase labour market flexibility? The Federation of Small Businesses says:

"If the Government wants to take a leaf out of the American book, it would ensure the small firms sector wasn't suffocated with paperwork."

The Engineering Employers Federation adds of the Chancellor:

"He seems to be saying one thing and doing something else."

What a surprise that is. The federation goes on:

"His message is about freeing labour markets while at the same time your average small engineering company is being buried under a tide of legislation and paper."

In the United States, businesses with turnover of under $0.5 million are usually exempt from the minimum wage. In Florida, it costs $150 to set up a new corporation, but in Europe there are thousands of pages of new regulations. In the United States, small businesses flourish because the Government leave them alone. Where are the Government's measures to implement the American dream about which the Prime Minister spoke so proudly last week?

Another remarkable part of the Chancellor's speech concerned the economic forecasts on which his whole Budget is based. Experts will be astonished that his forecasts for GDP growth remain unchanged from the figures announced last autumn. He forecast 1 to 1.5 per cent. growth this year, but the upper end of his forecast is three times the rate of growth forecast by independent economists and published by the Treasury. He forecast 2.25 to 2.75 per cent. growth next year, whereas the

consensus of independent experts is that growth will be 1.8 per cent. That is the basis of the whole Budget and of all the Chancellor's calculations—the basis on which, even on his own figures, in the coming years there will be no repayment of public sector debt at any point in the cycle. That is not how the right hon. Gentleman chose to put it in his Budget speech, but it is the truth of the figures.

Behind the statistics of an economic slowdown, we see families under pressure, and businesses struggling in a manufacturing sector that the Chancellor will have further hit today, as I shall describe shortly. Since the right hon. Gentleman entered office, the forecasts for this country have been downgraded more sharply than for any country in the western industrialised world. Much of our manufacturing industry is in recession, and our entire agricultural industry is in deep recession. The extracts of the Red Book that I have seen so far cover that up with statements such as:

"these undershoots relative to the Pre-Budget Report"

reflect

"a larger negative contribution to GDP growth"

by manufacturing output. In other words, manufacturing is in a mess, yet that is the sort of verbiage that the Chancellor or his civil servants come out with.

On enterprise, of which the Chancellor has made much, there are policies that we shall welcome. We shall welcome the new corporation tax starting rate of 10p for small businesses, although we shall want to know who will judge whether they are taking the right amount of risk, as the Chancellor appeared to foreshadow in his speech. He made much of his new package of reliefs and incentives for enterprise and, when we have looked at the details, we shall welcome some of them, including the research and development credit.

The very fact that the Chancellor appears so pleased with his latest package of measures, however, shows that he has completely missed the point. Does he not realise that what businesses need, much more than a new incentive here and a clever relief there, is to be set free from the massive burden of new taxes and regulations heaped on them by the Government? It is no good handing out one relief today and putting up other taxes tomorrow. It is no good the Chancellor coming here to talk about introducing tax breaks when the new Paymaster General chairs an Economic and Finance Council committee that is abolishing the tax breaks for the film industry that the right hon. Gentleman introduced less than a year ago.

The shipping industry will be deeply disappointed by the Chancellor's announcement today. It is hypocritical of the Government to fail to act, having raised such high expectations before the Budget. British shipping is an industry with desperate problems, and the right hon. Gentleman will have to explain why he has not been able to resolve the problems that he talked about previously. It is because he has been unable to do that that the president of the CBI says that regulations are now producing "creeping paralysis." The Association of British Chambers of Commerce said this morning that the Government have abolished 20 regulations and introduced more than 2,000. A small business man, quoted in a Sunday newspaper said:

"The Government is like a professor in a laboratory tinkering with his inventions and not knowing what the real world is."

The bad news from today's Budget is that the professor is still tinkering, that the whole of business in this country is his laboratory and that he still does not know what the real world is.

If they are to be effective, all the schemes that the Chancellor has announced for enterprise will need to be far more effectively implemented than the Government's policies on saving over the past couple of years. If there is one area that the right hon. Gentleman has hammered more than any other and about which he has done nothing in today's Budget, it is Britain's saving culture, which has been hit by stealth taxes. It says something about the inner mentality of the Government that people who work hard, save hard and try to be independent of the state are finding themselves penalised.

The effects can be seen in the dramatic fall in the savings ratio, of which the Chancellor made no mention. The pensions tax that he introduced is costing a typical 30-year-old saver an average of £150 a year. The abolition of tax credits for non-taxpayers, many of whom are pensioners on modest incomes, is costing 300,000 pensioners an average of £75 a year. Today, the right hon. Gentleman had the opportunity to put that right, but he decided not to do so.

The Chancellor also announced the crazy abolition of PEPs and TESSAs—the most successful savings vehicles in our history. One month before the general election, the Prime Minister said:

"the idea that the Labour Party is going to take action against PEPs and TESSAs is completely absurd".

What is absurd is the idea that the Prime Minister would keep his promise. In three weeks, those vehicles will be abolished and replaced by the new individual savings account. There was a time when the Prime Minister used to claim that that would produce 6 million new savers. Does he still think that the new savings account will attract 6 million new savers? No, he does not say that any more. He no longer wants to hear my question, let alone answer it. Savings vehicles must be simple, and the Government have made a complete mess of savings policy in this country. They have done nothing in today's Budget to put that right.

The figures about the tax burden are beginning to come through. It seems that the tax burden is set to rise from 38.9 per cent. in the first year—which was already an increase—to 39.5 per cent. of gross domestic product in 2001 and 2002. When we do the arithmetic, it also appears—*[Interruption.]* Some of us must make sense of the Chancellor's distorted announcements as we go along. Today's Budget will raise taxes next year by £1.6 billion. As a result of the Chancellor's three Budgets, taxes are set to rise by £8.9 billion. That is the actual total.

The Chancellor today introduced the long-awaited and much-vaunted 10p tax rate. We welcome any reduction in income tax, including the 10p tax rate—although I note that the Chancellor also abolished the 20p tax rate. As a result of the Government's decisions, income tax will rise from the level it was at when Labour took office, and should be viewed in that context.

We welcome the decision to bring the starting point for employees' national insurance contributions into line with the starting point for income tax. However, the Government must not forget that a number of benefits are linked to national insurance contributions. We want to ensure that the Government do not use that measure to undermine the contributory principle.

[Mr. William Hague]

The measures announced by the Chancellor regarding the national insurance contributions of the self-employed look, at first glance, like a higher tax on the self-employed overall. The Chancellor shrugs his shoulders and looks as though it is a matter of no consequence. However, it will greatly concern the self-employed if that reform results in a further increase in taxation for them. I note that the Chancellor is not taking the opportunity to deny that the measure will have that result.

The Chancellor's announcement about shares for all is welcome in itself, but it is in conflict with everything that he has done—and continues to do—in the area of share ownership. It is a bit rich for the Chancellor to talk in glowing terms about the merits of employee share ownership, given that he has spent the past two years undermining share ownership at every turn. What message does it send about share ownership when the Government prevent people who are too poor even to pay tax from claiming back tax credits on the few shares that they own?

What message does it send about having a stake in one's own business when the Government abolish retirement relief on capital gains tax, bringing thousands of small business people who are selling up for their retirement into the tax net for the first time? Such people have worked hard all their working lives and regard their businesses as their pensions for the future. The Chancellor has not thought about them in this Budget. If this were really a Budget for enterprise and work, the Chancellor would have reversed his previous stupid decision. We welcome any move to boost employee share ownership, but we will judge the Government by what they have done, not by what they say they might do.

I welcome the principle of incentives for people to run cars with low emission engines, which is good news. However, it is bad news for the Deputy Prime Minister, who is even now heading for the Maldives and will be delighted to know from the Chancellor's speech that he is to be given the job of reviewing competition in airports. He is presumably in the Maldives examining how they integrate their transport strategy. Looking at how to integrate sunbathing with water-skiing will come in handy in Hull.

Lower road tax must be put in the context of the stealth taxes being loaded on to motorists at the same time. Not only have the Government increased the so-called fuel escalator from 5 to 6 per cent., but they have brought forward the annual Budget increases from November to March and sneaked in an extra Budget. AA figures reveal that average motorists will pay £183 a year more in tax on their petrol next year than at the time of the last election. That is an extra 62p a gallon and it is another stealth tax on motorists. People will be grateful for £55 off the excise duty, but they are left £130 a year worse off than they were going to be in the first place.

Few people will be aware that, after today's Budget, about 85 per cent. of the price of petrol will be tax. The Government hope that people do not understand how much tax they are paying. We think that they have the right to know how much of their hard-earned income is being spent on petrol.

Those are the effects for private motorists, but for hauliers the situation is even worse. When one hard-pressed business man wrote to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, Lord Whitty, the Minister gave the prize-winning reply that

"all hauliers who operate internationally can take advantage of lower prices elsewhere".

Is it meant to be good for businesses to take their entire lorry fleet over to France every time that they want to fill up? Is it good for the Revenue if they do that?

The truth is that this country started raising those taxes when they were lower than those on the rest of continent, and the Government have continued increasing them by larger amounts after they have become higher than those on the rest of the continent. They have now taken their persecution of the motorist too far. They have taken the damage to the haulage industry too far. A policy change is needed.

We shall want carefully to consider the Chancellor's measures on the environment. Increased taxes on energy use and pollution should be completely offset by tax reductions, and we welcome the intention to do that. However, Back Benchers who cheered the Chancellor's announcements about carbon tax should recognise that it will hit manufacturing industry the hardest because that is the most capital-intensive industry and the most reliant on the use of fuel. The corresponding and compensating reduction in national insurance contributions that the Chancellor announced will give the least help to manufacturing industry because that is the least labour-intensive industry. So that seemingly innocuous announcement by the Chancellor will hit manufacturing industry hard in particular areas; and all hon. Members with such businesses in their constituency will find that it causes a problem for them in the years ahead—a fact not remotely referred to the Chancellor's speech.

The Chancellor made an important announcement about the married couples allowance, and of course we shall consider carefully what is proposed to replace it. He claimed to quote what I would do, but I have always said that the Government should ensure that the tax system recognises the costs of maintaining a family—not only children but elderly relatives—and suggested that we could have a system of transferable allowances for families in which one partner stays at home to look after the children.

The Chancellor's announcement about replacing the married couples allowance was interesting. The difficulties that may arise are, first, that he announced a means-tested taper. It is possible that the implementation of such a taper will infringe independence in the tax system because it will be necessary to consider the whole household in order to determine it. It will further increase disincentives by introducing another means-tested payment to the tax and benefit system. It risks being another factor that has to be administered by the employer, further loading regulation and complexity on to businesses. The Chancellor may have answers to those points, and I hope that he does; otherwise that change will introduce fearsome additional complexity into the system.

I am glad that the Chancellor has been frightened off his intention to tax child benefit, and we shall try to frighten him off doing so in future. We know that, while he is around, the prospect of that tax will be ever present.

The Chancellor also made announcements about a further increase in stamp duty. That may be his final revenge on the right hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson). The Chancellor should reflect on how that announcement may damage the property market, and on how making it more difficult for people to sell homes in certain parts of the country will damage the creation of a more flexible work force and labour market.

The Chancellor made much, as he always does, of plans for the new deal. We heard fine words, as ever, but it is time to check how the new deal is working. He may have seen a report in today's newspapers, saying:

"Bosses giving up on Brown's New Deal".

Such reports make sober reading for the Chancellor. Allied Carpets has suspended plans to take on 250 out-of-work youngsters. Bass has taken on only nine trainees even though it offered 50 places. Thistle Hotels offered 100 places, but has ended up with two trainees. Would not it be better to look at how other economies, such as America's, have created jobs by cutting taxes on business and cutting back on regulations—rather than dreaming up new ones? With unemployment threatening to rise again, one thing is clear: the new deal is not the answer—not the answer for young people, not the answer for employers, and not the answer for the economy.

The Chancellor made much of spending additional money. As I pointed out at the beginning of my speech, he has made his spending announcements on the capital modernisation fund before. What he announced today was a rearrangement of figures over the next three financial years.

People who are paying higher taxes—as they are—are asking where the money is going. It is mainly going to finance the huge additional cost of the welfare system, which the Chancellor has not reformed. We are in favour of higher spending on health and education—[HON. MEMBERS: "Oh!"] I say that just for the record, against the day when the Prime Minister distorts it again. The Government have presided over higher waiting lists, and people are wondering whether the money is being spent effectively.

The Chancellor mentioned his crime reduction initiative and the additional money for it, which, as it happens, he has also announced before. At the same time as announcing that additional money for crime hotspots, he is reducing the number of police, which of course means that there will be more crime hotspots.

Today, the Chancellor should have been attacking the forest of regulation that is strangling business, but he did not. He should have given a clear signal that the tax system will support marriage, but he did not. He should have cut fuel costs for the road haulage industry, but he did not. Instead of raising taxes by stealth, he should have started to introduce some honesty to the tax system. He should have tackled runaway welfare spending, but he did not. He should have saved poor pensioners from losing tax credits on their shares, but he did not. He should have started to support Britain's savings culture, but he did not. He should have set out a programme to lower the tax burden, but he is continuing to increase it.

On all those issues, the Chancellor had the opportunity to act, and has failed to do so. Shut up in the Treasury, he seems to believe that he can impose taxes but that no one will notice them or really pay for them. He seems to believe that people are abstract statistics, and that Budgets are just speeches and pieces of paper. He seems to think that if he keeps the tax-rise bits brief and waffles on at length about pet schemes, no one will notice that they are paying any more. But, in the real world, people stretch to pay their mortgage, try to save a bit, drive to work and drop off their children on the school run. In the real world, people will notice; in the real world, people will come to realise that this Government have let them down. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. Mr. Ashdown.

5.8 pm

Mr. Paddy Ashdown (Yeovil): I have heard of waving papers for success, but waving in desperation is another thing—or perhaps Conservative Members were waving their Order Papers in sheer relief that that speech was over.

In line with the traditions of the House, I offer the Chancellor my congratulations on a long Budget speech. I think the right hon. Gentleman's Budget will be considered one in which he had opportunities to do big things but decided instead to follow a scatter-gun approach and do quite a number of rather smaller things. I regret that; I shall return to the subject in a moment. Nevertheless, I think that anyone outside this place who has not had a total loss of memory will feel that the speech just made by the leader of the Conservative party was a mix of hyperbole, hypocrisy and hysteria in about equal proportions.

I had written down that we could welcome some things in the Budget; in fact, we can welcome many things in it. It seems that the Chancellor has once again made a selective smash-and-grab raid on some of our bright ideas and proposals; they feature in considerable number. Although that was not done with the clarity and decisiveness that I would have wished, they are there, and we welcome that.

These raids are becoming such a habit that I had thought of offering the Chancellor honorary life membership of the Liberal Democrats. Starting with giving independence to the central bank—the Bank of England—which was our manifesto policy, not Labour's, he seems to have applied more policies from our last general election manifesto than he has from Labour's. We saw those policies clearly in the proposals for vehicle excise duty, fiscal neutrality in charging a carbon tax, and the uprating of basic pensions in line with wages.

However, the Chancellor may be relieved to hear that, on second thoughts, I have decided to withdraw the offer, for three reasons. First, I do so because, in his first two years, he cut our public services, especially those relating to health and education, more, in real terms, than even the Conservatives planned to. Whatever the Government intend to do next year, the fact remains that, by the end of this Parliament, taking the Parliament as a whole, the Government will have put funds into health and education at a lower level than the Conservatives intended.

Secondly, I withdraw the offer because the Budget does not do as much as it should—or, we believe, given the sum of money available, as it could—to tackle poverty in Britain. *[Interruption.]* If the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, speaking from a sedentary position, would be prepared to wait a moment, I shall see whether I can prove that proposition to him.

[Mr. Paddy Ashdown]

Lastly, I withdraw the offer because, in many cases, where the Chancellor accepts our aims, the means by which he seeks to achieve them are, at best, inefficient and, at worst, ineffective; so if I sound a little grumpy in my response, I admit that it is because it is extremely frustrating to hear someone else singing snatches of our song but doing so completely out of tune.

Before I come to the detail, let me look at the wider economic picture. Liberal Democrat Members agree with the Chancellor's basic fiscal judgment that this should be broadly a neutral Budget. I want to study the detailed figures, but I believe that it is broadly neutral. The priority must be to bring interest rates and the pound down.

Last November—I wonder whether the Chancellor remembers; I do not suppose that he does, because he does not read my speeches every day—I told him, in my speech after the Budget, that he was wrong to deny that we would have a manufacturing recession this year. I note that, in the small print of his Budget, the Chancellor has at least had to acknowledge that he was wrong, and that we are witnessing a significant manufacturing recession. That is probable; indeed, it is probably under way as we speak. As the Chancellor well knows, the main reason for that—the main reason why exporters and manufacturing exporters and farmers are in trouble—is the overvalued pound, still 10 per cent. higher in real terms than in May 1997 and 25 per cent. higher, a quarter higher, than it was in May 1996.

As I told the Prime Minister a couple of weeks ago, we welcome the fact that the Government have inched across the Rubicon on joining the euro, even though they still try to tell us that they have not; but, once again, the Government will the end but do not will the means. Why is the commitment to join the euro when conditions are right not followed by the policies to make them right? That is what a Government should do if they are governing and leading the nation. A change of gear is not enough if no one is driving the car.

The Chancellor told us that the centrepiece of the Budget is his tax reform. We agree that there is some tax reform to be done, and it can be done within a broadly fiscally neutral Budget. Today's tax reforms should have been an exercise in simplicity, fairness and honesty. Instead, they have been an exercise in complexity, gimmickry and a good deal of conjuring.

First, let us consider simplicity. The Chancellor told us last November that

"our policy is pro-tax simplification".

If that was his aim, he has been heading consistently and enthusiastically in the wrong direction. I shall give him some figures. A decade ago, there were four personal tax rates. Under his predecessor in the previous Government, there were eight personal tax rates. Under the right hon. Gentleman, there are no fewer than 54 personal tax rates. We will send the Prime Minister and the Chancellor the list, if they wish. My hon. Friend the Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce), who is absent, will do that. He is no doubt making that case on the nation's television screens even as I speak.

That does not include the further personal and company tax complications that emerged today. Under the present Government, the tax system in Britain is becoming an unholy mess. In the era of self-assessment, that is madness. It is costly and complicated for businesses. It is becoming a boon only for tax accountants. We all know that the tax incentives of today, however superficially attractive in the short term, quickly become the tax avoidance loopholes of tomorrow.

Secondly, on tax fairness, we do not object to the removal of mortgage interest tax relief. Indeed, I remember proposing it in our manifesto before the last election and in the 1992 election, and being roundly criticised by Labour for doing so. The proposal was considered outrageous. We are delighted that the Chancellor has adopted our policy. The previous Government began to phase out MIRAS, and the Chancellor has taken the logical end position. Amen to that.

If ever there was a time to remove mortgage interest tax relief, it is now, with interest rates low. The right thing to do, it seemed to us, was to use the money generated to raise the level at which people start to pay tax. I agree with the Chancellor that tax allowances should be removed or restructured to pay for lower tax on the working poor and others on low incomes.

The Secretary of State for Education and Employment, who questioned what I said earlier, might like to pay a little attention, rather than having a chat with the Chancellor. It is a manifest absurdity that someone on the minimum wage has to pay income tax. That is the current situation, and the Chancellor's proposals have done nothing to tackle it. That manifest absurdity remains.

We disagree with the Chancellor's plan to create yet another tax rate—a 10p tax rate. The Secretary of State for Education and Employment might listen.

The Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Mr. David Blunkett): I am listening.

Mr. Ashdown: I beg the right hon. Gentleman's pardon.

Why not increase the personal tax allowance—the 0 per cent. tax band—instead? Perhaps the Chancellor will listen for a moment to the experts in the matter, the Institute for Fiscal Studies. He has quoted them often in the past, and perhaps he accepts their view on this as well. They say that

"a 10 per cent. tax rate is an expensive way of achieving little. . . it is likely to increase the complexity of the tax system"

which

"could be reformed for equivalent cost, yet with more progressive results . . . by an increase in personal allowances."

Exactly.

Let us admit that the 10p tax rate is a policy driven by headlines, not results. I said earlier that the Chancellor has been raiding our policy bank. Unhappily, he has raided our policy bank for a policy that we had but that we rejected because it made no sense. My hon. Friend the Member for Gordon, the Treasury spokesman, was the first person to propose it, but when we looked at it, we decided that it was nonsense. Increasing the allowances would have been far better, far more efficient, far fairer and a far more effective way of tackling poverty and encouraging jobs.

We believe that the Chancellor should and could have taken a first step towards the long-term aim of raising tax allowances to £10,000, over two Parliaments. Perhaps we

should not object; that is a Liberal Democrat policy that he can raid in future years, when he finds that the 10p tax rate has failed. He should have paid for that measure by abolishing the 20p rate, as he did, and mortgage tax relief, as he did, and adding to that the introduction of a 50 per cent. tax rate for those earning more than £100,000 a year.

There is no point in saying that such a measure would kill incentive in this country; it would do nothing of the sort, as any comparison with similar tax rates in enterprise economies abroad would show. That measure would have raised enough money to increase personal allowances this year to £5,600, taking 2.5 million of the lowest paid people in Britain out of income tax altogether, tackling poverty and improving work incentives. That would be a far more efficient way to use broadly the same amount of money.

In respect of honesty on taxation, the Tories are a little unwise to lecture us on hidden taxes; I do not think that memories are that short. Let us be frank: neither the Government nor the Tories are telling us the whole truth on taxation and spending. The Government claim that spending on our public services is going up, but they say that taxes are not going up. The Tories imply that we are overspending and that taxes are soaring. Both are wrong.

I have not had a chance to look at the detail of what the Chancellor has said, but figures from the House of Commons Library show that taxes will rise in this Parliament by about 2 per cent. of national income, rather more than the Government are prepared to admit to us. The Tories are wrong, because spending, as a percentage of national income, is not going up. It is going down. In the Tories' last year in power, public spending was 41 per cent. of national income. In every year of this Parliament, it will be significantly lower than that.

The higher taxes that are being raised by the Government—2 per cent. over the period—will instead tackle the huge structural budget deficit built up under the debt-ridden Tory Government. That is the truth of the matter, but honesty and transparency in taxation is not only about being honest with the figures; it is also about being honest with the public.

I should like to know, either now or later, what has happened to the tax contract which we heard that the Government would produce. It was a good idea—a Liberal Democrat idea, as it happens. We hand it over to the Government and are happy for them to apply it if they wish to. There was a great fanfare about introducing a tax contract. I say to the Chancellor that that should be objectively done—it should not be a vehicle for Government propaganda—but the measure does not even appear. It is gone; vanished. Why? Is not the Chancellor—*[Interruption.]* Is the Chancellor saying to me that he will introduce the measure next year perhaps? Yes, he is. I congratulate him.

Mr. Bob Russell (Colchester): A millennium contract.

Mr. Ashdown: A millennium tax contract. I am delighted; I will send the Chancellor our manifesto for the next election so that it is not applied beforehand.

We should like an independent audit on taxation to be carried out, setting out how many new tax rates have been introduced or abolished, what measures have been taken to promote simplification and what extra administrative cost burden will arise for businesses as a result. That is being honest with the public about taxation.

The two other big issues that I want to deal with briefly are the environment and public spending. Today, some significant and welcome steps in the right direction have been taken on the environment. Lower car tax on small-engined cars is good—we have been proposing it for 10 years—but the Chancellor has not gone as far as he could have done. There is a perfect case for abolishing tax—vehicle excise duty—on cars of less than 1,600 cc altogether. There is no earthly reason why that should not be done, and I suspect that that will happen; that will be the Chancellor's destination in due course.

I commend the Chancellor on his commitment to an industrial energy tax. That is undoubtedly good news for our environment, and we warmly welcome it. I do not want to sound churlish—the devil will be in the detail, as the old cliché has it—but at what level will the tax be set, and, crucially, is this a stand-alone policy or part of a serious strategy to fulfil the Government's commitment to cutting carbon dioxide emissions by 2010?

Finally, let me ask about public spending. Of course we understand that no Budget statement from this Chancellor would be complete without the regular announcement of a little more money—or, more often, the regular recycling of money already committed—for education and health. Given that that has become so regular, one wonders why the amounts cannot be allocated in the first place, allowing time for planning, rather than being drip fed into the system.

I am ready to be disabused if I am wrong, but is it not a fact that today's extra money for health, education and the police is not actually new, but has been taken from the capital modernisation fund that was announced last year? Is it not also a fact that the sums announced by the Chancellor are sums for not one but three years?

I seem to recall that, when the capital modernisation fund was announced last year, the Government proudly told us that it would be

"allocated to Departments on a competitive basis assessed in part by the merit and quality of Departmental Investment Strategies."

All that sounds jolly reassuring, doesn't it? But the press tell us that, in fact, the extra money was agreed at midnight on Friday after what they euphemistically call an "eleventh-hour dispute"—for which we should read "late-night punch-up, involving Cabinet heavyweights and a personal intervention from the Prime Minister". I suppose that could be described as competition of a sort, but I had not expected "three falls and a submission".

This, surely, is the important and serious point. We need to get away from short-term crisis management of the funding of our schools and hospitals, and into adequate long-term investment. Incidentally, I am afraid that the extra money for schools and hospitals, although welcome, is rather small beer. While I was listening to the Chancellor's statement, I turned to one of my colleagues and said, "My God! are they going to hold an election this year?" Of course, they are: they will hold elections on 6 May and 10 June. No doubt, Labour Members are smiling because they think that the Budget will help them in those elections. They should speak to the 29 out of 32 Scottish councils that have been forced to cut their education budgets for the past two years, and see whether they are equally pleased about an amount that will provide cold comfort after those two years of cuts.

The Budget money will also be cold comfort for a national health service that can stem the rise in official waiting lists only by doubling the number of people who

[Mr. Ashdown]

are waiting to see a consultant. It will be cold comfort for police forces that have had to cut police numbers for the past two years. And I fear that, although it will be some comfort—quite a lot, in fact—to some pensioners, it will be cold comfort for the millions of poor and elderly pensioners over 80 who continue to receive a supplement of just 25p to their weekly pensions. That is less than the cost of a first-class stamp, but the amount has been set at that level for 30 years. Surely it is time to increase it.

We believe that, even in a neutral Budget such as this, the Chancellor could have found the money needed to increase the pension top-up from 25p to £5 a week for pensioners over the age of 80, and to £3 a week for those over 75. Instead, he chose to focus on headline-grabbing gimmicks, which I do not think will be very effective in the long term, such as the 10p tax rate.

This is a Budget that may be—indeed, is—strong on good intentions; but I fear that it is still weak on most of the policies that are necessary to deliver them.

5.30 pm

Mr. Derek Foster (Bishop Auckland): We have just heard three very good speeches and probably parliamentary democracy at its best. I am sorry that the House now has to come down to reality. I could not possibly match the eloquence and command of detail of the previous three right hon. Members who spoke. I am just an old party hack, but I will do my best.

The Chancellor's speech was the usual tour de force. When he sat down, I thought that the new Jerusalem had already arrived. When the Leader of the Opposition sat down, I thought that things were as bad as they were under the Tories, but the right hon. Gentleman did a remarkably fine job in what is the worst possible speaking engagement in the whole year; he also has the worst job in British politics.

I know something about that because, for 10 years, I did the second worst job in British politics. On 18 occasions, I sat listening to my leader trying to make a speech in response to a Chancellor who had command of all the detail and the vast Treasury at his disposal, while he himself had limited facilities.

The Leader of the Opposition is my neighbour. I have the strange experience of being sandwiched between the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition. They are people for whom I have enormous respect and regard, particularly the Leader of the Opposition. He has the worst of the two jobs, of course: whatever he does and says will be dismissed because no one that thinks that he will win the next election.

That happened to Neil Kinnock, now Commissioner Kinnock, during my many years of working with him. No one really believed that he was going to win the next general election until 1992, when we all believed that we might do extremely well. Of course, in the end, we did not.

The Chancellor said so many good things in his speech that it is difficult not to make a speech entirely in praise of his policies and what he said, but I have no ambitions to be sycophantic; colleagues may have noticed that from time to time. That is not what being a Member of Parliament is all about. We are here to bring the Government to account, to tell them where we think that they may be right and to mention those things about which we may be worried.

I would have wanted the Chancellor to say that he recognised that deflation, rather than inflation, was the problem facing the economy. Indeed, the international economy faces deflation, not inflation. *The Economist* has woken up to that. Its leader column last week gave great coverage to an exposition of why deflation is now the problem, not inflation.

My old friend Keynes was a great Liberal. I have ambitions for my Chancellor to be as radical as Lloyd George. He is coming along; he is doing pretty well. Once he has had a bit more experience and we have been able to kick him up the backside occasionally, he may attain that radicalism. If we can do that, perhaps he will adopt Keynesian policies.

Those policies were always deeply respectable within the Labour party, although it was Lloyd George in 1929 who was the first to espouse them. In 1935, President Roosevelt espoused them and transformed the United States economy. In 1945, of course, the Labour party also espoused Keynesian policies, giving us full employment. Keynesianism was so successful that it informed the consensus until about 1970. In the 1970s, we had the two oil hikes, which most people believe blew Keynesian policies out of the water.

If Keynes had a weakness, it was that he did not address the issue of inflation. For him, inflation was not a problem. During the 1920s and 1930s, deflation was the problem. Keynes had a brilliantly successful strategy for dealing with deflation, for which we all owe him a great debt of gratitude. In my book, he is far and away the greatest economist of the 20th century. Without him, we should not have had the Bretton Woods agreement, which ushered in a period of tremendous prosperity for the whole of the western world. That seems to have been forgotten by Labour politicians.

The Deputy Prime Minister managed to use the word Keynes only at Christmas, when the Prime Minister was away. So courageous are we now in our political beliefs in the Labour party that we can whisper the word Keynes only when the Prime Minister is out of the country.

Keynes gave us full employment. The reason why I came into politics was to get rid of unemployment and to get rid of poverty. Only when we get back to the type of policy advocated by Keynes will we make the maximum impact on those two problems.

Why do I say that? In my region—the northern region—many of the Chancellor's policies are not working. We have the new deal—I am an enthusiastic supporter of all the new deals in all their aspects—but, without jobs, all that improved employability is dissipated all too quickly.

In those parts of the country where jobs are plentiful—in the south-east—people who have finished the new deal programme go straight into work. That has been enormously beneficial to them, to their communities and to their economies. If we are able to get more people into work, we shall bear down on inflation, thereby allowing us to run the economy at a higher growth rate. However, in my region, in Scotland, in the north-west, in Wales, in Yorkshire, in Humberside and in parts of the west midlands, when new dealers finish the new deal, there are not sufficient jobs for them to go to. We have to employ

a twin strategy, as we do in the making work pay strategy, because making work pay works only if there are jobs to go to.

Mr. Andrew Tyrie (Chichester): Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that the areas that he has mentioned have much manufacturing, which—as he is probably aware—has been hit badly in the Budget? The carbon tax will be almost penal for some manufacturing that has a very high energy input. Levelling off employers' tax on national insurance contributions and benefits in kind, and company car tax increases, will also hit manufacturing.

Mr. Foster: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention, as I was about to deal with that point.

I am sorry to say that the Treasury, the Bank of England and the City are part of the problem. For 40 if not 50 years—certainly for as long as I have been observing the problems of manufacturing industry, since studying them at Oxford in the 1950s—the problems of manufacturing industry have not changed. They have remained exactly the same: under-investment, poor research and development, poor training and development of staff and poor productivity—all of the problems that we are now trying to deal with—have been with us for the past 40 years or so. They have defied every Government's attempts to deal with them.

Part of the problem is the Treasury, because the Treasury prefers a strong pound in order to bear down on inflation. Every Treasury Minister of whatever political complexion is advised by the Bank of England, the City and Treasury officials that we need a strong pound, but by God, a strong pound is just what manufacturing industry does not need.

I know that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor has given his influence over interest rates to the Bank of England, but it was still open to him to say, "I want a continual reduction in interest rates until we converge with Europe and I want the pound to fall in value to enable our exporters to export far more effectively into Europe."

Oddly enough, I have been a pro-European for 40 years, but I have always been cautious about the single currency. If we went into the single currency now, at least we would get rid of the problem of the high pound. We may encounter one or two other problems and we need to be honest about the political agenda which is Europe. We pretend that it is only an economic agenda, but of course it is a political agenda and one that I welcome. Frankly, I do not mind power migrating upwards to Europe and downwards to the regions.

Mr. Andrew Lansley (South Cambridgeshire): Is not the right hon. Gentleman being far too sanguine? I appreciate that he may have the same concern, but does he agree that, if we were to enter the euro at our mid rate in the exchange rate mechanism, the equivalent of DM2.95, we would lock sterling into an uncompetitive and overvalued level?

Mr. Foster: The hon. Gentleman is quite right. I was quite happy for us to join the ERM. Of course, the previous Prime Minister, when he was Chancellor of the Exchequer, chose the only time that he could persuade his Prime Minister to enter the ERM. We all knew that we entered at the wrong rate at the wrong time and for the wrong reason. The value of the pound was too high. So the hon. Gentleman is quite right to say that we cannot enter now because the pound is far too high. We need it to be at something like DM1.50 or DM1.60—some would say even lower—in order to be competitive with Europe.

Manufacturing industry does matter. We have to get that across to the Government because manufacturing employers do not believe that the Government take manufacturing industry seriously. It may be wrong, but that is their impression. When I talk to manufacturers in the north east—and there are some truly global players, including Glaxo-Wellcome, Black and Decker, Thorn Lighting and Nissan, which is the most successful motor manufacturer in Europe—they all say the same thing: the Government do not take manufacturing industry seriously. Whether or not there is truth behind that perception, it must change. We have to get the message across that we know that manufacturing industry matters.

The previous Chancellor knew that. He understood manufacturing and cared about it. He made it clear that he wanted to create an environment that was favourable to it. He may not have succeeded to the extent that he or I would have wished, but at least he understood the problem. I want to make sure that the present Chancellor, for whom I have enormous regard and respect as a great intellect and someone with great drive—indeed, he is the intellectual driving force of the Government—and whom I greatly support, grasps the problems of manufacturing industry.

My right hon. Friend has grasped the other part of the problem. He speech was outstanding on information and communication technology. That is the future, but we must bring together the two elements. The future of manufacturing industry lies in going up market, producing higher added value, upgrading its technology and getting into information and communication technology. If we can apply ICT to manufacturing industry across the spectrum, from global players to small and medium enterprises, we shall begin to solve the problem. Industry is too slow to embrace information and communication technology, as are the Government. We speak a lot of warm words, but we are way behind the Australians in adopting information and communication technology. In our better government policies to renew the public services, we are lagging far behind the United States and Australia.

The Budget contains some superb measures, which I fully support. However, it will not go down very well in the north-east once people have realised the bad news. In my experience, all Budgets are waved to the echo on the day by supporters of the Government in the Chamber. They think that it is marvellous. The next day, it is not quite so good. By Friday, by God it is turning out to be a bit of a disaster, because everyone has worked out the effects on themselves.

People do not judge Budgets by the public sector borrowing requirement—or whatever its equivalent is now—the rate of investment or even interest rates; they ask what a Budget will do to their job, their mortgage, their ability to put petrol in their car and their tobacco. Regardless of whether we like the fact, 15 million people smoke cigarettes. They will not be pleased tomorrow.

My constituency has 600 square miles of rural territory. The people there will tear me to pieces when I go to see them at the weekend, saying, "Look what your Chancellor

[Mr. Foster]

is doing." I care about the working poor. The rich in rural areas can look after themselves, but the working poor cannot. We cannot make work pay for them if we price them out of their cars. They have no buses or trains. Their only way of getting to work is by car. If we make it impossible for them to use their cars, we shall be doing the opposite of what we intend. My right hon. Friend must appreciate that if he is to be effective in rural areas as well as in urban areas.

Rural areas are neglected by the Government. That is understandable, because most of us are urban men and women. Only 160 Members of Parliament come from rural areas. The rural economy needs just as much of a boost as the urban economy, because farming is going through its greatest crisis for 25 years and tourism has done badly because of the overvalued pound. We need to come to the aid of the rural economy and make it more competitive.

We need to boost tourism. The Scots and the Welsh get £5 per head to develop tourism. We get 8p per head in the northern region. If we had £5 per head in the north-east, we could create hundreds and thousands of jobs. I want my right hon. Friend the Chancellor to give us parity with the Scots and the Welsh. While he is at it, I should like him to revisit the Barnett formula.

5.48 pm

Sir Michael Spicer (West Worcestershire): We have heard a fascinating speech from the right hon. Member for Bishop Auckland (Mr. Foster). He was violently off-message—he would have been horrified in his previous job to hear one of his colleagues making such a speech—but the speech was very interesting.

The right hon. Gentleman said that deflation, not inflation, was the problem. However, that flies in the face of a central aspect of Government policy. They have put it into statute—made it illegal to act against the policy—that 2.5 per cent. inflation is the core objective of the Monetary Policy Committee of the Bank of England. The Chancellor skated over the fact that they are not complying with that, because inflation is currently higher than the target rate. There are signs, such as the tight labour market, that inflation will rise. What happens if inflation rises and interest rates have to go up?

What will happen in the context of the policy of shadowing the euro downwards, which the Liberal Democrats certainly are encouraging? There is potentially a massive conflict of interest between the measures advocated by the right hon. Member for Bishop Auckland and those advocated by the Liberal Democrats and, indeed, by Government spokesmen. I have just received an answer from the Economic Secretary, which says:

"The Government's policy is for a stable and competitive sterling-euro exchange rate over the medium term".—[*Official Report*, 4 March 1999; Vol. 326, c. *858*.]

That is one of the Government's objectives. The right hon. Member for Bishop Auckland has pinpointed a colossal dilemma that the Government are refusing to address.

As the right hon. Member for Bishop Auckland said, the speech after the Budget is possibly the most difficult speech in the world to make, but I thought that my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Hague) did it brilliantly. One of his central points was that this Budget can be seen only in the context of the two previous Budgets.

Two essential features were involved. First, the £40 billion of extra expenditure was based on a false forecast of economic growth. I was amazed when the Chancellor said that he was sticking to his 1 to 1.5 per cent. growth forecast for this year. The Bank of England's central forecast is now for about 0.5 per cent. growth, and the Bank's tendency has been to revise any new forecast downwards.

Secondly, the £40 billion—which came out of previous Budgets—was based on assumptions about income going to the Exchequer which will not come about. Presumably—on the basis that they do not believe their own forecasts—the Government have anticipated that they will not be able to find the money. That is why, even before the Chancellor stood up this afternoon, £8.5 billion of extra taxes were built into the system for this year. We have learned from the latest calculations that the figure has now risen to £8.9 billion.

The Budget is not neutral, as the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) said. It is another tax-increasing Budget. We have a serial tax increaser in the person of the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

To be fair, the great conundrum in domestic politics for any party in power is that the electorate face the Government, of whatever complexion, with two completely conflicting objectives. One is to lower taxation; the other is to raise expenditure on public services. That conflict of demand has built up as the population has aged and as demands have become more sophisticated. There is a constant demand for more expenditure—linked, paradoxically, with a demand for lower taxes and greater choice. Those shrill demands are made with equal force.

The question is how the circle can be joined. It is not feasible to conceive of a left-wing, socialist Government—despite any spin that is put on it—ever being able to square the circle. Solving the problem involves the joining of private enterprise and resources with public services—whether we are talking about pensions, health, education or transport. It requires the marriage of private resources and enterprise with the provision of what have been termed public services.

The previous Administration tackled some of the relatively easier areas—the provision of utility goods and services such as electricity. We are now entering the highly controversial areas of health, pensions and education. We cannot escape it—we will have to get to grips with it. The Conservative party was grossly misinterpreted at the last general election when we proposed linking private enterprise to the provision of pensions, but we made a start. Some might say that it was unwise to enter the fray at the beginning of a general election, as the other side exploited it. Now the Labour Government will have to get to grips with it. They will not, of course—but they will try.

It can really only be the Conservative party that will tackle this matter. Left-wing parties—whatever the words or spin used—will never be able to grasp the concept of enterprise. Traditionally, as part of its constitution, the Labour party was wedded to the ownership of the means of production. With enormous fanfare, that was removed from

the constitution. However, the concept of ownership has been replaced—particularly under this Administration—by that of regulation.

Increasingly, the Government are introducing the concept of regulation. That is starting with consumer protection, but it is leading, ultimately, to economic regulation until intervention by regulatory bodies nullifies any enterprise in the economy. Nowhere is this clearer than in the Financial Services Authority proposals which are now before Parliament. That matter is vital to the economy, and vital to the question of where we find the resources to meet the demands of public services—either directly through taxation or indirectly, as I believe, through private sector involvement.

The Financial Services Authority proposals are so critical because financial services—directly and indirectly—now account for 25 per cent. of the entire gross national product. That is more than the entire manufacturing sector. Much has been said about manufacturing, but the financial services sector now contributes a greater proportion than the manufacturing sector to this country's well-being and economic growth.

The Government will be setting before Parliament a system of regulation, the enormity of which few of us have yet fully appreciated. The regulatory body will have its own discretionary powers over what it does. It will be able to insist that new products are invented and promulgated. It will intervene in the marketplace.

I welcomed some of the words from the Chancellor on monopolies, on making it difficult for new entrants and on cartels and secret price deals. That is good, and I think there should be greater competition legislation.

That is all put to nought when we consider the context in which the Government are operating. We have a highly organised, interventionist and anti-competitive regime which starts in the City, but also affects the energy industry and pretty well all the major industries of this country. The Government are taking control of the command points of the economy. That must be anti-competitive and anti-enterprise in a way that makes nonsense of the use of the word "enterprise". The idea that the Government can match private enterprise to public services in the way that is clearly needed in the 21st century is also, therefore, nonsense. It will come as no surprise that, as the economy slows down, the Government will not be able to create enterprise and growth and will be forced to continue increasing taxation as a percentage of gross domestic product.

In addition to the Government's insatiable demand for money from the taxpayer, further tax pressures are coming from the European Union. There are currently three potential demands for tax increases in this country that the Government have said that they will stand against. I want to put on record some comments that the Economic Secretary made in the Treasury Committee on those three potential sources of increased taxation. It is fashionable to say that Select Committees are more important than the Chamber, but what is said on the Floor of the House is enormously important, certainly as a consolidation of statements made upstairs.

The Economic Secretary gave three assurances. On 26 January—the context was the art market, but the principle applies to VAT generally—she said:

"there are no proposals for the harmonisation of corporation tax."

I asked:

"Would that apply to indirect taxation as well?"

She said:

"There is a substantial legislative framework set out under European law for the VAT which allows Member States to make decisions for VAT in their own country but within a common framework."

She went on to say:

"The key issue for us in this country has been the safeguarding of the position on our zero rates. We will not change that . . . VAT matters within the European Community are subject to unanimity."

That was the first assurance. The Government have in effect said that they will veto any attempt by the European Union to increase VAT. We shall keep an eye on exactly what happens.

The second assurance was on the vital question of withholding tax in the City. I asked:

"Just to be absolutely clear, you said that you would not accept a directive with respect to the withholding tax. Does that mean you would veto any tax regime which included a withholding tax?"

The Economic Secretary replied:

"We would not accept a directive that required Member States to introduce a withholding tax."

I said:

"That means you would veto any such regime."

She said:

"That is correct."

The Government have given an absolute assurance on a veto on withholding tax, and I hope that there will be no messing around on that.

The third tax issue concerns the abatement, won originally by Lady Thatcher. I asked:

"Is it true that the Government plan to stand absolutely firm on the present level of abatement?"

The Economic Secretary replied:

"It certainly is."

The Government have given a complete and unqualified assurance on all three pressures from the European Union. I hope that my right hon. and hon. Friends have noted that and that there will be absolutely no question of the Government being able to budge on those crucial points.

The great future issue of tax and the European Union concerns the effect on tax of entry into the single currency. There can be no disputing the fact that, with a single currency, comes a single price system. The price system will be transparent; it will allow minor variations according to location and transport costs, perhaps, but it will be basically a single system. It will be largely generated by supply and demand conditions in the advanced, powerful economies.

For the foreseeable future, the market will be imperfect in terms of labour movements. For example, Portuguese people will want to stay in Portugal—they speak Portuguese and have lived there all their lives—so Portuguese labour costs will remain about half those of Germany. In crude terms, the Portuguese will have to pay German prices while getting Portuguese wages, and there will be a lot of unhappy people in Portugal unless there is a massive transfer of funds from the northern to the southern part of Europe. Clearly, the cohesion funds and all the other funds that are beginning to emerge are aimed precisely at that.

[Sir Michael Spicer]

There will be massive tax increases under the single currency, beside which the relatively marginal tax changes that we have been discussing today will pale into insignificance. That makes what has been happening in Germany over the past couple of weeks extraordinary and laughable. The Germans think that, in the near future, they can cut their taxes or cap their contributions to the European budget; that is quite apart from the fact that they have been told by the president of the central bank that, because of the stability pact, they may not alter their fiscal arrangements.

If we enter the single currency, there will be no point in having a Budget debate, and this will be one of the last. There will be nothing much to debate because, under the terms of the stability pact and the new tax regimes associated with the single currency, we will have given all powers to determine our tax and monetary rates to a central bank. That will be the end of all Budgets.

Mr. Lansley: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Have Ministers approached you seeking to make a statement to correct a figure in the Red Book that is clearly wrong? On page 26, the figure for current receipts at £335 billion is clearly at odds with the more accurate figure on page 151 of £345 billion. It is important for the House to have correct information on which to base our debates.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord): That is not a point of order for the Chair, but no doubt Ministers will have heard the hon. Gentleman's point.

6.8 pm

Mr. Barry Jones (Alyn and Deeside): It is always a pleasure and a privilege to follow the hon. Member for West Worcestershire (Sir M. Spicer). I was glad to hear the speech of the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown). I was not glad that it was his last response to the Budget as leader of the Liberal Democrats. I think that I have heard every one of his Budget speeches.

Like my right hon. Friend the Member for Bishop Auckland (Mr. Foster), I appreciated the way in which the Leader of the Opposition responded this afternoon. He made a good fist of it, as indeed he did of being Secretary of State for Wales. I did not agree with a word that he said—I will take out that insurance—but I was not surprised to see him come to the Dispatch Box in that manner. Such performances bring the House alive.

I very much appreciated the contribution of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor. As far as I could assess it, it was a Budget for social justice and an agenda for economic regeneration. As ever, it was delivered with an easy command; sometimes humorously, sometimes teasingly, sometimes mockingly. It was produced well, and I thought it very heartening. I especially appreciated the measures that my right hon. Friend announced for our pensioners, which will be warmly welcomed in every constituency. I was much taken also by the imaginative announcement that every school will get a large subvention to be spent on books, which are a measure of our civilisation. That proposal is not before time and our children can only benefit from it. I was glad that my right hon. Friend found the time, in a complicated Budget, to make a statement of such significance for our children.

The Budget will be a boost for Wales. I estimate that Wales will receive some £1 billion, and that is magnificent news from which Wales will benefit hugely. That £1 billion will be spent on schools and hospitals, and on help for our people in Wales to get back into work. It will also be used to cut taxes to widen opportunities for families. Some 500,000 Welsh pensioners will benefit and they will see a real difference this winter in their incomes, with the winter allowance being increased to £100, from £20 and £50 for those on income support. I also calculate that pensioners will benefit from the new guarantee on tax.

The Budget was a clever one and will be successful. The country needed it, but I agree with my right hon. Friend the Chancellor that we must close the productivity gap with our competitors. We must steer a stable course for lasting prosperity, and we need high and stable levels of growth and employment.

Like my right hon. Friend the Member for Bishop Auckland, my theme will be manufacturing. I am not as critical as he is, because I heard much in the Budget on the subject of manufacturing that encourages me. I will take any help that the Government give to manufacturing.

In my constituency, manufacturing remains a top priority, as it is for Wales and the whole of Britain. I want more manufacturing, and so does my constituency. I want to see small and medium enterprises, not just large factories, benefiting from Government measures. In Wales, we still overwhelmingly depend on small businesses. I welcome the new measures. Do they mean that we will invest more in capital plant and research? I believe that the answer is yes, but I have not read the small print.

The Government should act to enhance the standing of careers in manufacturing. We should have more measures aimed at making it a priority for our school leavers and graduates to enter manufacturing. Manufacturing as a career should have status and reward. I am far from sure that it has had that image in this century so far. As part of that process, more policy makers should have manufacturing experiences, and I draw a parallel with the Industry and Parliament Trust. Officials in our civil service and other policy makers need more experience in our manufacturing industries.

I wish to single out the steel industry. We need short-term measures to deal with the dumped and subsidised steel that is now flooding into the European Union and this country as a result of the collapse of the Asian economies. The consequence of the Asian crisis is now being visited on the European and British steel industries. Specifically, we need a cap on the electricity pool price and recognition that the steel industry is an intensive energy user. The industry faces sometimes ruinous costs for energy. We also need a negotiated agreement on the environmental consequences of steel making. Such an agreement needs teeth, but it should be negotiated because, without it, further costs could be imposed on what is still a great industry.

Steel in Britain is a success story. Shotton steelworks is in my constituency and I have observed its steelworkers meet every challenge set by the company. Like the British steel industry, Shotton steelworks is a thundering success. Output per employee has risen fivefold in the past 20 years. I thank the industry and my constituents, the steelworkers at Shotton, for that. The steelworks has

achieved a 10 per cent. per annum increase and the industry now exports 50 per cent. of United Kingdom production. Two out of every three tonnes go to the European Union and Germany is our biggest customer. One problem is still the strength of the pound; because of the burden that the strength of the pound places on our steel exports, I ask the Government to introduce urgent measures to assist the industry.

No hon. Member would deny that the aerospace industry boosts our export earnings. There are 3,700 British Aerospace workers on Deeside. They have called for more support for research and technology development in the industry. I must give credit to my right hon. Friend the Chancellor, because he mentioned research, technology and investment in that sphere, but we need to know how much and how soon. Will the amount meet the demands already expressed by the industry?

Investment launch aid is how huge projects in the industry become successful. It is Government assistance, but British Aerospace repays it over the years from its profits. So far, investment launch aid has been a winner and British Aerospace is paying back handsomely for the investment aid that it has had in years gone by. British Aerospace and Airbus Industrie in Europe have a colossal and mighty competitor in Boeing. At one time, Boeing swept everything before it. British Aerospace and Airbus have fought back and, arguably, they now have parity with Boeing. However, if they are to continue to deliver exports of high value, the industry will need more investment launch aid.

Mr. David Maclean (Penrith and The Border): I have listened carefully to the hon. Gentleman's comments about the pressures on British manufacturing industry, especially aerospace, compared with Boeing. Is he worried that, while Boeing is able to thrive in the USA in a highly deregulated economy, we are imposing more regulatory burdens on all our industries—including aerospace—making them less competitive?

Mr. Jones: I am not complacent, but I do not share the right hon. Gentleman's worry. If ever a brutal blow were delivered to British manufacturing, it fell between 1979 and 1982 when at least 2 million manufacturing jobs were lost because of the deliberate policies of the then Mrs. Thatcher, Sir Geoffrey Howe and Sir Keith Joseph. Those three highly placed Ministers dealt a brutal blow to the future of British manufacturing, and that is one of the reasons behind what I am saying today.

I have only £535 million in mind as investment launch aid—perhaps before the end of the year—for the latest airbus project, the ACXX. That would be the largest civil airliner ever built and marketed, and it would take on the Boeing empire. I request those funds on behalf of my constituents.

There is a proposal that Britain should purchase 40 to 50 heavy-lift aircraft, previously known as the future large aircraft project. I hope that the Government will make a decision on that soon, and I propose that British Aerospace and the airbus consortium should be asked to build the aircraft. My constituents would willingly, happily and skilfully make the wings for that aircraft, as well as wings for the ACXX.

Our aerospace manufacturing industry is the most efficient in Europe. In 1997, it generated more than £15 billion-worth of sales, and it directly employed 121,000 people. The industry consistently makes a major contribution to our balance of payments. In 1997, it contributed £3.1 billion to the trade balance. Maintaining the competitive position of that great industrial sector is important to our country. It creates wealth, and it generates a large number of high-quality jobs.

In 1997, the civil aircraft sector in Britain provided 46 per cent. of our country's aerospace sales. We should be proud of that record. The leading company in the civil airframe sector is British Aerospace, along with its subsidiary, British Aerospace Airbus Ltd. which manages the company's 20 per cent. shareholding in Airbus Industrie. At the end of October 1998, Airbus Industrie had secured total orders for 3,140 civil aircraft. I was delighted that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry was able to celebrate with my constituents and me on Deeside the delivery last month of the 2,000th wing set from the Broughton factory.

Current airbus programmes provide direct employment for more than 21,000 people who work in British Aerospace factories or for major equipment and raw material suppliers and for the smaller companies that supply goods and services. The wealth created by airbus work is estimated to sustain a further 41,000 jobs in Great Britain. That makes a total of 62,000 jobs sustained by the programmes, in my constituency, in Wales, in Scotland and in England. That sector of manufacturing industry is making a massive contribution to the fortunes of Britain and the European Union.

I interpreted positively what I heard from my right hon. Friend the Chancellor about research and manufacturing. However, I would like the Ministers to confirm that my interpretation is correct. This great industry generates not only work, but skills. It trains in the local community, and it supports the education action zones. It contributes to, and sustains, the new deal. British Aerospace is an industry of which my constituency is proud.

The Treasury and the Ministry of Defence work together closely on huge projects. I have met Ministers at the Department of Trade and Industry, the Welsh Office and the MOD to talk about the latter's £750 million airborne stand-off radar project, for which a competition is being run. My plea to the Government is that they should resolve to give the project to Raytheon, which is in my constituency. Several hundred highly skilled workers there know that 400 or more jobs would be created over several years, and Britain would also experience a transfer of technology.

An important review relating to British manufacturing is the current review of the assisted area map. It is vital that our constituencies continue to receive the benefit of assisted area status. Deeside suffered Europe's largest ever redundancy in 1980, when 8,000 job losses were announced in one day. It was estimated that at least 10,000 consequential jobs were also lost. We got over that terrible blow to a fair degree because we were given assisted area status, from which infrastructural developments resulted.

I do not want my constituency to lose assisted area status. I have said so to the DTI, the Welsh Office and the Treasury. Ministers have given me a fair hearing, for which I am grateful, when I have approached them on my constituents' behalf. Flintshire county council has put forward a fine case, which I support to the hilt. We have

[Mr. Jones]

lost a lot of jobs in the past year, although we have gained jobs, too. All the evidence suggests that the loss of assisted area status would deal us a severe blow.

My right hon. Friend the Chancellor rightly made much of the new money that he announced for schools and hospital trusts. I thank him for that, but I have a question for him: can he be sure that the money for schools and hospital trusts will be spent wisely, prudently and against the headings earmarked for it? I am not sure.

The money is urgently needed, and I suggest that the Treasury should set up an audit so that every local education authority and hospital trust has to show where the new money is spent. They would have to show that it was used for the purposes identified by the Chancellor. I am not saying that Flintshire's LEA does anything other than spend wisely. However, in general, I suspect that Ministers' generosity is sometimes misplaced at the grassroots level.

In summary, we are on course to rebuild public services with considerable additional investment in our hospitals and schools. I have heard enough from my right hon. Friend the Chancellor today to know that he is sticking to the principles of our movement, and I note that the official Opposition are shifting to the right and that the Conservative party is now governed by opportunism, as we have certainly seen of late. Even today, we saw some opportunism from the official Opposition; it might have been delivered in a fighting spirit, but at times there was weasel-worded dexterity.

I am proud of the measures introduced by our Government; I welcome the windfall tax, the minimum wage, the working families tax credit, the social chapter, the measures to help our pensioners, such as the increased help for heating costs announced today, and the huge subventions to our health service and to our schools. I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Chancellor.

6.31 pm

Mr. Charles Wardle (Bexhill and Battle): It is always instructive to listen to the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones) when he talks about manufacturing. I recall some useful discussions with him at the Department of Trade and Industry during the previous Parliament. I mean no disrespect to him or to the right hon. Member for Bishop Auckland (Mr. Foster) when I point out that the Government Back Benches appear to be peopled this evening with an interesting blend of old lags and some bright graduates of the Public Accounts Committee.

Without fear of being teased, because I am one of those Back Benchers who has not so much as raised an eyebrow at the mention of Opposition Front-Bench preferment during this Parliament, I can safely say that, in the almost 16 years that you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I have been Members of this House, I have never witnessed such a virtuoso performance as that given by my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition this afternoon.

What makes today's Budget so predictable is the fact that so much of what the Chancellor said in the House this afternoon had already been leaked in detail to the media by Treasury Ministers and press officers. The idea that only a couple of generations ago a Labour Chancellor of the Exchequer had to resign for dropping the merest indiscreet hint about the Budget to the press must seem risible to the current Chancellor. Not even the sidelining of Charlie Whelan has deterred him; he has continued to foster his symbiotic relationship with the media, whereby he trails his policies well before they are heard in this place; and grateful editors, for their part, portray the Chancellor as a model of prudence and fiscal rectitude.

That image is not borne out by the reality of the Chancellor's first three Budgets. It is not upheld by the Treasury's own forecast of a rising trend in the tax take as a proportion of GDP during this Parliament, as even the Prime Minister had to admit last week. Nor is it confirmed by the sharp fall-off in actual and projected economic growth, especially in the manufacturing sector. Although the Chancellor continues to hope—all too optimistically, I fear—for 1 to 1.5 per cent. growth, I am sure that the Bank of England's estimate of 0.5 per cent. is the top end of the realistic target.

The Chancellor's image is not well reflected in his hollow rhetoric on the international stage about sweeping changes in global financial architecture. The Budget was an interventionist Budget, full of meddling and the promise of future red tape. It paid no heed to the lesson that could have been learned from the United States. The Budget did not emulate, in any sense, what the Americans have done; it was more like the Swedish performance of the 1970s. If the Chancellor really understood business and enterprise and how 18 million jobs had been created—all in the private sector—over the past eight years in the United States, he would have presented a very different Budget.

One has only to look at the damage being done to order books in the new generation of small and medium enterprises—particularly in manufacturing companies. Until recently, such companies had proved to be extremely competitive, but they now face extra burdens from the social chapter, the minimum wage and the Employment Relations Bill. Those companies do not need an econometric model to tell them that they are already in recession; they have only to look at their order books and the shipments from the factory gate to understand exactly what the pain is.

Cheap imports and the domestic downturn in this country add to the problems that those companies already face overseas in weak export markets, as not only the economies of the Pacific basin and Latin America, but those of much of Europe, including Germany, slow down. None of the Chancellor's measures today will alter the fundamentals of that dismal reality. With savings down by a third and investment falling, the Chancellor's record of introducing huge increases in indirect taxation by stealth and his attempts to redistribute wealth will come back and bite him if the motivation for enterprise and wealth creation is diminished by new Labour's interventionism.

Many of the measures headlined by the Chancellor this afternoon had a familiar ring. The promise of more debt repayment and the undertaking not to borrow, except for capital investment, have been heard before, as has the talk of fiscal caution and controls on spending, and the hope of further interest rate cuts on the horizon and a soft landing later this year. However, the real test for all those virtuous aspirations will come sooner rather than later if there is another severe jolt in world markets, which could propel this country, and others, into a sharp downswing. That jolt could be triggered if, after eight years

of expansion, the United States economy were to cool rapidly, followed by a sharp downward correction on Wall street.

The United States already has a huge trade deficit, which has cushioned the weaknesses in America's trading partners and has acted as a safety valve for demand in the USA. It could also put pressure on the US dollar and push up prices in the USA. There are other warning signs for the US economy that we should not ignore—for example, the shortage of skilled labour. If the psychology of the US market falters for any reason, the prospect of a soft landing here in the UK will vanish. Similarly, the slowdown in Germany—this country's most important export market in euroland—could hinder our economy. It would also put the euro under more pressure in the markets. I must say that the euro already looks less than wholly convincing as a single currency for 11 far-from-convergent national economies; it is not playing its part, even in its infancy.

Elsewhere, the sharp rise in the People's Republic of China's current account deficit could still lead to a devaluation in that country, despite China's substantial foreign currency reserves. That would reverberate through world markets. Meanwhile, those who look to an early recovery in Japan—still the engine room of Asian economic performance—fail to understand the depth and complexity of the mess into which Japanese business has got itself. Significant risks remain elsewhere, all of which could seriously dent the Chancellor's calculations. Britain depends on export markets much more than the United States or Japan do, so another seismic shock in world markets would mean a hard landing here, a rise in unemployment and even higher social security outlays, which would cause the Chancellor to reassess the outlook that he claimed for the British economy in his speech this afternoon.

The commitment to further tax reform and the announcement of the much-heralded, but hardly dramatic, 10p tax rate have long been on the cards and are unlikely to make a big impact. The same can be said of the micro-measures for business, such as the increase in capital allowances, tax allowances for research and development and for venture capital schemes, and the changes in employers' and employees' national insurance contributions.

The Chancellor said that he will cut taxes for the family, and he has raised child benefit and added to the working families tax credit. However, he has also abolished the married couple's allowance; he is going to scrap mortgage interest tax relief at source; and he has raised petrol tax, company car tax and insurance tax. The list is long and damaging.

In respect of the brewing industry, the announcement of yet another Customs and Excise drive to tackle smuggling from the continent is welcome. However, the move treats only the symptoms, not the cause of the problem. The cause undoubtedly lies with United Kingdom beer duty, which is seven times higher than its equivalent rate in France. No change today in the price of a pint of beer is helpful—and, I might add, personally welcome—but ultimately, if the damage to the livelihood of small pubs is to be halted and if smuggling is to become a pointless activity, the Chancellor will have to lower beer duty rates.

There are two areas where the structural damage already caused by the Chancellor through the stealth taxes announced in his previous two Budgets has not been relieved by his announcements today. The first area is stealth taxes on business and the second area is stealth taxes on pensioners. Like the Prime Minister, the Chancellor wants to be seen to be business friendly. However, he has been nothing of the sort.

The Confederation of Business Industry has calculated that, while the headline rates of corporation tax have fallen—they did so again today—the Government have increased taxes on businesses and shareholders by about £25 billion over the course of a full Parliament. That is a net £5 billion a year in extra business tax: no wonder business leaders say that the business horizon has darkened since Labour came to power.

The move to a new quarterly payment system for corporation tax will hit company cash flows and will bring in an extra £1.6 billion in tax in the year ahead. The abolition of dividend tax credits, which was little understood by the public at large, will raise a further £5 billion each year. Increased road fuel duties will probably remove 26,000 jobs from the haulage industry alone. Increases already made in stamp duty will harm the commercial property market and hit business competitiveness. The arbitrary windfall tax on privatised utilities has taken another £5.2 billion from the business sector.

For pensioners, the news is even more bleak under new Labour—in spite of the Chancellor's promises this afternoon. Elderly people with modest savings have already been hit by the drop in interest rates, which may be welcome to mortgage borrowers but which hurts retired people with a small building society deposit. Increased tobacco and petrol duties, stamp duty and the phasing-out of retirement relief on capital gains tax, as well as the uncertainty that the Government have created over occupational pensions, will damage the quality of life of pensioners who fought wars, raised families, lived active and responsible lives and deserve better from the Government.

Three of the most damaging of the stealth taxes in this area are the withdrawal of dividend tax credits for individual non-taxpayers, the abolition of tax relief on private medical insurance, and the abolition of dividend tax credits for pension funds. The Chancellor told the House this afternoon that pensioners will be better off by £240 per annum per household. However, some 300,000 non-taxpaying pensioners will lose an average of £75 a year and another 80,000 will lose more than £100 a year as a result of the stop that has been put on dividend tax credits for individual non-tax payers.

The decision to abolish tax relief on private health care insurance earlier in the Parliament was as vindictive as it was shortsighted. It has already rebounded on national health service waiting lists. The abolition of tax credits for pension funds—equivalent to about 3p on the basic rate of income tax—will mean that people must contribute more to their pension schemes now or face the prospect of lower pensions on retirement. When local authority pension funds make their actuarial adjustments, council taxes will rise for that as well as other reasons.

In conclusion, this Budget is unremarkable because it has already been so widely leaked. I fear that the Chancellor has over-simplified the outlook for the United

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Kingdom economy at a time when adverse developments elsewhere in the world could easily undermine stability everywhere, including in this country. If some of the Chancellor's measures are welcome, they amount to little when compared with the structural damage that he has already done by stealth with swingeing increases in the overall tax burden.

6.45 pm

Mr. Alan W. Williams (East Carmarthen and Dinefwr): I am grateful for the opportunity to participate in the first night's debate on the Budget. I agreed with part of the analysis by the hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle (Mr. Wardle) of international problems—particularly the large United States deficit and the dangers that could arise if the United States economy experiences any difficulties. The hon. Gentleman also pointed to problems in the Asian economies and the rather surprising decline in the euro. I shall return to some of those points later. I also echo some of the hon. Gentleman's concerns about manufacturing industry—although we will not take any lessons from the Conservatives about manufacturing. Some 2 million manufacturing jobs were lost in the early 1980s and another 1 million jobs were lost in the early 1990s in two recessions that were totally self-induced.

I listened intently to the speeches of my hon. Friend the Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones) and of my right hon. Friend the Member for Bishop Auckland (Mr. Foster) in which they expressed concern about manufacturing industry and the rather anomalous continuing great strength of the pound. That is a problem that lower interest rates—which will result from this Budget—will help to solve.

I welcome the announcements made this afternoon, the Chancellor's overall strategy and many individual measures. The Budget redistributes wealth to families, particularly children. The abolition of mortgage tax relief was long overdue. I do not quite understand the changes to the married couples allowance, but they are designed to shift support to children. The rise in child benefit—which is even larger than had been forecast—will be an enormous help to poor families.

The working families tax credit, the philosophy of making work pay and the particular help to the low paid through the 10p tax rate are also welcome. I have some sympathy with the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown), who said that it might be more effective to raise tax thresholds than to introduce the 10p rate. However, this is a long-term policy and we hope that the band will expand. I endorse enthusiastically the general redistribution in favour of poorer families, especially families with children.

The Budget contains measures that will help the environment. Hon. Members have been lobbied heavily by the road haulage industry. Like my right hon. Friend the Member for Bishop Auckland, I represent a rural constituency where petrol duty causes problems. However, we are confronting a global problem. Carbon dioxide emissions must be curtailed, and the transport sector is responsible for the greatest increase in such emissions. We are simply continuing the policies of the previous Government on fuel duty.

Mr. Maclean *rose—*

Mr. Williams: I will not give way on this point, as there is cross-party agreement about this matter. We inherited that policy from the Conservatives and, unfortunately, the overall philosophy must be right: it is a green tax.

As for vehicle excise duties, the £55 discount for smaller cars must be correct. I have thought about that for a long time.

Mr. Owen Paterson (North Shropshire) *rose—*

Mr. Williams: No, I will not give way on this point. I may do so later in my speech.

Carbon dioxide emissions are an incredibly difficult problem politically, but we must address that issue in the long-term interests of the planet. This is the right time to introduce an energy tax because world oil prices—at $10 or $11 a barrel—are lower now than they have been in the past 30 years. I am pleased that the measure will be revenue neutral, in that the proceeds of the tax will be reimbursed in lower national insurance contributions for employers.

I wish that the landfill tax had gone up a little more steeply than by £1 on the current £10 a tonne. I visited a landfill site in my constituency two or three weeks ago. It is very concerned about the new EC directive on recycling and the diminishing role of landfill in the next 20 years. The process must be aided by green taxes, so we need a bigger rise in the landfill tax.

I very much welcome the help to small companies, including the tax credits for research and development and innovation. The Chancellor also suggested that, if senior personnel from privatised industries or large companies opt to work for new companies, generous allowances will be available, and that will help to transfer their commercial experience to that sector. There are many such individual measures that I welcome.

On the overall management of the economy, under the Chancellor's stewardship, the Government have reduced the £28 billion deficit that we inherited and transformed it into a surplus of £34 billion over the next five years. That means that economic growth will pause this year. We inherited a growth rate of about 3 per cent. and an incipient inflation problem. Interest rates have cut back growth to between 1 and 1.5 per cent., but the Chancellor predicts that the growth rate will recover in the next two years to between 2.5 and 3 per cent.

Mr. Lansley: Does the hon. Gentleman recall that, in the last Budget before the general election, the Conservative Government predicted a negative public sector borrowing requirement—a debt repayment—in 2000-01 equivalent to 0.75 per cent. of GDP, which would amount to several billion pounds? This Government are not proposing, even in the low part of the economic cycle, to undertake a debt repayment.

Mr. Williams: I recall that, under the previous Government, the PSBR was ballooning out of control year

after year. We inherited a deficit of £28 billion, and during the five years of the previous Government the accumulated deficit was £152 billion. Our accumulated surplus in our five years in government is projected to be £34 billion. Deficit has been turned into massive surplus.

Mr. Maclean: Since the Chancellor made a strong point of boasting during his Budget speech that he had not changed the previous Government's spending plans in any way, can he and the hon. Gentleman take credit for the reduction in the PSBR?

Mr. Williams: For the first two years in government we stayed with the public expenditure plans that we inherited and, in fact, we obeyed plans even tighter than those laid down by the previous Government. We have got rid of the deficit through those tight constraints on public expenditure and through economic growth, and we are now in surplus.

Today's Budget demonstrated that overall public finances are healthy. The Budget is broadly neutral; it is not a giveaway Budget. About £4 billion is given away in tax cuts and there is an extra £2 billion in public expenditure. We can well afford those investments.

By running the economy so prudently, we have created a climate that gives the Bank of England scope for interest rate cuts. In the past six months, interest rates have come down from 7.5 to 5.5 per cent. As the Chancellor pointed out, we have the lowest long-term interest rates for more than 30 years. They have fallen from 7 per cent. in May 1997 to 4.7 per cent. now—2 per cent. lower in only two years. There is every reason to expect interest rates to continue to fall this year.

Indeed, part of our macro-economic strategy is to bring the British economy into line with European economies to make it possible to join the euro in 2001, 2002 or thereabouts. The challenge to the Chancellor is to create an economic climate in which the independent Bank of England can continue gradually to lower interest rates from 5.5 per cent. to below 3 per cent. by 2001. We are on course.

As those interest rates fall—as they must if we are to be able to join the euro—the pound will, at some stage, start falling. I am an enthusiast for joining the euro, but I would not want Britain to do so at current exchange rates. As we heard in earlier exchanges, DM2.90 to the pound is uncompetitive. I believe that the pound needs to go down to DM2.70, better still DM2.60, and perhaps as low as DM2.50. As interest rates continue to fall over the next three years, the pound will devalue at some stage.

Mr. Paterson: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Williams: As the hon. Gentleman tried to intervene earlier, I will.

Mr. Paterson: Has the hon. Gentleman read articles 118 and 123(4) of the treaty of Amsterdam, which require us to enter the euro at the central rate on the ecu basket, and which state that we can enter only with the total unanimity of all other members, which would mean that we would almost certainly enter at our median ERM rate of DM2.95?

Mr. Williams: I do not accept the hon. Gentleman's interpretation. There is no question of our entering at anything like that rate. We shall wait and see what happens in the next two or three years. We have very prudent management of the public finances, the Government's account is in surplus and we are managing the incredibly difficult manoeuvre of the soft landing.

Over the next two or three years, we want to achieve, through careful economic management, a return to steady growth at a rate of 2 or 3 per cent. We have had enough, and the country has had more than enough, of the previous Government's boom and bust policies. Next year and the following year, as interest rates fall and the pound falls in value, the problem for the Chancellor will be to prevent a boom. The great problem in the British economy is that when one takes one's eye off the ball, demand suddenly rises and can produce boom conditions. Interest rates are at 5.5 per cent. The target is 3 per cent. and below because European interest rates may well fall this year; I hope that they will. We therefore want to halve interest rates.

Mr. Damian Green (Ashford): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Williams: I may take an intervention later, but I want to develop my argument.

As interest rates fall and are, perhaps, halved over the next three years, there is a danger of a take-off in housing, business and other sectors and of the economy growing out of control. That is why it is important to expand the work force and encourage skills and training. Our policies, like those of Clinton in the United States, will help unemployed people, including the long-term unemployed, to move from welfare into work. The new deal is also working exceptionally well to provide the option of work for the disabled. Today's Budget also included measures for the over-50s.

One of the previous Government's appalling policies resulted in many men in their 50s retiring prematurely on incapacity benefit following redundancy. That certainly happened in my part of the world, where coal mine closures in the late 1980s affected virtually all the miners. Many people in their 50s—perhaps 1 million in Britain—could be working. There are problems of low economic activity in older industrialised areas, where only 70 per cent. of people aged from 18 to 65 are in work. We want as a Government to ensure that there is work available for those who can and want to work. That is part of our anti-inflation strategy, which will be very important next year and the following year, as the economy resumes substantial expansion.

All of our achievement has been made with low inflation, which has been sustained at 2.5 per cent., or thereabouts. In granting the Bank of England independence to set interest rates, the Chancellor and the Government chose very wisely to give it a symmetrical target inflation rate of 2.5 per cent. If inflation looked like being higher than 2.5 per cent. in two years' time, interest rates would therefore rise, and if it looked like being less than 2.5 per cent., interest rates would fall. It seems as if, over the next six or 12 months, inflation will undershoot the target. Eddie George—I noticed that he was present to hear the statement—has made it abundantly clear that he will be just as vigorous in cutting interest rates if we threaten to undershoot as he was in putting them up 12 months ago.

I wish that the European central bank had the same symmetrical target. In the euro economy at the moment, inflation is under 1 per cent., and interest rates are set at

[Mr. Williams]

3 per cent. When the ECB met last week, it decided not to cut interest rates. The European economy—I return here to some of the comments of the hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle—is crying out for expansion. Unemployment stands at 10 per cent., while inflation is below 1 per cent. The combined balance of payments surplus in euro countries last year was $177 billion. As the hon. Gentleman pointed out—I agree with him—the United States deficit last year was $256 billion. The economies are almost mirror images of each other. The American economy is being run at a large deficit so that the rest of the world can market its products mainly in America.

The European surplus is a very deflationary influence on other countries. The German Chancellor, Oskar Lafontaine, is absolutely right to put pressure on the ECB to lower interest rates. Interest rates of 3 per cent. are absurd when inflation is below 1 per cent. and unemployment at 10 per cent. The ECB should not take just inflation into account.

In debates on the Maastricht treaty in this House and within the parliamentary Labour party, I remember Bryan Gould, the then Member for Dagenham, arguing vigorously, time after time, that the terms of the ECB were deficient. I remember the arguments of some of the Euro-sceptics, too, such as my right hon. Friend the Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies) and Lord Shore, the former right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney. The treaty that set up the ECB was far too monetarist in taking account only of inflation. The bank would be much better run if it adopted the same system as the US Federal Reserve, under Alan Greenspan, which takes into account growth and unemployment—a much wider set of parameters.

This Budget has been excellent for the country. It has redistributed in favour of families and children. It is very positive for the environment, small businesses and innovation. It is fiscally prudent, and—I think—has been calculated to cut interest rates. Those cuts in interest rates will follow during this year.

7.5 pm

Mr. David Maclean (Penrith and The Border): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for East Carmarthen and Dinefwr (Mr. Williams). As I was listening to his wish list, and his incredible economic theories of how the economy would perform if the rest of the world and the European economy did not exist, I unkindly concluded that the only soft landing that he was likely to encounter would be on his head. That is too unkind; he did not make any unkind remarks, and I should desist from doing so.

I agree entirely with the hon. Gentleman on one point. His Government are certainly trying to model the British economy on other European economies. That means over-burdensome regulation, powerful trade unions that control too much of their industries, stagnation, high unemployment and, of course, an arrogant presidential style of government that ignores the national Parliament.

It was a real pleasure to listen to the right hon. Member for Bishop Auckland (Mr. Foster) and the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones). The only criticism that I would make of the right hon. Gentleman's speech—I shall pass this on to him—is that, with customary modesty, he denied that he could interest the House as much as the Chancellor. He does himself a disservice. He made a fascinating speech. Although neither he nor I could match the Chancellor's rhetoric, the right hon. Gentleman came across as a man of intense integrity, who is passionately concerned with rural areas in his part of the north of England, as I am with those on the western side of the Pennines.

This is a clever Budget, which has increased taxes by stealth yet again. Labour's first two Budgets increased taxes by more than £40 billion over the course of this Parliament. It is legitimate to use that figure because we keep hearing about the £19 billion on schools, which is of course for the whole of this Parliament, and the £22 billion that is supposed to go into the health service, which is of course to be spent over the whole of this Parliament. It is therefore legitimate to say that, over the whole of this Parliament, Labour—so far—has increased taxes by £40 billion. In fact, most taxpayers will be paying more income tax under this Government in the coming year.

Why do we say that this is a stealth Budget? I shall give a little example of the Chancellor's sneakiness. We heard about the abolition of the married couples allowance and the introduction of the working families tax credit. Two things that the Chancellor did not tell us were that the amount to be paid out in working families tax credit is infinitely less than that lost through the abolition of the married couples allowance, and, of even greater importance—one does not discover this until one goes through all the fine details, the small print and all the Budget statements, which the media will no doubt catch up with in the next few days—the married couples allowance will be abolished 12 months before the introduction of the working families tax credit. The Chancellor spins that the Government will do much for married couples, but that may happen 12 months after the abolition of the married couples allowance.

We heard much from the Chancellor on, for example, the 10p tax band, but no mention, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Hague) said in an absolutely brilliant speech, of the abolition of the 20p band. We have to wait to find those things out, by searching for them. However, the Chancellor then said that that would mean a saving of 90p a week for the average family. Earlier in his Budget statement, he made the passing remark that petrol duty would rise by the normal rate of 6 per cent. That includes the inflation rate—[HON. MEMBERS: "Plus inflation."] By my calculation, that works out at an increase of about 13p a gallon, so the average family which benefits from the 90p a week reduction as a result of the 10p in the pound income tax band will pay £3.50 a week extra in fuel duty. The Chancellor did not mention that in his Budget. We must wait to find that out ourselves.

Mr. Paterson: If my right hon. Friend turns to page 109 of the Red Book, he will see that unleaded petrol has increased by 17.24p per gallon.

Mr. Maclean: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that observation. Perhaps my maths are as good as the arithmetic of the hon. Member for East Carmarthen and Dinefwr. I thank my hon. Friend for his better mathematical and arithmetic skills.

Throughout the Budget statement, the Chancellor spoke about the 10p corporation tax rate and the 10p in the pound income tax rate. There is also 17p a gallon on petrol; that is why he does not mention the figures. That is typical of the 1998 Budget.

Throughout the seven days of the 1998 Budget debate, no one in the House heard the Chancellor or any Treasury Minister mention the new tax that would be imposed on the purchase of a motor vehicle. We had to wait until the appearance of the Finance (No. 2) Bill before that fact was discovered. That is why we can say that this Chancellor is adding taxes by stealth.

I have given examples only of the small things that I, while sitting in the Chamber, have been able to figure out. Goodness knows what will emerge in the next few days and weeks, and when the Finance Bill is published. Goodness knows what underlies some of the Chancellor's bland statements today, which may contribute to the ever-increasing tax burden imposed by the present Government. The past three Budgets have contained tax increases totalling £8.9 billion.

Rural areas have nothing to cheer in the Budget. I suppose that a family on a very low income, with lots of children, living in a rural area and with access to a bus passing close to their door might be slightly better off as a result of the Budget.

Mr. David Davis (Haltemprice and Howden): Not if they smoke.

Mr. Maclean: I hope that they do not smoke; provided that they do not, they may be slightly better off as a result of the Budget.

However, as the right hon. Member for Bishop Auckland pointed out, with the best will in the world, tens of millions of people in this country cannot make use of an integrated transport policy. The motorist has been fleeced in this and the previous two Budgets. The motorist is paying billions into the Treasury and we are not getting that money back in better roads and better-maintained roads; all we get is talk of an integrated transport policy.

Mr. Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): Is my right hon. Friend aware that the latest analysis shows that, for the very first time, the cost of petrol in the United Kingdom is higher than it is anywhere in Europe?

Mr. Maclean: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that observation. I believe that the hon. Member for East Carmarthen and Dinefwr would say that that was part of the Prime Minister's plan to bring Europe into line with what the Government are doing here.

It is outrageous for the Government to keep talking about an integrated transport policy, which might work for a few hundred thousand extra people on the outskirts of Manchester—and perhaps some in parts of London and other big cities—but would not work for tens of millions of our constituents, including nearly all of mine.

My constituents use the train—the west coast main line—whenever possible. I use it constantly to travel to London. I would not dream of driving 300 miles to London—except when, occasionally, I have to empty kit out of my flat—but, to get to that train, there is only one option: the car. For everyone using that line for most of its route between Carlisle and London or between Glasgow and London, the only way to get to the train—the only thing that we have within hundreds of miles of an integrated transport strategy—is the motor car, and those rural motorists are being penalised.

The Government may think, "Ah; rural motorists. They must be awfully wealthy people. Serves them right; they are driving cars." They could not be further from the truth. The right hon. Member for Bishop Auckland is right; the Government are not helping the low-paid in rural areas, or helping people in rural areas to get jobs, by clobbering the motor vehicle.

There are no great bus services in rural areas. The money that the Government announced last year is ludicrous. In Cumbria alone, the money that they have announced to help buses in rural areas has easily been eaten up by one week's loss of income in agriculture, which has been placed under enormous pressure by the Government.

The Budget has attacked the job creators. It has clobbered those in small businesses who want to create jobs for others and create wealth.

As my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition said, and according to some articles in yesterday's press, if the Government want to do anything for business, they should cut regulation, cut bureaucracy and cut some of the 2,000 extra regulations that they have created in their 20 months in power.

In my constituency, elsewhere in Cumbria and in large parts of England and Wales, the proposals for the food tax and the Food Standards Agency will mean that tens of thousands of rural shops, small hotels and bed-and-breakfast outlets will be clobbered by the tax rate that big supermarkets will pay. That is not a Budget for enterprise. That is not a Budget for little entrepreneurs who want to build up their small rural bakeries and so on. The costs of the huge increase in the budget of the Meat Hygiene Service will be passed back to farmers, but they will also clobber large sections of industry, as will the minimum wage and the maximum working week.

If the Government really want to help tackle crime, it is not enough for them to make available a few amounts of money for crime hotspots around the country—electoral bribes, with the local elections coming up. If the Government want to do something to tackle crime, they should stop cutting the police budget. I am delighted to declare an interest in that. I am an adviser to the Police Superintendents Association of England and Wales, and very proud that I was offered that responsibility. However, I am not speaking on its behalf when I speak of the loss of budgets throughout the country for police, policing and police services. Metropolitan police numbers are declining to dangerous levels. For the first time, the Government have insisted that police funding be tied to a 2 per cent. efficiency drive, without saying how they will measure an improvement in efficiency.

The Chancellor boasted about measures for reducing crime. The first and best measure that we have for reducing crime is the British police service—not ideas such as part-time wardens patrolling the streets of Sedgefield.

This and previous Budgets have given us gimmicks and taxes by stealth. The gimmicks include computers or, as we read in the press at the weekend, laptop computers for every teacher to take home. What is the point of laptop computers for every teacher to take home if schools do

[Mr. Maclean]

not have the technology and infrastructure to teach pupils by computers and electronic means so that they may use the programme?

Mr. Alan W. Williams: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Maclean: The hon. Gentleman gave way to me once, so I give way to him.

Mr. Williams: The right hon. Gentleman says that the Budget is full of gimmicks and then mentions computers, schools and laptops. Even if he is not into information technology, will he concede that £2,000 for books for each school is not a gimmick?

Mr. Maclean: I am happy for money to be made available to schools if it is spent on books. I am happy for schools to spend money on technology. Of course I am into IT. I am a child of the new millennium—I surf cyberspace regularly—and I am happy for technology to be used in schools, but let us get the basic technology into schools first. Let us ensure, not only that every teacher has a laptop computer, but that there are proper computers for every pupil to use, and that there are computers on which teachers can access the programmes and print out lessons. Then, teachers might be able to make use of a laptop computer.

I am not an IT whiz kid, but I have learned one thing: the pointlessness of having a laptop computer to cart back and forth unless one has the technology in one's office to enable one's staff to use the material that one plays around with on the laptop at the weekend.

The other point—on which I shall conclude, as many of my hon. Friends and others want to speak—about schools and the £2,000 for books is that that is all very well, provided that the county councils spend that money on the books and on the schools. The lesson that I have learned over the past few weeks is that Labour-controlled Cumbria county council will not spend the full amount of the standard spending assessment allocated by the Secretary of State for Education and Employment on education. The council has siphoned off £1.4 million.

We even had the incredible spectacle of the Department for Education and Employment and the Secretary of State himself issuing a press release condemning Cumbria county council. The council presumably made representations to the Secretary of State, and the press release was withdrawn by the Department. Still, the county council is not putting the full amount of the Secretary of State's money for education into education. It has found savings elsewhere and has siphoned off some of that money.

It is all very well for Labour to boast about the Chancellor announcing money for the education budget to be allocated to schools. Too much of the money is retained by county halls and it is not reaching the chalk face. Similarly, money allocated to hospitals is not reaching them.

What we have heard today from the Chancellor is wonderful soundbite stuff. No doubt, we will read it ad nauseam in the press tomorrow. People in the housing estates in Cumbria and in other Labour areas tell me, and people write to me saying, "I voted Labour, but it is all sound. Nothing is happening on the ground." The nurses and doctors are saying that now.

As people begin to realise that Labour is all soundbite and no substance, the Government have taken an important step to rectify that, as we saw last week. As their initiative to deal with that accusation, they have recruited yet another top BBC executive to go into No. 10 to deal with better spinning. Mr. Bush, recruited as head of research in the news department of the BBC, is to be brought into No. 10 to head up the spin-doctoring on whether Labour is meeting its manifesto commitments.

Last year, no Minister made a speech from the Dispatch Box without saying, "We keep our promises; the Tories do not keep theirs." Ministers have not said it once this year. The Government are recruiting BBC spin doctors into No. 10 because they are breaking their promises and they are being rumbled. We have had a lot of spin today. In a few weeks, the truth will come out as the nurses, doctors and teachers realise that the money is not materialising, as the small businesses realise that they are being clobbered, and as the rural areas realise that they are being crucified by the Government. That will be the real proof of the Chancellor's spinning today.

7.23 pm

Mr. Derek Twigg (Halton): I welcome the statement made by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor. His excellent performance today underlined why we are getting the economy right and what was wrong under the Tories. This Budget, like previous Labour Budgets, deals with the legacy left to us by the Conservative party, but it also takes us forward into the millennium and deals with the issues of today and tomorrow.

The Budget rewards work and makes it pay. It offers a better deal for families. It rebuilds our public services. It provides a better deal for small business. It locks into economic stability. The Chancellor made the important point that he was doing away with the arguments of left and right, the notion that there was only one way of doing something, and the public-private argument. We see the Government taking the best of each sector, and using that to make sure that the economy grows; that we get better public services; and that people live better lives.

The connection between greater wealth and the provision of better public services is not often recognised. Greater wealth allows us to invest more in public services, as the Labour Government will continue to do and as the previous Government never did.

The Budget must be seen in the context of the Tory legacy and fundamental weaknesses in the economy left to us by the previous Government: inflation was rising; they had ducked decisions on interest rates, leading to the problems that faced us in the first year of our government; they had lost control of the public finances; and the national debt had doubled.

The Conservative Government wasted important public money on social security. They paid it out but did nothing to help people get back to work. They did not use the money well, so they wasted the Department of Social Security budget. It was all boom and bust under the previous Government—they never aimed at stability or long-term planning.

Another part of the Tory legacy was Black Wednesday, which cost us a great deal of money and caused severe problems for the economy. A further example is the Tory

Government's handling of the BSE crisis, which cost £5 billion. Their attempts to deal with the mess that they had created cost another £2 billion. There was also the cheap sell-off of public services. Important public assets were sold off on the cheap, and shortly afterwards we saw the share prices rocket.

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney, North and Stoke Newington): My hon. Friend referred to the problems caused to the previous Government by Black Wednesday. As he will remember, the problems of Black Wednesday were caused by fixed exchange rates and the unsustainability of such a system. Does it occur to him that, if we went forward into economic and monetary union, which is just another fixed exchange rate system, with no real evidence of the true convergence of the economies, we might experience our own Black Wednesday in due course?

Mr. Twigg: The Government have made it clear that certain criteria must be met. Our competence in managing the economy is on a different level from the incompetence of the previous Government. We have only to recall how they dealt with the poll tax. Councils around the country are still paying for it. That is part of the catalogue of Tory incompetence over 18 years in power. As a result, we have had to take some tough decisions early on, to get the country back on the right course and achieve stability.

As a party, we introduce important policies which support work and families, and help pensioners and society generally. The Conservatives oppose the new deal, the working families tax credit, and the national minimum wage. We hear much about America, although America has a national minimum wage. They oppose the cut in VAT—they would raise it further if they were in power. They have opposed the entire plan to improve economic stability. They are not interested in getting the country back on the right track, after the mess that they created.

The Government's economic policy has had a major positive impact on my constituency. The Chancellor is right to focus on economic stability, growth, better public services and more jobs. We are getting away from the boom and bust of the previous Government. Inflation is now close to its target level. We are taking tough action on borrowing. The borrowing record of the Conservatives was astoundingly bad. They took incredible risks with the economy. In the early 1990s, interest rates peaked at 15 per cent. I will not go into what they went up to in just one day on Black Wednesday, but they certainly went up to 15 per cent.

Mr. David Taylor (North-West Leicestershire): For a year.

Mr. Twigg: For a whole year. Under our Government, interest rates peaked at 7.5 per cent. That is a result of the fact that we have been dealing with the mess and taking decisions that the previous Government ducked. Mortgage rates are at their lowest for 30 years. Interest rates will probably come down again. That helps stability and allows us to plan for the future.

According to a report today in the *Financial Times*, a survey by the Office for National Statistics shows that UK manufacturing rose during January. Reports in the local financial press and from various organisations refer to a soft landing for our economy. Again, that is a result of the Chancellor's excellent economic policy. There has even been a rise, albeit small, in high street spending. According to a recent Gallup poll, the majority of fund managers thought that the economy was going forward. All that is confirmation that the Government are on the right track.

Mr. Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham): The hon. Gentleman cites as a source for his economic criteria fund managers in the City of London. Does he agree with those same fund managers, whose best forecast for GDP growth next year is about 0.7 per cent., which is rather less than half of the top forecast of his Chancellor this afternoon? Were the fund managers right then, and are they wrong now?

Mr. Twigg: The Chancellor set out his strategy clearly today. He is confident about the growth factor, as am I. A number of important issues are raised by the Budget, which should be examined in more detail. The Opposition have had a difficult time attacking the Budget. They have gone off at a tangent, with lengthy debates about Europe and other matters that are wholly irrelevant. Conservative Members have real difficulty, because this is a good Budget; it makes good sense to most people and will improve their standard of living.

Conservative Members like to talk a lot about families, but their record in government was one of failure. The Budget supports lower and middle-income families and provides help when it is needed most—when people have children. As a father, I totally and utterly support that. The Conservatives did not provide such support. The child tax credit has been introduced, child benefit has been raised—13,300 families in my constituency will benefit from that—and there will be a major improvement in the standard of living of people with children.

Mr. Jonathan Sayeed (Mid-Bedfordshire): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Twigg: In a moment. I have taken two interventions and I want to continue with my speech.

When we came to power, child benefit was £11.40 a week. It is going up to £23 a week, which is a major increase for which we deserve credit. The Conservative party has an interesting record on child benefit—it froze rates between 1987 and 1991—and also froze married couples allowance between 1990 and 1995. That does not support the Conservative Members' view that they have always been in favour of child benefit increases and the married couples allowance.

Mr. Sayeed: Has the hon. Gentleman read any part of the Red Book? Would he care to look at page 112? Item 17 shows that the married couples allowance will be abolished from April 2000. That will save the Treasury £1.6 billion, but the children's tax credit will not be introduced that year. Although the hon. Gentleman does not realise it, the Chancellor has fiddled the figures—he has taken money away by abolishing the allowance, but he is not giving money back through the children's tax credit.

Mr. Twigg: I am interested in the points that the hon. Gentleman makes, but I would like to hear him praise my

[Mr. Twigg]

right hon. Friend's increase in child benefit. I do not hear that praise, although there has been a major increase. *[Interruption.]* Does the hon. Gentleman want to praise the increase in child benefit?

My constituency has a large number of pensioners. I often think—wrongly, and I shall explain why—that some pensioners have felt a bit left out of the previous two Budgets, although we have done a considerable amount in terms of the standing fuel charge, extra fuel payments and the cut in VAT on fuel. We have also taken a number of other initiatives. The Budget contains a £3 billion package for pensioners, with an increase in the winter allowance to £100 over the next three years. That means that slightly more than 14,000 pensioners in my constituency will benefit from help towards their fuel bills. That underlines the Government's commitment to helping pensioners and shows that the particular difficulties that pensioners have during the winter have been recognised.

There has also been an increase in the minimum income guarantee for pensioners and it has been related to earnings rather than prices—it was nice to see the look on Conservative Members' faces when my right hon. Friend announced that measure this afternoon; they did not have much to say about it—and 200,000 pensioners will be taken out of paying tax. Many pensioners in my constituency will benefit from that.

My right hon. Friend talked about rewarding and improving our public services. It is useful to put into context what the Government have already done. Like the other improvements in funding, the £19 billion commitment to education in the comprehensive spending review will benefit my constituency. For example, five schools had been waiting for more than 10 years for new classrooms, but, within 18 months of the Government's election, three have had plans for new classrooms approved. I understand that a fourth school hopes to have its plans approved shortly. That money will help with bringing class sizes down, which is another great commitment that is widely supported in my constituency.

Halton borough council has been given £2 million from the standards fund, and five summer schools have been set up to improve literacy and numeracy. Those important developments have been achieved because the Chancellor has made improvements by providing additional cash for schools in his Budgets. Additional money has already been made available for school books and a further commitment, to which I shall refer in a moment, has been made today.

There has been talk about national health service waiting lists. I can tell Conservative Members that my local hospital not only met the reduction in its waiting list last month, but exceeded it by 282. That excellent performance shows that that money is being well spent—and that is not to mention the additional money that has been provided for mental health and other health services in the Halton area.

On transport, there has been significant change and I can see a significant difference between this Government's policies and those of the previous Government. I referred to that matter briefly a few weeks ago in my speech on the local government settlement. For many years, we in Halton have been trying to get extra money to deal with the maintenance problems affecting the Widnes-Runcorn bridge. We were unable to get that money under a Tory Government, but, this year, the Labour Government have allocated an extra £2 million, which is an important investment. Dealing with those problems may prevent more fundamental problems occurring later. There has been additional money for transport generally in my constituency, and the Government's integrated transport strategy is important not only because of the problems with the bridge but because we have a busway and because there is a low rate of car ownership compared with other constituencies.

I am particularly interested in education. The Government have made clear their commitment to lifelong learning, skills and training and, through investment in further and higher education, they are trying to provide a better economic base from which firms can prosper. The further education college in my constituency has an important role to play and the Government have allocated extra money in the comprehensive spending review to be spent on further education and supporting students. The Government recognise the importance of further education to getting the economy on the right track and providing skills and investment in our communities.

There is new investment from the capital modernisation fund, which I am pleased about, and £2,000 has been allocated to each school to buy new books. That is a significant sum for many schools and, although there has been an increase over the past two years, an extra £2,000 for books is important. When I went into schools during my time as a councillor or a governor, I never tired of being worried about, or annoyed by, the state of some of the books that the children had to use. Some books were tattered and torn, or there were perhaps five to a whole class, and it was difficult to get hold of the wide range of books necessary for children of differing abilities.

That problem always worried me, but the Government have acknowledged the problem and have put £2,000 into each school. That is an improvement. One of the obvious problems caused by not having access to books is that children do not pick up a love of reading as well as they might. They do not find it easy to find books to read, and that affects their literacy. The Government have recognised the problem. Although £2,000 per school is a small amount in terms of the overall allocation of money in the Budget, it is important.

Mr. Lansley: Like my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Bedfordshire (Mr. Sayeed), I am concerned that the hon. Gentleman has not read the Red Book. Page 111 makes it clear that the money in the capital modernisation fund—£250 million will be brought into 1999-2000—is expressly drawn forward from later years and is not new money.

Mr. Twigg: I do not want to go over the ground that I have already covered—that money is in the fund. I would like to hear the hon. Gentleman and the hon. Member for Mid-Bedfordshire expressing support for the extra £2,000 for each school. I did not hear them doing that—I assume that they do not want to talk about that money—and they may be against investing £2,000 in each school.

The Budget highlighted the £410 million that is being given in respect of access to computers. Some schools seem to be better off than others. Access to computers and training are extremely important, and it is a shame

that some children do not have the same access as others or are not able to gain experience and training. My son, who is nine, has been very fortunate in school and has managed to develop his computer skills, but I have seen real problems in other schools that I have visited and the money should be widely welcomed.

There is extra money for public services in the health services, which will be invested in modernising accident and emergency departments. We have all seen problems in our local hospitals, and around the country generally, and the staff of accident and emergency units and their patients have difficulties in respect of both waiting times and equipment. Such investment must be warmly welcomed, and I am sure that it will be. Notwithstanding what others have said today, I think that both NHS staff and patients will welcome the money.

Comments have been made about the £170 million to make communities safer. It is a shame that some Conservative Members have taken the attitude that they have. Under Conservative Governments, crime rose. I am interested by the fact that the right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard), the former Home Secretary, is not present. He wanted to send more people to prison and subject them to short, sharp shocks; but he did not manage to do anything that reduced crime.

It is clear from what I hear in neighbourhoods in my area that people there are worried about crime, neighbour nuisance and the behaviour of some groups of young people. Some are afraid to go out at night. It is crucial for the money to be spent on dealing with those fears, and improving the situation.

At a recent conference, I spoke about the Government's crime and disorder audit. The police and communities are being brought closer together, along with the voluntary sector and other agencies, to establish a strategy for crime. It is all about creating safer communities. The Conservative party scoffed at the idea, but I do not think that my constituents would consider it a laughing matter, or consider that the Government were wasting money. I think that they would say that this was a positive move to deal with crime and disorder, and to involve local communities in that.

Rewarding work has been a major plank of the Government's policy in the last two Budgets, and also in this Budget. It is worth repeating what has happened, in order to set the scene for today's statement. A total of £3.5 billion was taken from the privatised utilities to pay for the welfare-to-work initiative and the new deal; already 60,000 young people have been helped, and a total of 300,000 have been helped. It is all very well for the Opposition to scoff at the programme, and to have a go at it. Many of them do not support it, and I believe that a number have not even troubled to support it in their constituencies. People like me, however, have worked closely with the Employment Service, with employers and with other agencies to try to ensure that young people and the long-term unemployed are given the best help that is available.

Having talked to unemployed young people, and to adults who have been long-term unemployed, I have witnessed the desperation, the lack of hope and the sense of failure that troubles them. They have been thrown on the scrap heap. The last Government's policy for dealing with unemployment was to take people off unemployment benefit and put them on to incapacity benefit. They had no real policy to return people to work; their policy was, "Let the market decide, and we shall see what happens." The present Government's policy involves working with the private sector, the public sector and the voluntary sector to produce policies to help people into work.

I recently attended a presentation for the Prince's trust, at which 10 young people were to receive awards after taking a course. They had moving stories to tell. Many had been sponsored by the new deal to work with the trust; some who had formerly been shy and introverted, and had problems in communicating, had become outgoing, confident, able young people. That is the sort of effect that the Government's policy is having, and that is why they continue to support the new deal.

I have also talked to employers, and I know that problems can arise. Things are not always perfect. Nevertheless, the employers to whom I have spoken want to get involved: they want to support young people, and to give them the skills and training that they need. I was pleased that the Chancellor made it clear today that the Government's help would continue. Conditions would, of course, be attached, but I approve of that: there must be responsibilities as well. I am glad that is still a major plank of the Government's policy.

Last year saw a proposal to cut national insurance by £65 a year, and a decision by Parliament on the national minimum wage. Those, too, are important planks in the Government's policy of both rewarding work and putting people into work.

Like other Members of Parliament, I have seen factories and companies close in my constituency, but unemployment in my constituency—and around the country—is lower than it has been for 20 years. A better deal now exists, making work pay and encouraging people to work. Under a Tory Government, there was hardly any difference between what could be gained from benefits and what could be gained from work. People had no incentive to work. Most people want to work, but they want to be able to earn a decent living.

The new 10p income tax rate is vital, as is the cut in the standard rate from 23p to 22p. Rewarding work in that way will ensure that families are better off. The working families tax credit has been increased by £2.50; there has been an increase in the minimum income guarantee of £2 a week for full-time working families; and no family earning less than £235 a week will pay tax. That is a major step forward, and an important incentive for families and individuals.

The last Government's use of the benefit system was not aimed at helping people to return to work. That Government were not interested. They paid out benefit, but they did not want to devote any effort or time to assisting people to work. There is a stark difference between this Government's policy and that of their predecessor.

I have already mentioned the new deal. Today's announcement about the new deal for the over-50s and the guarantee of a minimum income of £170 for the first year is very welcome. In my area—and, I am sure, those represented by others—there has been a major shake-up in manufacturing industry over the past 20 years. I should add that, under the last Government, two out of five manufacturing jobs—2 million—were lost. Manufacturing industry was devastated all over the country.

[Mr. Twigg]

Halton, Runcorn and Widnes are in a chemical industry area. The sector employs more than 4,000 people in ICI alone, and probably employs up to 12,000 in the chemical industry and support industries. It is a vital sector in my constituency. Part of the result of what happened during the 1980s and early 1990s was that many people were made redundant and took early retirement, and now find it difficult to return to work because of their age. I welcome the Government's recognition of the problem. I have talked to people in that age group, and they feel that they would be helped to return to work if they could improve old skills and gain new ones.

That is often the problem: the need to acquire new skills, and to secure a chance of obtaining work. In the past, it has not been possible for people to have training and to acquire new skills. The importance of today's announcement should not be understated, and many people in constituencies such as mine who are over 50 and unemployed will welcome it.

The Government's emphasis on the importance of supporting small business is also an important part of our strategy. Ten or 15 years ago, a Labour Chancellor might not have said what the Chancellor did. As I said earlier, I think that being Chancellor means taking the best from both private and public sectors, and supporting businesses as means of wealth creation. The biggest opportunity for businesses to grow lies in the small and medium-sized sector. During the 1980s and 1990s, what I heard about from my constituents who owned businesses were their problems with the last Government: problems in getting loans, problems with red tape, problems with late payments of bills and problems owing to a general lack of support and advice. Those problems were very stark, and one wondered why nothing was done.

It should also be remembered that, under the last Government, there was a record number of bankruptcies. A record number of small businesses went under. Given the legacy that they left, the Conservatives have no right to talk about the importance of supporting small businesses. They destroyed hundreds of thousands of businesses with their boom-and-bust policies.

Small businesses have complained to me about skills shortages, the difficulty of obtaining funds from banks, lack of advice, lack of training and even payroll difficulties. That is interesting, because the Chancellor mentioned it today. I am pleased that the Chancellor is to set up a new small business service, which will be warmly welcomed. Again, the 10p corporation tax rate for small companies will benefit 270,000 companies. It follows the changes in last year's Budget to corporation tax and capital gains, which have been a major incentive and been warmly welcomed by those companies.

Let me emphasise a point that I was making earlier. One small business man showed me the list of electrical contractors that existed in my constituency 10 or 12 years ago, and how many are left—the latest booklet on the figures was published about a year or so ago. Less than half are left. The business man said that he had great difficulty in recruiting skilled people, including electricians, and that, because there were not as many of them, the demand on wages was much greater: the cost of employing people was much greater. He said that that had all happened under the Tory Government—that there had been a complete sea change in the way in which business was able to deal with such problems.

That man, who works very hard throughout the country to get work, said that it had not been worth his while to take on any apprentices, because his profit margin was so tight that he would have difficulty funding new staff. The point about the new deal is that it tries to help towards that problem.

That happened under a Tory Government. That is a real-life case. I saw the figures. There was a complete change in the number of companies that were around.

Some points have been made about manufacturing generally. Of course, I take a different view on manufacturing from the Conservative party. It is an important industry in my area. As I have said, ICI and the chemical industry have been, and are, an important player there.

In my constituency, companies have closed for a number of reasons. Interest rates have caused difficulties for companies such as ICI, but what is interesting is that ICI is saying that these things are cyclical. It expects in two or three years, or even less than that, to do much better.

There has been major world upheaval in the chemical industry. South-East Asia's problems have had a major effect. I recently went to a chemical industries presentation on the chlorine industry, which, again, is a particularly important part of the work of ICI in Halton. Most household products and most drinking water have elements of chlorine, so it is an important industry to the country.

The ICI complex at Runcorn in Cheshire used to use 1 per cent. of the electricity produced by the national grid; it used as much electricity as the city of Liverpool. That is a tremendous amount of electricity and power.

Mr. Loughton: Will the hon. Gentleman admit that the chemical industry, which is so important in his constituency, will be hit hard by the energy tax that the Chancellor has announced this afternoon?

Mr. Twigg: If the hon. Gentleman will hold his impatience for a second, I will explain exactly why the problem exists.

At the presentation—a number of the hon. Gentleman's colleagues were there, by the way—it emerged that the cost of energy was a massive problem for the chemical and other industries. That problem had been raised with the previous Government on numerous occasions. When the previous Government privatised the power companies, they made things worse: the cost of energy went up. Therefore, not only did the previous Government decimate the manufacturing industry with their economic policies generally but, on issues such as energy, which is so important to manufacturing industry, they got it wrong completely.

I understand what the Chancellor said today about the energy tax. He has made it clear that there will be a reduction in national insurance contributions. I am pleased that he will continue the consultation. I did not hear anything that would in any way damage my particular industry, given the commitments that he made.

I was pleased to see the Chancellor's commitment to renewable energy. Because of the problems that the energy strategy and policy of the previous Government caused ICI, it was worth its while building its own power station, or certainly getting a company to build it; Intergen did the work. It is still looking at another source of renewable energy—steam—but it has made numerous savings in energy cost by reusing energy that is produced in its plant. That is the sort of strategy that the Government will want to encourage in the industry as a whole, so good practice is there.

Let me conclude my remarks—*[Interruption.]* I could also read out the tax increases that the Conservatives introduced when they were in power. If they want to talk about tax, we can do so.

Without doubt, today's was another confident performance by the Chancellor; my right hon. Friend's performances are confident. Even the International Monetary Fund is saying that what the Chancellor is doing should be regarded in other countries as a model of good practice. What a change from what the IMF said under the previous Labour Government. There has been a change in strategy and in the way in which we are dealing with the economy. There is now confidence in the handling of the economy by the Chancellor and Government. This week, the IMF again praised the Chancellor and said that Britain's policy should be used as a good example elsewhere.

The Budget has again been about spreading wealth, helping the low-paid and disadvantaged, and redistribution to the less well off. All the Conservative party was interested in was helping the best off, doing nothing to help people get out of poverty. This is another Budget that deals with redistribution, ensures that people get a fair run at resources, encourages them to get back into work and promotes and encourages incentives, innovation within the economy and enterprise. Public services have also been improved and will continue to improve. It is a good all-round Budget and I am proud to support it.

7.57 pm

Mr. William Ross (East Londonderry): I have sat through quite a number of Budgets and I have rarely heard the two Front-Bench spokesmen behave with the vividness with which they both behaved today. Whether there was any more content in it today, and whether it will mean any more at the end of the week than after many past Budgets, remains to be seen.

One of the things that has always concerned me is the public sector borrowing requirement. It seems, from what we are being told, that that, at least, is going very fast and far in the right direction. I have always thought that a nation should try to balance its budgets. I do not see much point in paying a lot of taxpayers' money in interest: we have paid far too much over the past few years.

I welcome many of the minor items—and there were many—that will have a good effect. For example, the 10p starting tax rate is welcome for both business and individuals. I also welcome the fact that the capital expenditure for Northern Ireland will go up by £50 million. In particular, I welcome the announcement that there will be £2,000 for books for each school in the land. What I am not clear about is whether, when the Chancellor was expressing that good news, he was including Northern Ireland—or whether the £2,000 per school is restricted to Britain, as the last announcement was. Perhaps that could be made clear before we leave the building this evening.

I listened with interest to the Chancellor's growth forecasts. I hope, for all our sakes, that we hit the 3.75 per cent. increase that he thinks we will achieve in 2001. As I have said, I have sat through quite a number of Budgets in this place, and I have found out by hard experience over the years that it does not take much to go wrong, and to go from a Budget surplus to a £50 billion deficit. Anything can go wrong given the fragile nature of the world economy. Most people are behaving as though it is in a robust state, but I think that the full effects of last year's Asian crisis have not yet worked through the system.

Mr. Tyrie: Has the hon. Gentleman noticed that the Chancellor's growth forecasts are extremely optimistic compared with those being provided by independent forecasters? The Chancellor's forecast for growth this year is 1 to 1.5 per cent., against independent forecasters average forecast of 0.6 per cent. For 2000, the Chancellor's forecast is 2.25 to 2.75 per cent., compared with independent forecasters average forecast of 1.8 per cent. Does it not very much reinforce the hon. Gentleman's point that, if that growth is not forthcoming, the public finances could be gravely imperilled?

Mr. Ross: Economics is called the dismal science. As it is such a dismal science, many economists try making a wide range of forecasts, in the hope that at least one of them will be right and happy for a day or two. All Chancellors fall into that general trap. Heaven only knows what the effect on public revenues will be if we have only 1 or 0.75 per cent. growth instead of 3.25 per cent.

I noticed that the Chancellor announced, with much cheer and a great flourish, that the inheritance tax band will be raised. Everyone thought that that was quite a substantial sum. However, a check of the books reveals that the band is being raised only to match the inflation rate of the retail prices index. I wonder by what percentage house values have increased in the past one or two years. I suspect that that increase is rather higher than the inflation rate and the RPI. Therefore, perhaps the Chancellor is not being quite as generous as he is telling us. Whenever I discover the Chancellor telling us one such story, I wonder how much more smoke and how many more mirrors are around the place. Usually, there are quite a lot more.

I do not smoke for many reasons—not least because I could not afford it when I was young and foolish enough to start. When I was old enough to understand the ill effects of smoking on health, I backed away from it very rapidly. However, other people in Britain smoke—a figure of 15 million was mentioned earlier. Only education will stop smoking, if it can be stopped at all.

The Government have previously, through the tax system, applied quite a lot of pressure on people to stop smoking. However, page 149 of the Red Book shows that, in the next few years, the tobacco tax take is forecast to fall. Are the Government trying to tell us that there will be a tremendous decrease in the number of people who smoke? Or are the Government being pragmatic and realising that the tax take will decrease not, because of a drop in the number of smokers but because of a very large increase in the amount of smuggled tobacco?

[Mr. Ross]

Every year, the Gallaghers firm, in Northern Ireland, comes to see us. In Northern Ireland, 3,000 people are employed in tobacco factories. Gallaghers' representatives told us that, in the United Kingdom, seven out of 10 packets of hand-rolling tobacco are smuggled. An awful lot of that is produced in Ballymena. It goes over to the continent, but is back in a fortnight or less.

Although there is no tax increase on hand-rolling tobacco, there is an increase on pipe-smoking tobacco and on cigarettes. The tax increase on cigarette prices works out at 17.5p per pack of 20. However, where is that revenue disappearing? The reality is that the Government are factoring in a very large increase in cigarette smuggling. This year, the Gallaghers representatives warned us about the problem. I hope that Ministers will take heed of the dangers inherent in smuggling.

I should like also to draw the attention of the House and the Chancellor—if he needs his attention drawn to it yet again—to the road fuel tax. In 1996, Northern Ireland accounted for 2.8 per cent. of the total United Kingdom road fuel market and provided 2.8 per cent. of United Kingdom fuel excise duty. Until today, duty in the United Kingdom was 43.99p per litre for petrol and 44.99p for diesel. In the Irish Republic, duty was 24.54p per litre of petrol and 21.35p per litre of diesel. Today, in the United Kingdom, leaded petrol duty went up by 4.25p per litre, unleaded petrol duty went up by 3.79p per litre, ordinary diesel duty rose by 6.14p per litre and low-sulphur petrol duty by 4.96p per litre.

Smuggling from the Irish Republic into Northern Ireland was already immense, even without those duty rises. A tanker of 25,000 litres gives the smuggler a profit of £4,450 in saved excise duty. Additionally, UK VAT, at 17.5 per cent., also is not paid, taking the smugglers profit to £6,380.50.

Diesel smuggling began in 1997. Large-scale petrol smuggling began after last year's Budget, which increased United Kingdom duty far above that in the Irish Republic. How much is smuggled? Although that is very difficult to determine, a few months ago smuggled fuel was being openly advertised on roadsides. Although the Revenue cracked down on it, the Revenue is short of staff.

We do know that, in the past year, 48 vehicles and 400,000 litres of fuel were seized. However, the Government know that 24 million litres have been smuggled into Northern Ireland in the past year, resulting in a Treasury loss estimated at £100 million. Such extensive fraud is not acceptable to any hon. Member. It is even less acceptable to honest traders in Northern Ireland, who are left in the position of having either to break the law or to close the doors of their businesses. The loss of those businesses would have a real effect on local residents.

Very often, in rural areas and smaller towns, service stations have replaced many corner shops. Local fuel oil and distribution companies are also suffering grievously, as they supply low-volume fuel stations and sustain the operations of smaller companies that the major companies, such as Shell and Esso, simply ignore. They have all been very hard hit. The major oil companies are making an effort to combat smuggling, and have said that their year-on-year losses by value are up to 40 per cent. They are subsidising some of their outlets, but they cannot continue to do so. No one should expect them to do so.

Taxes on road traffic affect transport companies, contractors and construction firms and the aggregate trade. They are all being hit very hard. I should like to know how the Chancellor plans to address the issue. Buying smuggled fuel is not a matter of having to go across the channel, but of driving a mile or two down the road, filling up the vehicle and coming back. The difference in large vehicle excise duty between Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic is, in some cases, several thousand pounds. I am speaking specifically about the heavy vehicles used in the aggregate sand quarrying industry, but also about many other types of vehicles.

Some time ago, I tabled a question on the amount of duty paid in each European Union country on comparable vehicles. No one knew the answer—or at least that is what I was told by the Treasury. I leave it to hon. Members to judge whether the Treasury did not know the answer or did not want to tell me the answer. Regardless, the Treasury was not able to tell me, saying that the figures were not available.

Recent reports show that fuel operators in Great Britain have been hit by vehicle excise duty, as they have been hit by fuel duty. Companies are moving across the channel. In the past week, I saw a report in the newspapers on the Stoddart company's decision to consider moving across the channel.

British traders and lorry owners have difficulty in comparing prices between Britain and those on the continent. However, it is not difficult for people who live in Northern Ireland to compare prices with those in the Irish Republic. Nor is it difficult for them to drive down the road. Firms are transferring their vehicle fleets across the border, taxing them there and operating out of the Irish Republic into Northern Ireland. Those Northern Ireland jobs and companies—which are United Kingdom jobs and companies—are being exported because of the tax structure that operates in the United Kingdom.

Although not too many changes have been made today, higher rates will apply to lorries with axle weights over 11.5 tonnes. There are quite a number of those heavy lorries on our roads. Many of them operate on the continent and many of the firms that use them trade with the continent. I suspect that, by upping the tax on heavy lorries that operate out of the United Kingdom, the Government will simply make it easier for firms that operate out of the Irish Republic, France, the Netherlands and elsewhere in Europe. So where is the benefit? If we are trying to get rid of the heavier axle loading in order to save our roads and bridges—after all, we spent many millions of pounds on upgrading them to EU standards to accommodate the 38-tonners—what is the point of making life difficult for the owners of such vehicles in the United Kingdom, given that everyone else can run them much more cheaply? It is just crazy, and the sooner the Treasury wakes up to that, the better. The Treasury should go back and look at it again.

Green Budgets are a very good idea when one is not in competition with others, but, in practical, terms they will produce real greenery—there will be weeds growing in many business premises in Northern Ireland and ultimately Great Britain as well.

I echo the words of the right hon. Member for Penrith and The Border (Mr. Maclean) on the use of cars in rural areas. I agree with every word that he said. The car is not a luxury for rural families. It is certainly not a luxury in

Northern Ireland; it is absolutely essential. People who live in large conurbations with a bus service that actually works and gets them from A to B within a reasonable time can manage without cars. Where I live, there is no bus unless one is going to school. After that, one has to walk, ride a bicycle or drive. If one lives five miles out into the country, one does not walk or ride a bicycle; one has to have a car. We are continually upping the cost of transport for some of the lowest-paid people in the community to get to and from their places of work. It is not fair and it is not right. The whole system of green politics does not work in the real world.

The right hon. Member for Bishop Auckland (Mr. Foster) began by expressing his regrets that he not got a job in the Government, or something like that. I have no spite against the right hon. Gentleman, who is not in his place. In fact, I have known him for many years and I hold him in very high regard. However, I think it is a good thing when a person who has been close to the centre of things in government or in opposition does not get a job because he knows where all the bodies are buried. He is an invaluable source of information to the House and we are glad to have him here. I was most interested in what he said and he made an excellent speech. However, I was disappointed when he said that he was attracted to the single currency—as the Chancellor undoubtedly is—as an aid to trade with Europe.

The hon. Member for West Worcestershire (Sir M. Spicer) spoke about the need to transfer money within Europe. I thought that he was going to refer to the United States, which is often held up as an example when we debate Europe. However, he did not do that. I am sure that he and other hon. Members know that, in the United States, it is not necessary to transfer very much money because, due to their common language and culture, people move to where there are jobs. That does not happen in Europe because the language barrier creates difficulties for workers, so it becomes necessary to transfer money. In my view that is where the euro will run into immense difficulty.

If all our trade were with Europe, the idea of a single currency producing easier trade and simpler systems would have great force, but that is not the case. A great deal of our trade is outside the EC. Whenever we lift our eyes from the channel and look to the open sea that leads to the rest of the world, our perspective changes about where Britain's future lies. I believe that the open sea tilts the balance decisively in favour of retaining sterling for world trade. It also brings into focus the simple fact that the single currency is not just an economic issue, but a political one from which certain economic and revenue-raising implications would inevitably flow.

For example, taxes would have to harmonise right across the Community. They would be set not by the House, but by others who would seek economic and employment benefits for their own communities. They are bigger and stronger than we are and we know that, whenever they have the power, they will seize the advantage. It has always happened and it always will. I wonder whether the Chancellor really wants his successors to become the puppets of others. He may say that the future will be one of equals contending for common policy on revenue and on expenditure, but I do not believe that. I think that it will be dog eat dog and that we will lose out.

The real future will be analogous to the position of the old Stormont Finance Minister in relation to the Treasury. Perhaps more right hon. and hon. Members should examine what actually happened then. After the war, the Unionist Government in Stormont took a conscious decision to remain in step with the social and other policies of the rest of the United Kingdom. For them, the fulcrum was not between the haves and the have-nots; it was between belonging to this nation and being different and being shoved out. The fulcrum on which their decisions turned was constitutional rather than economic. For that reason, they decided to remain in step with the rest of the United Kingdom, although that resulted in their position changing from contributors to the Exchequer to net recipients.

The net outflow to that region of the United Kingdom—and to others—has steadily increased from that day to this. The decision put them in a position where they were always supplicants to the Treasury and I think that they were very often short changed. The Stormont Government had taken a cold-blooded political decision to serve a political and constitutional purpose. If we apply that reasoning, that thinking and that standard to the concept of the European single currency, we reach a far more accurate understanding of what is actually involved.

Mr. Andrew Stunell (Hazel Grove): The hon. Gentleman has drawn an analogy between Northern Ireland and the rest of the United Kingdom in relation to the euro. Perhaps he should consider the situation between the Irish Republic and the United Kingdom from 1921 and 1979, when there was a common currency but wildly different social and political policies, particularly during and immediately after the second world war—a period to which he has already alluded. Does that not indicate that considerable divergence is possible within that economic linkage?

Mr. Ross: I had considered raising that point, but I left it out as I thought that it would take too long. At the time, the currency of the Irish Republic was tied to, and guaranteed by, the pound sterling, as other minor currencies throughout the world still are. To some extent, the Government of the Irish Republic were, as they believed, puppets of the British Treasury. That is why they saw fit to break the link. Like children let loose in a sweetie shop, they then foolishly went on a spending spree that got them into the most horrendous difficulties. Only when they began to receive the endless torrent of funds that they have enjoyed from Europe in recent years were they able to redeem their position. I hope that that helps the hon. Gentleman. If not, perhaps he will go back and look at the issue in the light of what I have said.

When the House considers the best interests of the United Kingdom and all our citizens, it should come to the conclusion that they are best served by trade with the whole world. That would at least be following in the footsteps of Churchill. The freedom of action that we enjoy in setting our taxes and on economic policy should remain here, with the elected Members of Parliament who represent the people of the United Kingdom. This is where such decisions should be made.

8.21 pm

Mr. Christopher Leslie (Shipley): It is always a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for East Londonderry (Mr. Ross), who made an interesting and lively contribution.

[Mr. Christopher Leslie]

I welcome the Budget that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor delivered this afternoon. I should like to refer to some of the points made earlier by my hon. Friend the Member for Halton (Mr. Twigg) on the themes of the Budget. I saw two clear themes, which have been evident throughout the Government's tenure of office: stability in an uncertain world climate and tight and prudent fiscal policy, providing a firm foundation for sustainable growth. Those two themes cannot be reiterated often enough. We should recognise that those polices are welcome in today's economic climate. They were woefully missing from the record of the previous Conservative Administration. That helps to explain where the Conservatives went wrong and where we are going right.

My hon. Friend the Member for Halton mentioned the history of Tory stewardship of the economy, eloquently contrasting the Labour Government's achievements with the boom and bust instability that the Conservatives created. The Tory years were marked by recklessness, with fiscal policy all over the place and public sector borrowing and the national debt spiralling out of control. Thank goodness the Labour Government came in when we did, or who knows what would be hanging around the necks of future generations?

Throughout the Budget statement, there was a gleam in the eyes of Conservative Members. They were green around the gills with jealousy. It is telling that we seem to have forced so many of them to vacate their seats this evening. The fact that it is towards dinner time is no excuse.

It is useful to consider the general economic context. Hon. Members have talked about the history of the British economy, but we also need to consider the current worldwide situation, which is full of uncertainty and unpredictability. We have to navigate the British economy through a lot of choppy waters. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor mentioned that a quarter of the world is in recession and the German economy is shrinking. The hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle (Mr. Wardle) ran through many of the problems in the world economy. There are difficulties in Asia and Latin America and a boom in the United States, with the stock market continuing to rise inexorably, propping up a lot of world demand. In this difficult time, it is important to focus on steering a course of stability for the British economy. The Conservatives failed to recognise that in their replies on the Budget this afternoon.

The British economy shows many signs of success. My hon. Friend the Member for Halton referred to the International Monetary Fund, whose article IV consultation concluded last week. The executive board directors made some insightful comments about the state of the economy. The report said:

"Executive Directors commended the authorities for the United Kingdom's impressive economic performance in recent years and their skilful management of the economy."

The report went on to describe many of those skills and how they had manifested themselves, adding later:

"Several Directors considered that the United Kingdom's experience . . . could offer useful lessons for other advanced and developing countries."

That is an objective ringing endorsement of what the Government are doing.

The International Monetary Fund and other external observers are not the only ones who are saying that our economy is on the up. The Ernst and Young Item Club forecasters recently said:

"Britain is on the verge of a golden economic scenario, with low inflation allowing interest rates to fall towards 4 per cent."

The recent DHL international quarterly survey talked specifically about manufacturing industry and the upturn in confidence among exporters. It said last week that 54 per cent. of manufacturing exporters were expecting orders to increase. That is an excellent sign that we are turning the corner and moving towards a more stable, sustainable growth pattern. Even direct foreign investment—we have heard much criticism on that subject from the Conservatives—has improved. The managing director of the French Chamber of Commerce said last month:

"We have noticed that the number of investments from French companies into Britain has increased quickly in the past two years."

He went on to say that the French

"are also seeing Britain as a good marketplace, whereas it was previously seen as a little complicated."

That was the case under the previous Conservative Administration.

Considering the position of the British economy on monetary and fiscal policy is a good way to assess the impact of today's Budget. Inflation is clearly being brought under control, thanks to the independence granted to the Monetary Policy Committee of the Bank of England. I am sure that many people will grow to appreciate that policy, when contrasted with the threat posed by the Conservatives, who would probably scrap Bank of England independence. The Conservatives getting their grubby political hands all over monetary policy again would pose a risk to everyone's prosperity. We shall find out what their policy is in time. If they do not like Bank of England independence, I should like to know what they would do like.

Mr. Green: As I understand it, the stated policy of the Labour party is to abolish the Monetary Policy Committee. The hon. Gentleman cannot have it both ways. Either he thinks that the committee is a good thing, and should be allowed to set British interest rates, or he wants to abolish it by entering the single currency—but he cannot have both at once.

Mr. Leslie: There is a very long word, Mr. Deputy Speaker—depoliticisation. Labour recognises that it is important to depoliticise decisions on interest rates, and to make sure that the world around us does not fear political tinkering with interest rates. The Conservatives cannot resist such short-term political fixing, and that miserable lot would return to it if they were re-elected.

The IMF report also stated:

"Directors praised the government's efforts to strengthen the framework for monetary and fiscal policy in recent years . . . The revamping of the framework was most advanced with respect to monetary policy . . . this framework had worked well in the UK . . . On the transparency of the monetary framework, Directors considered the UK to be close to the frontier."

That is almost like a quote from "Star Trek"—boldly going where others would fear to tread.

Recently, I was flicking through the annual report and accounts of a company called Fleming Claverhouse Investment Trust plc.

Mr. Stunell: As you do.

Mr. Leslie: I was doing so because of an interesting quote from the company's investment manager, who said:

"The new Labour Government gave the Bank of England operational independence . . . thus reinforcing their pre-election claims of economic prudence and the need for low inflation."

That quote jumped out at me because the right hon. Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr. Lilley)—the deputy leader of the Conservative party—is a director of Fleming Claverhouse Investment Trust. His own company is commending the Labour Government's careful stewardship of monetary policy.

Interest rates are down from their peak of 7.5 per cent. to 5.5 per cent. We have the lowest mortgage rates for 33 years, and the lowest long-term interest rates for 40 years—an excellent sign for the future. Cheltenham and Gloucester published an affordability index recently, which said that that represented a fall of more than a quarter in the amount that the average home buyer spent on their mortgage. The company predicted that rates would drop significantly further.

Another study, by the National Institute for Economic and Social Research, predicted that interest rates would fall to below 4 per cent. by early 2001—the lowest level since 1955—as inflationary pressures eased. There are more testimonies to the success of the British economy in terms of monetary policy.

The British Bankers Association highlighted a record £1.21 billion increase in mortgage lending this year. It called that "remarkable" and said that it was "genuine new demand". This will come through the system to ensure not only that we have a soft landing, but that we return to sustainable prosperity and increases in growth over the coming years. The growth forecasts have not changed, and growth will continue, along with low inflation.

The Building Societies Association said:

"borrowers might find the housing market particularly affordable this year".

I am glad to see that things are looking up in that regard. Things can only get better, as we know—and they have got better.

On fiscal policy and national debt, we see a transformation not only in the Government's coffers, but in how much debt is hung around the neck of the nation. We are going into a surplus in the current Budget of at least 0.5 per cent. over the economic cycle, and the tough control of public borrowing—cutting the deficit by about £19 billion in our first year in office—has laid the foundations for a sound revenue base which can pay for the vital public services and the long-term investment that we want.

The Red Book highlights an equivalent of 6 per cent. reduction of debt in terms of GDP over the next six years—a significant achievement for the Government. As we get debt down as a proportion of GDP, we stop having to pay all that interest on the debt. The money that we save in that regard can be used for other parts of public expenditure.

My hon. Friend the Member for Halton highlighted the history of the Conservative party's aims in public expenditure, and referred to the way in which the Conservatives seemed to focus on consumption and on throwing money away in debt charges, willy-nilly. They were happy to pay money on interest, rather than using the money to invest in the future and the infrastructure of the nation.

There were significant tax cuts in previous Budgets, with national insurance cut by £69 for each year from April 1999 and tax promises which have been kept with regard to VAT and income tax. We have the lowest-ever business taxes, with the main rate of corporation tax cut to 30 per cent, and the rate for smaller businesses reduced to 20 per cent. The list goes on.

The income tax cuts are a significant achievement—particularly the new 10p starting rate of income tax, which will be welcomed widely across the country. The right hon. Member for Penrith and The Border (Mr. Maclean) said that he was already receiving letters telling him that people did not like the Budget. I have not checked my e-mail this evening, as I have been in the Chamber, but I know that people will be extremely pleased about the new 10p starting rate and, more importantly in some regards, the 22p basic rate from April 2000.

All in all, each year the average household will be £380 better off, the average working household £450 better off and the average household with children £740 better off. The Budget cuts taxes for the vast majority, and I know that my constituents in Shipley will be extremely pleased with it. I expect plenty of letters to come flowing through my door; perhaps I will forward them to the right hon. Member for Penrith and The Border.

We should focus on the capital modernisation fund. It has not been mentioned much, because my right hon. Friend the Chancellor had to rattle through so many excellent reforms. The nation will benefit from long-term investment in infrastructure, and an extra £1.1 billion was announced today on top of the £40 billion for schools and hospitals. For example, there is an extra £470 million for the national information technology strategy and £430 million for modernisation of accident and emergency provision in the NHS.

Under the Labour Government, Bradford royal infirmary will get a new accident and emergency department that will be quintuple the size of the old one. The extra £170 million to tackle crime has already been mentioned. The investment from the capital modernisation fund will be extremely welcome and will start to filter through shortly.

Pensioners will benefit tremendously from the Budget. Shipley has a high proportion of pensioners. They will welcome the increase in the older persons allowance, which will cost the Exchequer £100 million; the increase in the minimum income guarantee, not merely by prices but by earnings, which will cost £220 million; and, most significantly, the £100 winter allowance, which will cost £640 million and be worth every penny—pensioners need that allowance, and they will see even more clearly than before the contrast between our support for people who have worked and saved hard all their lives and the derisory amounts given to them by the Conservative Government.

Enterprise is a theme that pervades the Budget. My right hon. Friend said that he was making seven announcements, but I counted 12 initiatives, including low

[Mr. Leslie]

corporation tax; the extension of 40 per cent. first-year capital allowances for small and medium enterprises, which will encourage reinvestment in production process technology; the research and development tax credit; and something called "university challenge" in the Red Book, which may be more appropriately described as a £100 million boost for university science laboratories. We should not undervalue the benefits brought by that seedcorn money.

The single small business service should not be overlooked in a review of the Government's achievements. It will come to be seen as a radical and enlightened reform. Conservative Members say that anything that the Government introduce adds bureaucracy and red tape, but one of the service's sole objectives will be to help with the administrative burden, cutting through red tape, giving loan guarantees and helping with automated payroll services for small firms. That will be welcomed by many small firms. Some of the biggest costs that they face are caused by the bureaucracy involved in pay-as-you-earn and so on.

I also look forward to announcements on the new competition policy reviews taking place in the Department of Trade and Industry and the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, especially the review of whether it is possible to reduce the cost of water for consumers and to ensure that profit is not always at the top of the privatised utilities' agendas.

One of the Government's themes was helping poor people, especially families with children. The child support provided by the state will double during this Parliament, taking into account the increase in child benefit and the £416 given in the child tax credit. That will mean that the average family with children will be £740 a year better off. That move is very welcome, as are the Government's other initiatives, such as making work pay, the national insurance changes, the working families tax credit, the national minimum wage and the return to work initiative for the over-50s.

I shall conclude my remarks to allow other hon. Members to speak. I look forward to hearing how Opposition Members intend to plug the revenue gap that would be created by the amendments that they propose to the Finance Bill. For the financial year 2001–02, their proposals would reduce revenue by £7.5 billion. Would they plug that gap by cutting public services, by adding extra to tax or by returning to increases in the national debt? What would the Tories do about Bank of England independence? Would they scrap the £40 billion extra spending on schools and hospitals? Given that they would also make no preparations for the euro, their policies represent a significant threat to the financial well-being of every man, woman and child in this country, should the Tories ever get back into office.

The country wants stability in the economy, not the old boom and bust. I look forward to April as the month of delivery. People will start to see the benefits of our changes, including the national minimum wage, sure start, increases in child benefit and the extra £40 billion of the comprehensive spending review. Most of all, I look forward to the day when people see the benefit of the 10p tax rate, which will be extremely welcome. It is an excellent Budget and one that is worthy of this fantastic Labour Administration.

8.43 pm

Mr. Jonathan Sayeed (Mid-Bedfordshire): I congratulate the hon. Member for Shipley (Mr. Leslie) on a fluent speech, very little of which I agreed with. For the sake of brevity, I wish to take him up on one issue only. He said that he was delighted with the measures for families and children, but I urge him to read page 112 of the Red Book. Item 17 states that the married couples allowance will be abolished from April 2000, with a saving to the Exchequer of £1.6 billion, but its replacement, the children's tax credit, will not be introduced until a year later. That is the way in which this Chancellor has consistently clawed back money.

In preparation for the Budget, I organised a survey of a large number of organisations in my constituency. Those organisations are not economists, statisticians or even politicians: they are businesses that employ people and produce profits. Out of the employment that they provide and the profits that they produce, they supply the taxes that Parliament spends.

It is against the yardstick of what those businesses think of the Government that we should judge this Labour Chancellor. A wide range of businesses were included. Some are manufacturers, some are in construction; some are in wholesale and others are in retail. Some are in the service sector, and 23 per cent. of what they produce, they export.

Over the past 12 months, business has grown for one third of them, has contracted for one third, and has stayed the same for one third. Before Labour Members congratulate themselves on that stand-still policy, I should tell them that quite a few companies said that they had been doing so well despite the downturn in the economy because they were living off the good times under the Tories.

I asked what the companies predicted for the next 12 months. Anyone who has run a company will know that one knows a lot about what will happen during the next 12 months. One knows one's contracts, wage bills and much else so that one may make a fairly clever, careful prediction. It is true that 38 per cent. of the companies thought that business would improve, but 62 per cent. thought the situation would remain the same or get worse. That is a statement by business that we are in for a period of economic stagnation, and no Government should be satisfied with that.

I thought that I should check that the companies were wide awake and that they were not sitting on their laurels, but looking to the future and trying to invest. I asked whether they were ready for the millennium and whether their computers were ready, the computer chips in their lifts were checked, and their weighing machines with microchips in them were fully tested. Ninety-seven per cent. said yes.

I asked whether the companies were prepared for the euro, and 49 per cent. said that they were, and had been for some time. I asked how many were in favour of joining a single currency, and three fifths said, "No, never." They said that it was perfectly simple to run a business that deals with many currencies—as I have—without the need to join a single currency.

The companies wanted a Government that they could chuck out when they needed to do so. [HON. MEMBERS: "They did that."] They wanted a Government that they could elect when they wanted to. [HON. MEMBERS: "They did that, too."] Labour Members may laugh,

but the same may happen to them. However, only if we are a sovereign nation will chucking out a Government matter. Most of the businesses want to be part of Europe, but they do not want to be run by Brussels or Frankfurt.

I asked what the Government had done that most affected the businesses, either positively or adversely. Top of the list for three quarters of them was the European working hours directive. They said that, the Government had increased labour costs by 7 per cent. One commented that no overtime could now be permitted. Administration has become more complicated, and there has been a net increase of 1,980 regulations. They said that, under this Government, administration has become more expensive and less flexible. Shift coverage will be difficult. Put all that together with the minimum wage and the increase in upper levels of national insurance, and the companies are finding life hard.

What do the companies want? They want more flexibility and less bureaucracy. They want reduced fuel taxes. They want the Government to encourage capital investment, and to keep their promise to deal with the payment terms of larger companies. The companies were relieved to hear the Prime Minister recognise at long last that taxes are increasing under his Government, and that they would continue to rise. They said that, until the Prime Minister understood that, there was no chance of taxation coming down.

Cutting taxes matters and that is where the Government fail consistently. They trumpet that they cut corporation tax by £800 million, but what they failed to tell us was that, at the same time, by abolishing advance corporation tax and changing the system of collection, they increased the cost to business by £3.6 billion. We have the headline figure for reduced corporation tax, but the figures for ACT and the system changes are hidden. That happened in the previous Budget, and is apparent again in today's Budget.

It is not only headline figures that matter. The Chancellor claims that corporation tax in this country is the lowest in Europe, but he is wrong. Sweden is in Europe, and its corporation tax is 28 per cent. However, Sweden suffers from a brain drain and a capital drain because all its other taxes are so high. It is the totality of tax that matters.

Foreign companies based in Britain produce 40 per cent. of British exports, so it is essential not only that we get them to invest in this country, but that we keep them here. Those companies owe no loyalty to this country and we shall not keep them here unless we can prove that they have a better fiscal environment here than elsewhere. It is critical that the totality of tax, in whatever form it comes, is lower here than it is in any other place where those companies might want to settle.

I believe that a Budget that lacks transparency lacks honesty. This Budget is at best translucent. However, amid the Chancellor's obfuscation, the hidden figures and the unannounced tax increases, some things are clear: tax is too high; tax on mortgages will go up; tax on marriage will go up; and tax on petrol, company cars, pensions, savings, home purchase and business is set to go up. All that from a Prime Minister who said a few weeks before the election that Labour had

"No plans to increase tax at all".

Worst of all is what has been done to the savings of people in this country. It is a monstrous disgrace that the savings ratio has declined so dramatically, from nearly 11 to 7.5 per cent. Savings protect the future of the elderly people of our country; they are our future. By damaging that, a Government make certain that more people will be dependent on the state in the future. To damage the savings ratio is a profound mistake for any Chancellor and the current Chancellor has done so in every Budget that he has delivered.

Now and again, we hear nice things, for example, that there will be more money for health, education and the police; but then we read in the Red Book that those modest sums will be paid over three years. Furthermore, it is not new money; it was announced almost a year ago. But then I consider Bedfordshire police and remember that the Labour Government cut the funding to that police force during this financial year. The Government say that they will give money in the future with one hand, but this year they have taken away more money with the other hand.

Some would call the Budget dishonest and they would do so because it hides the truth—*[Interruption.]* As you see, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am trying to keep within the rules. What is clear is that the Chancellor is anxious to hide some truths.

The Government are unravelling Britain. The Prime Minister is likely to go down in history as the Prime Minister who broke up the United Kingdom. The Government clearly believe in gutting the constitution. They are undermining parliamentary democracy and making our voting system less democratic. The Government are intent on abandoning our currency and are raising taxes inexorably. The best thing that this Government could do is learn some lessons from the past. There is a very simple lesson that they should learn: when we tax less, we incentivise more. Let the Government get on with that and we might have a worthwhile Budget.

8.55 pm

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney, North and Stoke Newington): It is with considerable amusement that I have sat in the Chamber all afternoon and evening watching the Tories floundering in response to a Budget that is, in many ways, a symphony on their best themes: the family, support for business and enterprise, and low taxation. Of course, it was presented with considerable panache and flourish by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

However, I warn my colleagues who have, again and again, prayed in aid the International Monetary Fund in support of the Government's economic strategy that, if I were them, I would beware of plaudits from the IMF. It is a ferociously monetarist organisation, which is not interested in poverty alleviation, the redistribution of wealth or a strong public sector. Some of my colleagues have said with great pride that one of the Government's achievements has been depoliticising monetary policy. That is a contradiction in terms.

Of course decisions about economic policy are political, but those processes and decisions must be accountable and transparent. We mislead the public when we say that we can depoliticise issues that have a bearing on the life and liberty of our electorate. What some of my colleagues call "depoliticising monetary policy" others might call "abdicating responsibility for monetary policy". We shall see the consequences of that in the long term.

Before I leave monetary policy—some hon. Members may be aware that it is one of my favourite subjects—let me say that it is interesting to note how the Government

[Ms Diane Abbott]

try to have it both ways. They have abdicated responsibility in favour of that estimable man, Eddie George, at the Bank of England. However, when it suits them, the Government try to claim responsibility for the successes. I heard the Chancellor say this afternoon of monetary policy that "together, we are steering a course of stability." When Eddie George makes unpopular decisions, they are his; however, when those decisions appear to be working, the Government claim that they are steering a course "together". There is no "together" about it: for better or worse, we have given away control of monetary policy.

Sir Robert Smith (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) *rose—*

Ms Abbott: I am sorry. I would usually give way, but I cannot do so now as time is short and several of my colleagues wish to contribute to the debate.

The Government have given away control of monetary policy just as we will give away control of other spheres of economic policy if there is economic and monetary union.

Let me move to the substance of my speech. My right hon. Friend the Member for Bishop Auckland (Mr. Foster) said that it is important not to judge Budgets immediately. He is quite right. I sat through 10 or 12 Tory Budgets, and I know from experience that, however much one thrashes around and waves one's arms at the time, the consequences of a Budget are best considered in the cold light of morning. Being neither new nor new Labour, I know enough to understand that a Budget is best judged not by reading the party handouts but by studying the Red Book. When one examines the Red Book, one sees a number of lacunae, which I am not able to shed light on at present.

I was struck by an item in the Red Book that described how the Government would save £500 million in public expenditure by countering avoidance in the provision of personal services. My mind boggled as to how the Government planned to save expenditure on personal services and my curiosity led me to discover what that meant. When I referred to the Red Book and the supporting press releases, I found a press release that said that the Inland Revenue is looking at tax avoidance by people who leave employment and return to the same jobs as consultants. However, it provided no information as to how the Government planned to counter that tax avoidance. So how they can say in the Red Book that they will save £500 million in that area, I do not know. Having sat through 12 Tory Budgets, I strongly suspect that more such scams would be discovered in the Red Book if people only had time to consider it.

I want to address the Budget's effect on families, not only working families—which are the Government's buzz words at the moment—but all families, including pensioners and single parents. I very much welcome the increase in child benefit. It has been established for many years that the most effective way to help children is not fiddling with the tax regime but providing child benefit. Equally, I welcome the Chancellor's decision not to tax child benefit, at least for the time being, because any attempt to do so would unravel the independent taxation of women, which is one of the few economic accomplishments of the previous Tory regime.

If one considers the Red Book, however, to try to work out the Budget's effect on families, one notices that working households gain the most. The Chancellor trumpets that as a great accomplishment, but let us think about that. We might think that the people who are losing out are non-working households—people who sit around watching daytime television and smoking cigarettes—but of course most of those households, who gain the least from the Budget, are pensioners, single parents and the disabled. Much as I applaud the Government's focus on work and working households, I must, even at the risk of being considered off-message, draw their attention to the importance of households whose members cannot work. They are not people who choose not to work, but those who have no practical prospects of gaining access to the labour market in the foreseeable future.

One of the interesting points that is hidden—although not very well hidden—in the Red Book and the supporting press releases is that there will be further elements of coercion in the new deal. No doubt, that will be spelt out in the coming days and weeks. Young people will be forced to take part in the new deal and to go to interviews or lose their benefit. My concern is that the creeping element of coercion for young people will, in time, be replicated for other groups, particularly single mothers and disabled people.

Single mothers are a particular concern of mine. I point out in the kindest and most comradely way possible that the Chancellor and the Secretary of State for Social Security know nothing about bringing up a child on one's own. We would hear less glib talk from them about the importance of single mothers going out to work if they had ever had to get up before dawn, put a child in a buggy, take the child to the minder and find themselves a job on public transport or filling shelves so that, at the end of the week, they had a few pounds more than they would have received in benefit.

I say to my colleagues on the Treasury Bench that I went back to work when my son was eight days old, but I enjoyed my job and I had every support. I and many other Labour supporters in the country would be horrified if a Labour Government moved towards coercing mothers of young children back to work. Although Ministers would deny that they are doing so, if we consider the trend in the way that they are structuring social security, we can see that it is a possibility. What is the merit in young, under-educated women leaving their children in the care of other young, under-educated women so that they can go out and fill shelves?

In his Budget speech, the Chancellor spoke of failing to reward those who take the most important responsibility of all. Our attitude to single mothers means that we are failing to reward them. The Government cannot continue to imply that the only way for single mothers, whatever the age of their children, to improve their standard of living is to go out to work. If anything, we should pay single mothers of children under five more benefit because it is their choice to stay at home, and we should not coerce them into going to work by artificially keeping down the levels of benefit and by constant propaganda about entering the labour market and the work force. The reality for those young women is not becoming a Member of Parliament, a merchant banker or some other well paid jobholder, but demeaning, underpaid work, with all the misery and practical problems of using public transport to get to work and to childminders. I am sorry

to labour the point, but I feel strongly about it. Ministers overlook it in their obsession with getting everyone into work.

I welcome the fact that the Chancellor of Exchequer has talked much about the books and computers that he will get into schools, but all the books and computers in the world will not matter if we cannot retain teachers. Hon. Members can call me simplistic, but in a market economy, the key indicator is cost. So, if we value teachers, we must pay them.

My son is at a state primary school on the border between Hackney and Islington. Since the beginning of this school term, he has had six different teachers—not because the school does not care, but because it is impossible to retain teachers in inner London on the pay that they are offered. It is no good Treasury Ministers talking about superteachers. Ordinary parents want ordinary teachers to teach their children. I do not know about the rest of the country, but staff in the inner city will be retained only if the average teacher is offered higher pay. We are fooling the public if we pretend otherwise.

I would like my son to have more books and computers, but I would also like him to have a teacher who stays at the school for an entire school year. I would like him not to have to put up continually with supply teachers and a desperate head teacher who cannot retain his staff. On the present salary, young teachers living in London cannot buy a house or have any kind of life. I await the time when Treasury Ministers get up and get real about issues of recruitment and retention in the public sector. They should think not about fast-streaming some, or offering money to superteachers and supernurses, but about reflecting market realities and paying people the proper rates for the job.

I noticed that the Chancellor said that there would be action on competition policy. I welcome that; I hope that it will involve action on competition among newspapers and the Murdoch empire. Action on Murdoch would be widely welcomed both in the Labour movement and among the general public.

I noticed that the Chancellor talked about financial services, which is a very important subject. As we approach the millennium, we are moving into an era in which we are looking to the financial services industry to provide many parts of the welfare state, such as benefits for unemployment or sickness and higher education, which my generation assume will be paid for out of taxation. If colleagues had served, as I did, for eight years on the Treasury Committee and seen the horrors of pension mis-selling and the financial services industry, they would know that it will take more than league tables to get the industry into line on such matters.

I notice in the Red Book that the Government are laying a great deal of stress on the private finance initiative to meet their requirements for capital investment. This is not the debate in which to address the PFI, but the Government are going down a blind alley with it. The PFI is simply not suitable for certain public expenditure, especially in the health service, as the Government will find to their cost.

We have one of the most able, accomplished and intellectually self-confident Chancellors of modern times, yet he has a tendency to dwell on micro-economics, supply-side measures and new computers and books to the exclusion of macro-economic issues, on which ultimately we judge a Chancellor. When we strip out the soundbites and the little tasty things that are designed to affect the elections in May, we will find that what really matters to the economy are prospects for growth, world trade, monetary policy, public spending and the burden of taxation. Only a close study of the Red Book in the coming weeks and months will reveal what is really happening on those issues.

There is much to welcome in this Budget, but, as I have said in the House before, I doubt very much whether the aspirations of Labour voters can be realised within what is essentially—despite the protestations of the Tories—a Tory macro-economic framework.

9.10 pm

Mr. Damian Green (Ashford): It is always interesting to follow the hon. Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott). I do not agree with her that the Chancellor makes a convincing Tory, but I agree that Labour voters will find him unconvincing, whatever clothes he is trying to put on.

The hon. Member for Shipley (Mr. Leslie) cast doubt on whether my right hon. Friend the Member for Penrith and The Border (Mr. Maclean) was in a position to know the instant public reaction to the Budget. I am happy to report to him and the House that, about half an hour after the Chancellor sat down, the hon. Member for Gravesham (Mr. Pond) and I appeared on a radio programme, and that, after the hon. Gentleman had said that the new Jerusalem had arrived and I had said that the Budget was essentially a con trick, members the public were asked their views, and they all said substantially the same thing—that the Budget pretended to give with one hand, while it took with the other, and that there was nothing in it for them.

I am also happy to report that the public's views had nothing to do with my penetrating analysis or eloquence because the interviews were pre-recorded, so the Chancellor can take all the credit for that instant disillusionment with his measures. Obviously, the people of Kent have more savvy than the Labour Back Benchers who waved their Order Papers earlier.

I do not want to travel to the wider shores of macro-economic policy, as so many colleagues have done so. I should like to make three points that are especially pertinent to my constituency and other parts of Kent, and two wider national points on aspects of the Budget that deal with training and lifelong learning.

My first—very practical—point concerns the Chancellor's non-change in alcohol duties. Although that will be welcome, it will not be enough to prevent what is becoming quite a serious fiscal and social problem for the whole country, but especially a social problem for my constituents and others who live in Kent, which is the first port of call for smugglers of drink and tobacco. The Treasury is aware that levels of beer duty, which the Chancellor has left unchanged, are seven times higher than levels of French beer duty, and that that gap provides a straightforward and easy economic incentive to smuggling and fraud.

Every day, about 1.5 million pints of beer are smuggled. One in three pints of beer drunk in Kent is now bought in France. Some of that trade is legal, but the vast bulk of it is illegal, and it costs the Treasury about

[Mr. Damian Green]

£900 million a year in lost tax revenue. The Chancellor made some announcements about improving the resources of Customs and Excise to tackle the problem, but he must know that those improvements are only a fig leaf. As long as the economic incentive is there, the trade will carry on.

Alcohol smuggling is not only a fiscal issue but a serious social issue. As a result of keeping tax too high, paradoxically, alcohol is too cheap, because so much smuggled alcohol enters the country, and therefore it is more accessible to children. The journal of the British Institute of Innkeeping drew attention to the fact that a police camera sequence filmed in the centre of my constituency showed youngsters as young as 11 or 12—who, the police discovered, had got drunk on illegally smuggled alcohol—trying, as they put it, to stop the traffic. They were wandering around the streets, hopelessly drunk, putting themselves and other motorists in severe danger.

The fact that our alcohol taxes are too high is not simply a matter of the Treasury losing income and revenue; it is a social disaster happening under the Government's nose. I urge them to set in train a full-scale review of excise duties, because that would be not only in the Treasury's interests but in the wider interests of law and order.

I am sure that the Minister knows that tobacco smuggling poses an equally serious problem. I am sure that every hon. Member approves of the use of high taxation in an attempt to discourage smoking; that is not at issue. However, at the moment, it is not working. One in seven packets of cigarettes smoked in this country is smuggled, so cigarettes are available much more cheaply than the Government, any health professional or any hon. Member would wish them to be. The Chancellor is shooting himself in the foot, and the money that the Secretary of State for Health spends on anti-smoking propaganda is wasted because the Government cannot bring themselves to address the issue. I have been told by my local police that they have known packets of 20 cigarettes to be available in schools in my constituency for as little as 35p. Quite apart from the revenue aspects, a serious health aspect is clearly involved.

Mr. Tyrie: Does my hon. Friend agree that the Government should take a leaf out of William Pitt the Younger's book? He faced the same problem. The excise duty was falling because of the increase in smuggling. There were calls to increase the number of Customs officials to go chasing the smugglers. He did the opposite. He lowered the excise duties, particularly on spirits. As a result, revenues increased. He found a superior means by which revenues would increase—lower rates of duty. That is a much better way to deal with the problem.

Mr. Green: My hon. Friend makes an elegant historical point.

There is a further serious social issue. The smuggling is attracting professional criminals to what is otherwise a peaceful and tranquil part of the country. The police warn that unpleasant criminal gangs are assembling and taking over local areas. They warn that there will soon be gangland shootings in small villages in east Kent unless something is done about the matter. This is more than a Treasury issue. It is a serious law and order issue which the Government have it in their power to address. Unfortunately, they do not seem to have the will to do so. I urge them to deal with it.

The third issue that concerns my constituents is the accelerating increase in petrol duty that the Government insist on introducing. The right hon. Member for Bishop Auckland (Mr. Foster) referred to it in the context of his constituency. That was many hours ago. Those of us who sat through the speech of the hon. Member for Halton (Mr. Twigg) may think that it happened in a previous lifetime.

For my constituents, cars are not a luxury. They are not even a necessary evil. They are a necessity for people to get to work and to lead an ordinary life. The Government seem to be trying to shove the car into the category of goods which, in principle, they would like to ban. They cannot quite bring themselves to do that, so they will tax its use out of existence. There may be arguments for that in urban areas, but there are no arguments in rural areas.

The Government are making rural motoring impossible for the less well-off. As the right hon. Member for Bishop Auckland observed, the better-off shrug and bear it, but people who have a car as a marginal good and worry about the price of petrol face increasing difficulty. The Government have got themselves on to a treadmill, which they must get off. If not, we can only agree with the right hon. Gentleman's conclusion that the Government have no regard for rural areas and those who live there.

Lifelong learning is one of the Government's great catch phrases, but I am forced to conclude that it is no more than a slogan. The Chancellor devoted part of his Budget statement to individual learning accounts. For anyone who knows anything about the scheme, that section of his speech was slightly surreal. He spoke about how the scheme could be extended, how it would be tweaked, and how it would be tied in with the use of computers.

The fact is that individual learning accounts do not exist. They are chimera in the Chancellor's mind. He spoke of extending them, but he cannot extend them until he introduces them. Last year, the Government produced a Green Paper on the issue and promised us a White Paper. We have seen no sign of the White Paper. The Department cannot tell us when it will come out.

The Government said originally that the scheme would be introduced on 1 April. There are still no details about them. [HON. MEMBERS: "1 April."] I intended to refrain from 1 April references, but, as my hon. Friends have not done so, that may be an appropriate date for the Government to consider introducing the scheme.

The Government say that they will provide £150 a day which, with the £25 a day that the individual claimant must put in, will allow two days of training on Windows. That is all well and good, although it will not transform the life chances of anyone who goes on such a training scheme funded by an individual learning account. So far, those things do not exist, yet the Chancellor devoted a section of his Budget statement to them. I shall be delighted if a Treasury Minister can explain what on earth the Chancellor was on about.

The gap between rhetoric and reality is startling in other areas, such as the new deal for the over-50s, which was much trumpeted. We read about it on the front page of

one of the national newspapers in the now-traditional pre-Budget leak. I read with great eagerness table 4.1 on page 58 of the Red Book, where I discovered that this enormously important scheme will have precisely £10 million spent on it this year. To put that in perspective, £820 million will be spent on the new deal for young people. Those over-50s who think that their lives will be transformed by that new scheme will be sadly disappointed.

I wondered whether the scheme was merely a pilot project that would be extended next year, but I discovered that, for every year for the rest of this Parliament, precisely £20 million will be spent on it. This is not a major scheme.

Mr. Tyrie: May I give my hon. Friend another example of a surreal aspect to the Budget? We are told that there is £20 million for a venture capital challenge competition. The venture capital industry is to be revived, somehow. Of a total investment in the country of £132 billion per annum, what difference will £20 million make?

Mr. Green: As the debate continues, others of my hon. Friends will find more nuggets in the Red Book that reveal the enormous gap between rhetoric and reality. For example, the university for industry, which is one of the Government's big ideas and a major training initiative, has funding of £5 million for 1998-99. That is fair enough, because it is for the start-up costs. Will funding be serious next year, when the university is established? Funding for 1999-2000 is zero, funding for 2000-01 is zero and funding for 2001-02 is zero. There is no money for this major Government initiative to promote lifelong learning.

Mr. David Taylor: If the hon. Gentleman reads the Red Book in a little more detail, he will see a footnote that makes it clear that the funding for the university for industry is taken over by departmental totals at that stage. Although the funding does not appear in the table, it is referred to.

Mr. Green: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman, because I was coming on to that point. Footnote 7 on page 58 states:

"Other costs of the Ufi are funded from within departmental expenditure limits."

In other words, the funding has been junked inside the Department because the Government do not know what to do with the policy and do not care about it very much. That is symbolic of the Budget: provide a leak, add some gloss, give it some spin and let the policy look after itself. That does not wash and the longer that the Government are in office, the less that will wash. The British people will see through the Budget and, in the long run, it will be judged a failure.

9.23 pm

Ms Sally Keeble (Northampton, North): I am pleased to speak in a debate on a Budget that will greatly benefit my constituents. I agree with the hon. Member for Ashford (Mr. Green) that the British public will see the Budget for what it is—they will see it to be a resounding success. In particular, the families and the pensioners who make up the bulk of my constituents will feel the benefits of the Budget.

I had a rather rueful thought as the hon. Member for Ashford talked about the problems of smuggled alcohol. Such smuggling has, from time to time, been a real problem in my constituency and an extremely dramatic case was splashed all over the papers. Alcohol was smuggled in from France and sold in the local Conservative club, and there was an extremely high-profile raid.

I want to comment on some of the facts that were put forward by the hon. Member for Mid-Bedfordshire (Mr. Sayeed), who is no longer present. He said that, year on year, the Chancellor had damaged the savings ratio, but, from my understanding of the Red Book, that is not true. The ratio will edge up slightly, from 7 to 7.5 per cent.

I also take issue with the incorrect information that the hon. Gentleman provided about the increase in taxes on ordinary families. What he said was untrue. Page 157 of the Red Book shows that the tax take is lower than it was for most of the Tory years and page 71 shows that it is lower this year for families with two children than in any year since 1992, which—surprise, surprise—was an election year. Apparently, by 2001, the tax burden on families with two children will be roughly half what it was for most of the Tory years. Many families will feel the benefit of that, and will realise that it is due to the Chancellor's sound management of the economy and his generous and thoughtful tax and benefit arrangements.

Let me now deal with the Budget's impact on families. Children's tax credit is to replace the married couples allowance. That will produce real benefits that will be much more carefully targeted. There will be a dramatic increase in child benefit. Moreover, the working families tax credit and child care tax credit will shortly be introduced. Taken together, those measures will radically transform the living conditions of many of my constituents, and, in particular, will end the outrage, which has existed for many years, that children are always those most affected by poverty. Many will be relieved when children receive the greatest support from the Government.

The Budget contains a number of other measures to benefit children, which many families will see coming into effect very quickly. For instance, extra money is being put into education. Cash for books will constitute a substantial improvement for many schoolchildren, while improvements in maternity grants will plug a gap in our tax and benefit system, providing support for women and children at the point at which it is often most needed—the point at which they are most vulnerable. Families of the type that constitute the bulk of my constituents will benefit by roughly £40 a week as a result of all the changes in the Budget.

In my constituency, I have been constantly lobbied by pensioners, not just about the level of their state pensions but about the impact of tax on their incomes, and the importance to them of their long-term savings. I was pleased to hear confirmation that the increase in the minimum income guarantee would be linked with earnings. That will provide a cushion for pensioners who are having to struggle on the lowest-possible incomes. I am sure that the national savings bond for pensioners will also be very welcome in a community in which people understand that, to a large extent, they must provide their own security for long-term retirement.

[Ms Sally Keeble]

I recently engaged in a consultation exercise with a number of pensioners, from which it emerged that most would prefer to make their own choices, and to have the support and the tax structure that enabled their income to be protected. I was therefore pleased to note that the tax structure would be changed to provide larger allowances for pensioners over 65 and over 75. I am sure that will go a long way towards persuading those whose private income takes them above the minimum level, who have felt bitter about their inability to increase their income, that the Government are supporting them and helping them to make ends meet.

I single out the winter allowance, which, again, for many people addresses a real need: they face real hardship. The increase from £20 to £100 is dramatic: it is beyond what anyone expected. It will make a substantial difference, not just easing the costs of heating, but making people more likely to keep the heating on, rather than turning it off in the coldest months.

One further aspect might be overlooked, but will certainly affect many of my constituents. Most people in Northampton are in work. They will benefit from all the measures that will help families in work. Many people are self-employed or run small businesses. It is a town with a huge amount of enterprise and many small firms, which remain small and do not have any ambitions to grow into multinationals or anything like that.

For those businesses, the 10p tax rate, the continuation of the capital allowances and the changes in the payment of PAYE and national insurance contributions will make a substantial difference in cash terms, and will also make them feel that their enterprise and work are rewarded.

It is not just people in this country who will feel the benefits. The changes in the Budget and the skill with which the Chancellor has handled the economy have made us the envy of the rest of the world. My hon. Friend the Member for Shipley (Mr. Leslie) mentioned the praise from the International Monetary Fund. I quote, perhaps in more practical terms, the fact that, last year, this country had record levels of inward investment—not because it is the sweat shop of the world, as the Tories tried hard to make it, but because of the opportunities and skills that we offer.

People in Northampton, North will find that the Budget echoes all the things that are important in their lives. It will make work pay, reward thrift and planning, encourage saving and reward and help those people who have—*[Interruption.]* People scoff. At the same time, there is the support for pensioners' savings, and individual savings accounts are coming into line, and they will provide a big draw for people on low incomes who have smaller savings.

The Budget will encourage enterprise and support families. It comes between international women's day and mother's day, and it will be incredibly popular with many women. It will support all those things that make our society work. It will make Northampton, North one of the benchmarks of the country. In future years, it will be seen as a Budget that marked a real turning point for our country and put things on an upward curve for many people.

9.33 pm

Mr. Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham): One Minister leaking to the *Financial Times* over the weekend promised a "substantial, surprising and important" Budget. What is substantial is the amount of revenue that the Chancellor is filching by stealth from the back pockets of the British public—£40.7 billion over the lifetime of the Parliament. Before he got up this afternoon, £6.4 billion of extra taxes were already guaranteed without his having to say a word.

At least the Prime Minister last week came clean on the tax burden going up under the Government. It is a shame that the Chancellor did not follow his example. The whole Budget was an illusionist's dream. Labour Members cheered the 10p tax rate, but failed to realise that, by scrapping the 20p tax band, the Chancellor was taking it back with the other hand.

There has been no let-up from many of the iniquitous, unfair and shameful tax rises that have already been introduced by the Government. There has been no reprieve for 300,000 non-taxpaying pensioners who will lose their dividend tax credits, or for those people about to sell their lifetime businesses, who will lose out on retirement tax relief. There has been no reprieve from the extra taxes on business of £5 billion over the past two Budgets, which it is now estimated will cost some £20 billion over the next two years.

It was a Budget of failed opportunities, disguised with a series of technical measures for start-up companies, promises of jam tomorrow, recycled announcements that we had heard over the past few months and downright gimmicks.

Tax breaks for small companies, which, by their nature, do not make profits, are not exactly very useful. The truth is that, by 2001, the Budget will increase the tax burden as a proportion of gross domestic product, to 39.5 per cent. or more. That is the highest level in 12 years.

The Government have also vastly complicated the tax system, so that now we have over 54 different rates, three new bands of stamp duty, two rates of value added tax, two rates of insurance premium tax, dozens of rates of capital gains tax, differential rates of vehicle excise duty, five new rates of income tax and five rates of corporation tax. Overall, the Budget contains 23 tax increases.

I should like briefly to mention green taxes. The Minister said in the *Financial Times* that the Budget would be surprising. One surprise, which has been cleared up, is the absence of the Deputy Prime Minister, who is away scuba diving in the Maldives. That caped crusader for the environment has been sidelined yet again. From a Government who promised to place environmental concerns at the heart of decision making, the Budget has been an enormous let-down. Last year's Budget was described by environmentalists as "as green as mud." Tomorrow, environmentalists' verdict on today's Budget will be less kind.

We have heard so little today about the energy tax. The Marshall report was remarkable in dealing with that tax, and not only because it—a report from a former chairman of British Airways—did not propose applying the tax to aviation fuel. It is a downstream tax. It is not a real carbon tax, as it will not tax energy production at the power station. It also does not discriminate against the least environmentally friendly energy production, such as coal-fired power stations, for example.

Yet again, the gas-fired power station industry—which contributed most to reducing our carbon dioxide emissions—is to be sidelined in favour of propping up the coal industry and the Government's friends the miners. The Government's target was to generate 10 per cent. of power demand from green sources by 2010. The Budget will do virtually nothing to achieve that target. For starters, the Government should end the moratorium on gas-fired power stations.

The energy tax—a downstream tax that is not a carbon tax—will encourage a further switch from manufacturing to services. Which sectors will pay most? How will the Government persuade households to use less energy? How will it reduce CO_2 emissions by 3 million tonnes? How will the Government hypothecate tax back to different types of businesses? What incentives are there for power generators to fit scrubbers to treat emissions? How much lower will tax need to be if the system is not rigged to be pro-coal? The tax will have an enormous effect on manufacturing industry, particularly in northern Labour constituencies, and especially in the chemical industry.

We heard absolutely nothing today about emissions trading permits. The Budget was tokenism of the worst kind—as demonstrated by the provision of only £50 million to encourage business investment in renewable fuel and cleaner technology. The Government are interested only in gloss. On green taxes, the Budget is a damp squib.

Other minor provisions in the Budget were intended to encourage use of smaller cars and lower-emission lorries, but the Government demonstrated no serious intention to achieve the objectives. Last year's token Budget provisions completely failed to give the Government a veil of environmental friendliness.

On 1 February, in a written answer, the Minister for Transport in London admitted that, in the lifetime of this Parliament, the number of buses that have been encouraged to convert to road fuel gases has risen from 20 to 53. The number of heavy goods vehicles able to use road fuel gases has increased from 41 to 96. That is hardly a testament to the Government's green credentials or to the green measures provided in last year's Budget.

Today's token measures will achieve the same token result. The Budget provides no specific tax incentives to manufacturers of motor vehicles powered by road fuel gases. We need a bold move—of the kind that the previous Government made—to encourage lead-free petrol. We need a five-year plan for the road fuel gas industry properly to establish the necessary capital structure.

The Budget contains nothing to equalise VAT treatment of new-build and green-field sites, renovation of existing properties, and redevelopment of brown-field sites in towns. Landfill tax is to go up, but there is absolutely nothing in the Budget to facilitate alternatives to the 84 per cent. of waste that goes into landfill. There is absolutely nothing in the Budget about recycling, reusables or composting.

Similarly, raising the fuel escalator on petrol—so that a gallon of petrol now costs £3.10—does not reduce car mileage travelled but simply adds £120 per annum to the costs of the average middle-income family and discriminates against those living in the country, those who have to take children to school, and the disabled who rely on their vehicles.

On capital taxes, the Government have completely complicated the capital gains tax system. They missed the opportunity to raise CGT allowances to £10,000 which would have exempted about half the people who currently pay CGT, accounting for just £27 million.

The Budget has indeed been substantial, surprising and important, but largely from what it has patently failed to do despite all the warm words that have been piled high on the British public for so long. It is surprising for the audacity with which the Chancellor has attempted to dress up a tax-raising, tax-complicating, regulating and red-tape-generating Budget.

Putting up tax and benefits is not a neutral act, but rather a measure of stealth to extend the hand of the state yet further. While the Chancellor attempts to grab the headlines with a 10p tax rate, he loses no time in simultaneously grabbing that back and more from the wallets of industry, business, home owners, car drivers, pension fund holders, the self-employed, smokers and married couples. When the small print has been studied carefully, the euphoria heard from the Labour Benches this afternoon will soon be but a distant echo.

9.41 pm

Mr. Andrew Stunell (Hazel Grove): I am delighted to speak in the debate. First, I have to give credit where it is due and to say that any observer from any part of the House would have to give the Chancellor nine out of 10 for presentation this afternoon. It was very skilfully done, but the words of the right hon. Member for Bishop Auckland (Mr. Foster) must be borne in mind: what seems brilliant on Tuesday can often seem sour on Friday. I wonder whether today's message of tax cuts all round and enhanced public services will stand up to inspection. I have a strong feeling that, when many pensioners in their 80s in my constituency look at the small print, they will be disappointed at the small scale of the largesse that they are to receive.

Having endured cuts of £10 million in the last year of the Conservative Government, and £12 million in the first year of the Labour Government—and having just been confronted with another £4 million in cuts for next year—the chief executive of Stockport council will no doubt find the idea that public services are receiving extra support somewhat hollow.

The chief constable of Greater Manchester has reported that, during the last five years of the Conservative Government, the number of uniformed police officers in Greater Manchester fell by 156; that, in the period between the general election and last September, it fell by a further 34 officers; and that, as a result of the £12 million budget cuts next year, it will fall by a further 130 officers. I have a feeling that he, too, will not be convinced of the largesse that the Chancellor has been handing out.

I shall now concentrate my remarks on the environmental impact of the Budget. Last year, the Chancellor made himself look a little foolish by promising to produce a Green Book to match the Red Book, which would outline measures in respect of the environment. In the event, he produced one page. This year, he has done better; he has produced two pages: pages 84 and 85 of the Red Book.

The Chancellor said that the Government were committed to a target of a 12.5 per cent. reduction in carbon dioxide emissions by 2010. He did not say too

[Mr. Andrew Stunell]

much about the domestic target of 20 per cent. which is referred to elsewhere in the Red Book. That set of environmental Budget proposals is intended to reduce carbon emissions by 3 million tonnes a year. In broad terms, that is only 2 per cent. of the target that we need to reach, so there is a very long way to go to achieve even the limited statement of green objectives and results.

I shall comment on two of the proposals. First, we welcome the fact that the Government are taking seriously the Marshall report. We very much hope that it will be implemented in a practical and worthwhile way. We regret, however that what is proposed is not a genuine carbon tax. It does not allow consumers and industrialists to choose to use green and renewable energy and therefore to bypass the tax. Although the measure will no doubt raise money and be an incentive for greater efficiency, it will not promote the use of renewable energy.

The other features of the Budget that the Chancellor waved around to demonstrate his green credentials were the changes to vehicle excise duty and the fuel escalator. It is a great pity that he did not listen more carefully to what the Liberal Democrats have said. We proposed that vehicle excise duty on all vehicles smaller than 1,600 cc should be eliminated. The revenue should be compensated for by an increase on fuel duty of 5p per litre. That would leave any motorist doing less than 23,000 miles a year marginally better off. It would overcome the criticism to which the Chancellor has rightly been subject from hon. Members on both sides of the House—that his proposal will hit rural motorists particularly hard. Under his proposal for a £50 reduction for cars with smaller engines, motorists with cars smaller than 1,100 cc will be in credit for only the first 6,000 or 7,000 miles. After that, they, too, will pay more than before the Budget.

The Chancellor also omitted many other practical and sensible proposals that would have helped him to reach his Kyoto targets and would have benefited the people whom he was anxious to protect—those who live in poverty. A reduction in VAT on energy-saving materials and energy efficiency measures for buildings would have gone a long way towards helping many of the 8 million households living in fuel poverty, who currently spend more than 10 per cent. of their income on keeping warm. It would have helped them to have properly insulated and heated homes and would have helped to avoid the 40,000 excess deaths each winter in this country that result from fuel poverty. That is six deaths per week per constituency throughout the winter. The Chancellor's silence has denied us the chance of that benefit. There is scope, too, for an investment policy that concentrates on renewables. I could say a lot more if the clock were not racing towards 10 pm.

The Budget also lacks a clear policy on integrated transport. It was fine to hear that the Deputy Prime Minister will make a wide, sweeping statement, but we want to know when that is coming. The extra money that we have for rural bus services cannot be used to help existing services, but must be used on new ones. That produces some absurd results in my constituency on the urban fringe of Greater Manchester. To qualify for the grant, the strangest routes have to be devised. They must not run on an existing bus route and must have a qualifying amount of rural road. If that is the best that we can do to create an integrated transport strategy, the Secretary of State needs to come back from the Maldives in double quick time.

There were no proposals for a green-field development tax. We must ensure, particularly in areas such as Hazel Grove, that there is a strong disincentive to build on green-field and green-belt sites. I very much hope that there will be opportunities for consideration of such proposals in further debate on the Budget.

The aim of the Budget was to address some urgent priorities. We share those priorities, including a sound regime of taxation, high-quality public services and a real concern for the environment. Sadly, the opportunities have been missed in many areas. That is particularly true in terms of the environment.

In 2010, the Government's guideline figures become legally enforceable via the treaty into which we have entered. As a result of the Budget proposals we have heard today, we will be well behind the game. We are clearly missing the Kyoto targets with these proposals, and we are missing the opportunity for jobs and investment that worthwhile and vigorous pursuit of those targets would bring.

Worst of all, in the long term, we are heading into a situation where pursuing those environmental targets is seen as something that only people with hair shirts are prepared to pursue. The targets could be seen as a way of improving the quality of life for the people of this country, improving the investment and export potential of its businesses and giving a world lead on climate change. Those opportunities have been missed today. That is a great shame and a great mistake.

9.51 pm

Mr. David Chaytor (Bury, North): I am grateful for the opportunity to follow the hon. Member for Hazel Grove (Mr. Stunell), who made some constructive criticisms. It was interesting that both he and the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Mr. Loughton) concentrated on environmental taxation—the point that I wish to raise.

If the hon. Member for Hazel Grove looks deeper into the Budget documents, he will find that, in addition to the progress made on environmental taxes today, further announcements will be coming on-stream in due course and further work will be set in train—particularly on the question of tax on aggregates, on pesticides and on water extraction.

Today's Budget is a landmark Budget, in so far as environmental taxation is now being taken seriously. It is crucial that the environmental objectives are integrated into fiscal policy. Some Conservative Members have said that not enough is being done to protect the environment, while others criticise the energy tax and the fuel taxes. There is a schizophrenia deep in the heart of the Conservative party on environmental policy.

The previous Government, to their credit, were the first to initiate environmental taxation with the landfill tax and the introduction of the road fuel duty escalator. However, when the Tories have the nerve to criticise the impact on petrol prices, we should point out that the difference between petrol prices under the Conservatives and under this Government is three Budget increases of 1 per cent.—the previous Government's policy was to increase duty by 5 per cent.; ours is to increase it by 6 per cent.

The Budget is important in so far as it restores fairness to the heart of taxation policy. For a generation, it has been impossible to have a serious debate about taxation in this country because of the obsession with the level of taxation and with reducing taxation. By the various measures that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor has announced today, we once again have the concept of fairness at the heart of our tax policy. Many thousands of low-paid workers in my constituency, as well as the 15,000 pensioners, will welcome the new emphasis on fairness.

I wish to concentrate on the environmental measures, and I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Chancellor on grasping the nettle of the industrial energy tax. Had the previous Government not made such a mess of their VAT on fuel policy, that industrial energy tax could have been in place—developing, working and cutting carbon dioxide emissions. We are five years behind where we should be because of the incompetence of the previous Government on VAT on fuel.

Having said that, I urge the Chancellor and the Government to think seriously about the implementation of the energy tax. The ground has been well prepared by Lord Marshall and his colleagues, and most large companies are well aware of the implications of the tax—many are already developing their own internal emissions training systems. However, I fear that many smaller companies have not yet grasped the importance of the energy tax. They have not yet understood how it will impact on them. The Government must take the issue seriously and ensure that advice is available to small companies on how they can not only adjust to, but benefit from, the energy tax.

For many years we have not thought seriously about the use of industrial energy. We have become profligate because we have got used to low energy prices. When companies seriously consider how to conserve energy they will quickly find that they can save a considerable amount on their bottom line; but they can do that only with professional advice.

I hope that the Government will keep under constant review the way in which the proceeds from the industrial energy tax are used. It is right to establish the principle that it should be revenue neutral, but if it is used only to reduce employers' national insurance contributions an opportunity will be lost. If the tax is to work, it must be set against investment in renewable energy. Companies should be able to claim exemption if they can show that they are switching to renewable energy sources. That is one of the most effective ways of reducing greenhouse gases and other emissions.

We should consider the impact on rural motorists of road fuel duty, but we should not overplay the issue—and, when we talk about petrol prices and poorer people, we should remember that the poorest third of households do not have a motor car at all and are not affected. There is no real argument against the principle of the road fuel duty escalator, and there are other mechanisms whereby low-income motorists in rural areas can be protected. One method is to use the standard spending assessment system and adjustment to council tax. One of the most effective ways of protecting those poorer motorists is to adjust council tax to compensate them.

Mr. Paterson: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Chaytor: I would very much like to, but I am afraid that, in view of the time, I cannot.

Mr. William Ross: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Am I correct in thinking that the hon. Gentleman is wrong in believing that he has to finish his speech by 10 pm? Surely he could resume it tomorrow.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael J. Martin): I think that we will take one day at a time.

Mr. Chaytor: I am grateful for the suggestion that I might be able to finish tomorrow, but I am happy to finish at 10 o'clock precisely.

I welcome the changes in vehicle excise duty and the introduction of a lower rate for smaller vehicles. I especially welcome the fact that, buried deep in the Budget documents, is the proposal that, as of next year, we will have a fully fledged variable excise duty, related to vehicles' emissions ratings. That is long overdue. We should not only reduce the duty for lower-emission vehicles, but increase it for higher-emission vehicles.

The motor car is a key indicator of affluence, and one of the most effective means of introducing fairer taxation is to recognise that better-off people have bigger cars and drive further in them, while poorer people have either no cars or small old cars and do not drive many miles.

We need to be more confident in our support for environmental taxation. The Government need to be up-front in explaining that we are going through an historical transition, away from a tax system that is almost entirely dependent on taxes on labour and towards a tax system that becomes increasingly dependent on taxes on pollution and the depletion of natural resources. That trend is welcome and the public as a whole would appreciate it if it were clearly pointed out to them. We do not need to be reserved or shy. We should stand up for environmental taxation—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

It being Ten o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

Debate to be resumed tomorrow.

PETITIONS

DNA Samples

10 pm

Mr. Steve Webb (Northavon): This petition arises from the murder on Christmas day 1995 of 18-year-old Louise Smith from my constituency. In the course of the police investigation into her murder, 4,600 local men gave DNA samples to the police to assist in the capture of her murderer. Those DNA samples, freely given, had to be destroyed by law, even though those who gave them would have consented to their retention for use in future investigations. Therefore, the petition, signed by 9,266 residents of Northavon and others:

Declares that current legislation which requires the Police to dispose of DNA profiles provided by volunteers during a Police investigation is wasteful of Police resources and reduces the effectiveness of investigations into other crimes.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons introduce legislation to amend the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 to allow the retention of such DNA profiles where consent for such retention is granted by those submitting a specimen.

And the petitioners remain, etc.

To lie upon the Table.

Rural Road Hauliers

10.1 pm

Mr. Paul Marsden (Shrewsbury and Atcham): I wish to present a petition, which I strongly support, on behalf of Mr. J. G. Jordan and 156 other rural road hauliers from in and around Shrewsbury and Shropshire. While greatly appreciating the general help that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor has given road hauliers today in his Budget, the petitioners request:

That the House of Commons recognise that rural road hauliers are especially disadvantaged as the Government strives to meet its environmental targets and as such they should receive a fair package of financial support.

And the Petitioners remain, etc.

To lie upon the Table.

Meath Home

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Pope.]*

10.2 pm

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley (South-West Surrey): I appreciate the opportunity to raise in the House a matter that is not only of great concern in my constituency but a cause of profound disquiet across the charitable sector. Today, in the Budget statement, the Chancellor said that he wanted us to be a giving society and that this should be a giving year. My concern is that many of those involved in the provision of long-term care feel more like giving up than going on, because of the Government's refusal to take seriously, and act on, their concerns.

The Minister may have heard the BBC "Today" programme in January, when Stewart Etherington of the National Council of Voluntary Organisations said that two out of three voluntary organisations providing care were subsidising the local authority and more and more of them were having to spend their scarce money in investing in legal fees to obtain their entitlement. The Minister may also be aware of the letter from the Prime Minister to Mr. Norman Thody of the Disabilities Trust. Mr. Thody had complained, with the all-party disablement group, about the intolerable position in which so many providers of care find themselves. The Prime Minister's letter stated:

"I am concerned that you feel the Government is overlooking the contribution of the voluntary sector. We place great importance on the input of voluntary and community organisations to the social, cultural, economic and political life of the nation. We also value their role in helping Government to achieve its objectives."

Interestingly, the letter continued:

"You may also be interested to see a leaflet issued in October by the Charity Commission, 'Charities and Contracts—CC37'. The leaflet gives practical guidance to trustees and staff thinking of entering into contracts with public bodies to provide services on behalf of those public bodies in return for payment."

That document makes it clear that it is not the job of the charitable sector to subsidise the state and the delivery of services under the National Assistance Act 1948. It states:

"We recognise that there will be gaps in some services, because the public bodies required to provide the services at public expense are unwilling or unable to pay for them. We strongly advise charities not to enter into contracts to deliver a service that a public body is required to provide unless the public body pays the economic cost. A charity may offer, as part of the contract, to raise the standard of a service above the standard required of, and paid for by, the public body. But we advise that a charity does not commit itself in a contract to 'fill the gap' in a service which is not funded up to the standard which the public body is required to provide."

That is precisely the situation at Meath, and at other voluntary homes across the country, such as the Cheshire homes in my constituency. The Meath home is a magnificent organisation. It was founded more than 100 years ago by Mary Jane, Countess of Meath. It is the house in which General James Oglethorpe lived. As well as being one of my predecessors as Member of Parliament in 1722, he went, in his spare time, to the United States, where he founded Georgia, before he returned to his parliamentary duties.

The Meath home was always enlightened in its traditions. In 1892, when the home was dedicated by Her Royal Highness the Duchess of Albany, the amount of

care and rehabilitation for people suffering from epilepsy was moderate. The home was enlightened, but developments in medical science and in styles of care have ensured that it has kept pace. It is highly regarded and extremely popular.

The Countess of Meath's approach was also enlightened. She

"reported as to the character of the institution, which she said would be worked on the lines of the Home, and not of a hospital".

It was her

"wish that it should be a Home of Comfort, all being made as bright and cheerful as possible."

Time has moved on. There are 64 residents who have epilepsy and associated disabilities. There are day care and community-based activities for people from the local community and the region with similar disabilities. Up to 23 local authorities have placed residents there. It is the only residential home of its type south of the Thames. It caters for individuals with a wide range of disabilities, and it offers clients a home for as long as they wish. Each client has an individual care package which is regularly reviewed.

The home has been highly commended by the registration officer as

"A first class home for the residents in every respect."

Grateful letters are received regularly from parents and others. I could not speak too highly of the Meath home, whether as the local Member of Parliament or—I must declare this interest—as a patron of the home.

I have observed a deteriorating situation in recent years, however. The Registered Homes Act 1984 was enacted at the time when I became a Member of Parliament. It drove standards up and it required more and more of residential institutions. The Community Care (Residential Accommodation) Act 1992 changed the relationship once again, however, with substantial sums of money being transferred to local authorities.

I do not intend to labour long and hard about the deplorable settlement that Surrey social services has received this year. The Meath home's argument is not essentially with Surrey, which has been as reasonable and co-operative as it can be. Suffice it to say that the national average increase in personal social services is 5.8 per cent. this year. Half the local authorities received more than 7 per cent.

The Under-Secretary of State for Health will know from colleagues in the north, whom he meets regularly, that they are grateful for their settlements. However, Surrey received 2.36 per cent., although it requires at least 7.5 per cent. to stand still. Surrey is an area with a high cost of living, and there are great charges for staff and others. The working time directive and various other measures have compounded the difficulties at Meath.

It is not Surrey that Meath home is having to take to the small claims division of the High Court, however. The problems with Birmingham, Haringey, Enfield and a great number of the other authorities which have residents at the Meath home are quite appalling. The time, effort and frustration spent on securing payment for residents who are being given a value-for-money, quality home for life is unacceptable. I ask the Minister to intervene.

I shall go over some of the background issues, because it is a reflection of the desperation felt in the voluntary sector that so many voluntary bodies are now taking legal advice on what steps to take next. Several cases that have reached the courts make clear the obligations and rights involved, even though going to court is never a step that anyone would choose to take, because of the invidious nature of doing so.

Under section 21 of the National Assistance Act 1948, a local authority is required to provide residential accommodation for the elderly or disabled adults in their area who require it. There are two recent cases that are relevant. In 1997, the House of Lords decision in the case of Barry stated, that in assessing the needs of a person for services to be provided under the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act 1970, the local authority could take into account its own financial resources.

In the Court of Appeal decision in the case of Sefton, which was made shortly after the Barry decision, Lord Woolf said that he did not see the resources argument as playing a significant role in deciding whether a person required residential accommodation. He emphasised that, once a local authority has concluded that the person concerned requires residential accommodation not otherwise available to him, the accommodation must be provided and the local authority cannot plead lack of resources in argument for failing to do so.

The similarity under both Acts and both decisions is that, once the assessment has been made, the accommodation or services must be provided, irrespective of the local authority's resources. It follows that, if the local authority cannot provide them itself, it must pay someone else to do so; and it cannot limit the payment by arguments based on its lack of resources.

In 1994, the High Court decision in the case of Avon was to the effect that the local authority must also take into account the psychological needs and wishes of the person, even if the local authority has to pay much more than it wants to for more expensive accommodation. That may make it extremely difficult for a local authority to shift residents when they have become established in a home.

There is no desire to have those issues subject to endless judicial review, but I have to warn the Minister that, unless there is assistance, action and intervention from the centre, that is the route down which all the voluntary homes will have to go.

Several other recent legislative measures are relevant. Although it does not come into force until March 2000, the Competition Act 1998 prohibits conduct on the part of one of more undertakings that amounts to an abuse of a dominant position in the market, and there are severe penalties for breaching the prohibition. Conduct may be an abuse if it consists of indirectly or directly imposing unfair purchase or selling prices, or other unfair trading conditions.

The Late Payment of Commercial Debts (Interest) Act 1998 imposes a fierce 16 per cent. interest charge on the late payment of debts by large businesses, including local authorities, to providers that are small businesses. That may not be immediately relevant to the Meath home, which has 80 employees, rather than 50 or fewer, but the Act does reflect how seriously all those involved are having to take the current problems.

My understanding of contracts is that the court will generally enforce a contract in accordance with its terms unless it is unlawful. Where the contract says nothing about the price to be charged, or there is no written contract,

[Mrs. Virginia Bottomley]

the court is likely to assess the fees on what is fair and reasonable. It will not pay attention to extraneous factors such as the parties' financial circumstances. In other words, we are moving close to judicial review territory, which is not an outcome to which either the Minister or those involved in care would turn lightly.

I have several practical suggestions which I hope the Minister will follow up. Although the matter is not one that solely concerns a home for people with epilepsy, there are specific issues relating to epilepsy. I am delighted to see my hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs. Gillan) in the Chamber; she has a particular interest in Chalfont, and I was delighted to visit the centre there when I was Secretary of State for Health. The centres at St. Piers, Lingfield and at St. Elizabeth in Hertfordshire and in Liverpool would give an account similar to that of the Meath home. The members of the all-party group on epilepsy group are extremely vexed and hope to accompany representatives of the Joint Epilepsy Council to visit the Minister, so that he is made aware of the complexity of the issues relating to long-term care for people with epilepsy.

However, there are more general and widespread issues concerning the delivery of voluntary care. My requests to the Minister are as follows. First and foremost, a standard, simplified form of contract should be adopted which would reduce the current appalling bureaucratic waste of time and money. A huge amount of staff time and energy is spent chasing 23 different local authorities, each of which has its own contract. It is time to offer central guidance and good practice. Frankly, I had hoped to achieve that aim when I was with the Department. The assurance always was that local authorities would simplify the matter themselves, but they have not and they will not, and they need a central steer.

Secondly, authorities must be stopped from using their dominant position in the market in breach of the Competition Act, which is driving many homes out of business, by requiring all contracts to provide that the authority will pay a proper price under contract for the services that its clients receive rather than imposing a price arbitrarily. The contracts must contain a mechanism for independent mediation or arbitration in the event of a dispute over fees or other issues. It is appalling that homes must threaten to reject a resident. The Meath home has never done that, but other homes have reached that stage before local authorities have taken their concerns seriously.

Thirdly, the Government must stop authorities flouting the court decisions in the Sefton and Avon cases by claiming that lack of finance precludes them from paying a proper and reasonable price for those in residential care under section 21.

Fourthly, the Government must indemnify trustees of unincorporated and other charities against personal liability for redundancies or losses arising from failure of authorities to pay a proper price for services.

Fifthly, the Government must extend the scope of the Late Payment of Commercial Debts (Interest) Act so that it covers not just small businesses but all voluntary and private providers that have contracts with local authorities.

Sixthly, the Government must ensure that local authorities receive central Government funding to enable them to meet their statutory obligations to the disabled and others under the National Assistance Act 1948. I will not labour the Surrey point again here, but I am delighted to see the Opposition health and social services spokesman, my hon. Friend the Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Mr. Hammond), in the Chamber. He, too, represents a Surrey constituency, and shares in my predicament.

Seventhly, the Government must ensure that adoption of the compact on relations between the Government and the voluntary and community sector, which was launched last November, is made to work effectively at local level.

This is a matter of profound concern. Our traditions of charity and philanthropy in this country are second to none. The trustees, chairman John Jeffrey and chief executive Eleanor Lochner at the Meath home are outstanding, philanthropic, responsible and enlightened people. The Government's refusal to act is putting an appalling strain on all concerned. A decision cannot await the royal commission on long-term funding, which evidently the Government have kicked into touch. I have given the Minister seven practical suggestions and I hope that he will deliver on them.

10.18 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. John Hutton): I congratulate the right hon. Member for South-West Surrey (Mrs. Bottomley) on her success in obtaining this Adjournment debate. I welcome the chance that she has given me to set out the Government's position on the issues that she has raised. I join her in paying tribute to the dedication and professionalism of the staff at Meath house, and I certainly look forward to a future meeting with her and the delegation on epilepsy to which she referred.

The social services department in Surrey has been negotiating with Meath home trustees since autumn 1998 to put the financial arrangements between the social services department and Meath home on a sounder, more permanent footing. Negotiations are constructive, but they have been tough on both sides. I understand that the social services department sees the home as rightly ambitious about the service developments upon which it wishes to embark. However, the social services department in Surrey believes that it has a responsibility to strike a fair balance between funding the home and obtaining best value for Surrey residents. Some progress has been made. The social services department has indicated that it is prepared to make a special arrangement whereby Meath home is guaranteed a retail prices index increase in fees, year on year.

However, towards the end of February, Meath home wrote to the social services department with a proposal for new increases in residents' fees ranging from 2.3 to 85 per cent., with an average increase of 30 per cent. per resident for the coming financial year. If the social services department agreed to those increases, the cost to the local authority would amount to over £112,000 a year.

The social services department is not against the idea of paying fees according to the disability of residents at the home, but it will, quite properly, want to negotiate concerning the costings put forward by Meath home trustees.

Notwithstanding the recent additional complications in the contractual arrangement between Surrey and Meath home, the social services department is continuing to negotiate. I have the assurance of the director of social services in Surrey that he hopes that the position for 1999–2000 will be resolved in the near future. I am sure that the right hon. Member for South-West Surrey will understand that those negotiations must be left to the parties concerned, but I certainly hope that they will be resolved very shortly in a way that is satisfactory to both parties and, of course, to the residents of Meath home.

Mrs. Bottomley: As I made clear in my remarks, less than a third of the residents come from Surrey. The most acute problems are not with Surrey but with the many other local authorities that send residents to the home and then refuse to increase the fees or even pay the bills.

Mr. Hutton: I know that the right hon. Lady made those points, and I shall turn to the contractual arrangements with other local authorities in a moment. She has not left me much time to respond as fully as I would like, but I shall do my best.

I turn quickly to some of the other issues on which the right hon. Lady remarked. On 2 December, my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister announced the provisional local government finance settlement for next year. He told the House that the Government's support for local authorities would increase by 5.5 per cent. next year—more than double the rate of inflation. On 4 February, having listened to representations from many local authorities about the settlement, he announced the Government's intention to add £30 million to the provisional settlement. He also guaranteed that every social services authority would receive an increase in Government support of at least 1.5 per cent. next year. That is, without doubt, the best financial settlement for local government since the introduction of council tax in 1993.

As for funding for social services, within the total amount for local government, the Government have provided for a 6.3 per cent. increase for social services departments. For the first time, we have guaranteed that national resources for social services will be increasing in real terms for each of the following two years, enabling social services departments to plan ahead knowing that there will be increased funding. In fact, social services will receive almost £3 billion more in total over the next three years—an average of 3 per cent. more than inflation in each of those years.

We have also honoured our election manifesto pledge to make the distribution system fairer by introducing changes to the standard spending assessment formulae to ensure that the resources provided nationally are allocated in accordance with need. Some of those changes did not benefit Surrey, but I am happy to take this opportunity to convince the right hon. Lady of the wisdom of making the changes.

We changed three of the four SSA formulae for social services this year. I shall deal with each change in turn, explaining why it was made and how Surrey was affected.

First, we completely changed the formula used to allocate resources for children's social services. The old formula for calculating the SSA for children's services was based on evidence from almost a decade ago and was heavily criticised. It was out of step with current policy and my Department has spent three years on research to improve the formula. That work was started by the previous Administration, of which the right hon. Lady was a prominent member. The Local Government Association has been closely involved throughout, and many authorities have commented on the proposals in that time.

There are no lingering doubts about the factors in the allocation formula. All the major objections have been dealt with, and we believed that this was the moment to introduce the new formula. Surrey will gain somewhat from its use.

We also made two changes to the SSA formula used to allocate resources for residential care for older people. I know that the right hon. Lady was concerned about that. First, we decided to include in the formula a factor that reflects the number of people aged over 65 who are in receipt of disability living allowance. That has proved to be an uncontroversial change.

The second change was to exclude from the calculation the number of people living in institutions. We made that change for a number of very good reasons. First, the research that led to the formula was based on the characteristics of people living in the community. As the research did not consider people living in institutions, it follows that they should also be excluded when the formula is applied.

Moreover, if the SSA calculation reflects the total number of people in institutional care in an area, it will be giving the wrong amount of financial credit to each authority. That is because some of the people publicly supported in care in Surrey are not Surrey's financial responsibility. Some will be paying in full for their own care and will not represent a call on Surrey's resources. Others will be in care in Surrey, but will have been placed by another authority, such as a London borough, perhaps—the right hon. Lady referred to some such people—and will therefore be the financial responsibility of that other authority. As I understand it, that applies to some of the residents at Meath house.

Thirdly, and very importantly, people have said to us that it is not fair to take account of the numbers in care when allocating resources, because that number is open to local authority influence so should not appear in an objective allocation formula. What signals would it send for the Government to use a formula which, in effect, gives credit for putting people in residential care, yet gives no credit for keeping people out of residential care, especially since it is one of the Government's main priorities—it was outlined in the recent social services White Paper—to promote independence?

It is manifestly wrong for the SSA formula to give a perverse incentive to local authorities to place people in residential homes, rather than caring for them in the community, promoting independence and self-sufficiency. Making this change worked against Surrey, but I hope that the right hon. Lady can understand why we chose to make these changes and the powerful logic behind them.

The right hon. Lady may feel that the Government are being unfair to Surrey, but let us look at some statistics. On children's services, Surrey has less than half the number of children in families on income support compared to the national average.

Mrs. Bottomley: I made it clear that I did not want to discuss Surrey's funding, I sent the hon. Gentleman the seven questions that I hoped that he would address, and the place is called Meath home, not Meath house.

Mr. Hutton: With great respect, I have been referring to Meath home throughout my remarks. The right hon. Lady referred specifically to the deplorable settlement in Surrey, and I am contesting the basis on which she made those remarks. She chose to raise that issue, so I am afraid that she will have to accept that I intend to respond to that part of her speech. We have made a number of changes to the SSA formula, and I have given the reasons why we did so. I feel confident that they are fully justified and have led to a fairer distribution system.

I ought to correct the impression given by the right hon. Lady that we have somehow reduced spending on social services in Surrey. Nothing could be further from the truth. In general, resources for local government spending in Surrey will increase by 4.6 per cent. next year. Spending on personal social services will increase by 2.4 per cent. Total social services expenditure in the county was £141.427 million last year. Next year, that will rise to £144,625,000. Those are the facts.

The right hon. Lady also expressed her concerns about the way in which local authorities purchase residential care in the independent sector, and called for more direct Government control over the rates at which such care can be contracted. The Government's position on this issue was spelled out clearly in the White Paper "Modernising Social Services", in which we identified four key elements of good commissioning practice.

Local authorities should use a variety of contract types to deliver positive outcomes for users and security for good providers. We encourage authorities to issue block contracts to providers of innovative services for which there is a need. Block contracts can give security to providers by guaranteeing certain levels of income each year. I agree with the right hon. Lady that contract prices should not be set mechanistically, but should pay proper regard to providers' costs and planned outcomes for users.

Such encouragement, with our proposals for best value and a new performance assessment framework for social services, will help local authorities to deliver services to a clear standard—covering both cost and quality—by the most effective, economic and efficient means possible. Best value must be secured in all social services, whether provided in-house or contracted out to the private sector. We do not take an ideological approach to this issue. We have no preconceived ideas about whether the public or private sector should be the preferred providers. Those decisions should ultimately be based on judgments about best value and optimum outcomes for local users. Local authorities must be able, in the final resort, to demonstrate that their arrangements are delivering that.

The right hon. Lady expressed some concern that she was not able, during her period in office, directly to intervene in, and regulate, those matters. It is only fair that, I point out to her that the system that she is drawing to the attention of the House, about which she is complaining, is the one that she bequeathed to this country. It is a bit rich that the right hon. Lady is complaining about the system of which she was the prime architect. We announced in the White Paper our proposals to improve the commission process. We believe that that is a significant step forward—a step that the right hon. Lady was unable to take.

The right hon. Lady drew attention to several important issues, and I have been unable, in the time that I have, to respond fully to all her arguments and points. I shall correspond with her about some of the other points that she raised.

All hon. Members share a common concern to protect vulnerable people and especially to ensure that our local social services are able to provide the effective care and support that is necessary for that purpose. I believe that the action that the Government have taken—including the additional resources for local government and our plans to modernise social services—will help local authorities such as Surrey county council to do just that.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-nine minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 10 March 1999

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Dietary Supplements

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Dowd.]*

9.33 am

Mr. Mark Todd (South Derbyshire): I am glad to see such a healthy attendance so early in the morning.

My motivation in choosing this subject for debate stems from two concerns. First, two companies in my constituency are manufacturers of herbal remedies, vitamins and minerals. One, a very small company, is worried about the potential impact of regulation of the sector that might affect its business. The other company is much larger, but its anxieties are real too.

Secondly—like, I am sure, many other Members—I have been lobbied by consumers in my constituency about last year's proposed reduction in maximum permitted levels of dosage of vitamin B6. I think that we all remember the postbags that we received then. As vitamin B6 was classed as a food at the time, the Select Committee on Agriculture, of which I am a member, reviewed the Government's proposals. Our firm view was that the proposed regulation of the dosage was unjustified. Such evidence as there was that excessive consumption might pose a risk had been heavily criticised by scientists. No one taking vitamin B6 had complained of ill effects, despite the massive publicity given to the subject for several months—and, internationally, for longer.

If, as was claimed, the issue was purely one of safety, there was no real evidence to support intervention. There are two possible grounds for intervention: safety and need. Is the product effective in meeting a person's requirements? Does anyone need it? Are unjustified claims being made about the need for it? Let us begin with safety, however. As the Committee's report observed, as a society we allow many items to remain readily available, their availability being restricted only by often ineffective measures to protect children from products that carry known risks, such as alcohol and tobacco. It has been clearly demonstrated—possibly even in the personal experience of some Members—that excessive consumption of alcohol can damage health; yet we still allow it to be freely available in shops, with no suggested dosage levels.

A doctor with whom I conducted a debate on the radio this morning ventured to express the view that sales of alcohol and tobacco should be banned. I suggested that such a programme might enjoy limited support among the electorate. We must make judgments about what is practical and also about what should be left to individual citizens to decide for themselves, on the basis of reasonable information that is available to them.

We also allow the sale of salt without warnings, although excessive consumption of it can do significant damage, and we do not try to restrict the size of packets available in supermarkets.

We need to consider the concept of risk. We all take risks, in almost everything that we do. We take risks when we eat and when we consume drugs prescribed by doctors. We take risks when we cross the road. Which of those risks is it our responsibility to judge, and in which cases should the Government try to help? One of the problems has been the failure to establish the philosophy on the basis of which we should make decisions. Should the Government decide what people ought to consume when they are feeling ill, or should individual citizens make judgments based on their own perception of their health needs?

We should measure relative risks. We should be clear about the kind and level of risk that we expect citizens to weigh up for themselves, the cases in which clear warnings are justified, and the cases in which society should expect Government intervention in the form of either restriction or a total ban. Because we have engaged in no proper analysis or debate, we act in an ad hoc and reactive fashion featuring glaring inconsistencies of approach.

The Government's response to the Select Committee report is directly relevant to today's debate. Let me quote some key passages. The Government

"accepts the Select Committee's view that action on vitamin B6 should not be taken in isolation but in the context of the wider review of the safety of dietary supplements which is to be undertaken by the Expert Group on Vitamins and Minerals. The government recognises that the Expert Group will be considering the establishment of principles on which controls for ensuring the safety of vitamin and mineral supplements can be based."

Mr. John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings): I note what the hon. Gentleman has said about the expert group, although many in the health food industry are concerned about it. Will he, however, dissociate himself from the words of the Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, who said that these were "drugs masquerading as foods"? Surely that compromises the work of the expert group before it has even begun.

Mr. Todd: My right hon. Friend the Minister for Public Health will have a chance to reveal the Government's position for herself. I will not be drawn into defending or otherwise a statement that I have not seen in context.

The response continued:

"The government agrees that there is a delicate balance to be drawn in this and other areas between regulation to protect the public and the desire to determine such issues on the basis of personal choice.

It is for this reason that the government accepted the Select Committee's recommendation that action on vitamin B6 should be deferred pending the report of the Expert Group on Vitamins and Minerals."

Essentially, the Government said that we have to understand the philosophy of how we should intervene in the sector before we take an isolated decision on one particular product. They accepted the argument that I have set out.

There is scepticism among many consumers and those in the vitamins and minerals industry. Our discussion on B6 showed an unhappy relationship between that sector

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and the "official" health sector. There is considerable suspicion that drug companies wish to undermine the position of those providing alternative products.

Mr. Desmond Swayne (New Forest, West): Do not large drug companies have a motivation to use increased regulation and licensing requirements as an enemy of economy of scale that they can exploit to exclude smaller firms that feature largely in the market?

Mr. Todd: The hon. Gentleman may have a point. On a slightly different subject, but related to it, consumers in my constituency have complained to me about changes in the price regime for the purchase of simple analgesics following changes in dosage levels. There is a suspicion that some companies in the sector find ways in which to raise prices, based on Government intervention that has just happened.

In recognition of that scepticism, the Government made an extremely welcome and positive step, which was to allow direct representation by consumers and representatives of the industry on the expert group. After it considered the Government's response, the Select Committee applauded both those steps: the recognition of the need for a clear philosophy and for proper representation in the decision making that would lead to a regulatory framework.

One might therefore assume that any new proposals for intervention will be founded on that report, when it finally emerges, and there is probably still another year or so to go before it concludes its evidence. One would be wrong. The Medicines Control Agency is proposing to take additional powers in the sector after a brusque consultation that even another Government Department, the Department of Trade and Industry, has commented on:

"We share your concerns that the consultation period was very short . . . There are a number of pieces of legislation affecting these proposals in the 'borderline area' and we are concerned that the proposals from the MCA do not make any reference to these or require the MCA to consult with ourselves and other government departments with a responsibility for these areas."

That is scarcely a ringing endorsement of the consultation.

The MCA has proposed that it should have sole powers to decide whether any health product should be classified as a licensable medicine, requiring it to be tested for efficacy. Those tests carry massive costs for small companies. I think in particular of Surepharm, a small company in my constituency, which was built up from scratch by an individual entrepreneur, employs 30 or 40 people and specialises in the sector. It could not carry the regulatory cost that would be involved in securing clearance for particular products through the MCA.

That company had never imagined that it was manufacturing something that might be described as a medicine, yet someone could make that claim to the MCA and it could make that judgment. One recognises that most minerals, vitamins and herbal products could be described as either a food or medicine, and lie within that borderline classification. If the sole basis for classification is whether a product has a physiological impact, most foods and drinks would fall within the MCA's compass.

Mr. Richard Allan (Sheffield, Hallam): I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for raising the subject. On the key subject of classification, my constituent, Mr. Ralph Pike of the National Association of Health Stores, has referred to the problem of the definition "medicinal by function" which appears in the consultation. Does he share my concern about its being a strange and subjective definition in deciding such important issues?

Mr. Todd: Indeed; I share exactly that concern. I have also been contacted by health food proprietors near my constituency; as my constituency is not blessed with one of those shops, people have to go to Derby to buy the products. They are concerned about precisely those points, so I recognise the point that the hon. Gentleman makes.

An individual would only have to complain and say, "Yes, I believe it is a medicine," for the MCA to be involved in the process. There is no review of any MCA judgment in which the industry or other consumers might be involved.

As the MCA is likely to be reactive to individual contacts, its involvement will be incoherent. A comment will be made about an individual product, the MCA will make a judgment on whether it is a medicine, and then apply the necessary regulatory framework to it if that be so. Essentially similar products may be treated differently. That is why the Government wisely referred the issue of B6 to the expert group to provide a coherent framework within which decisions might be made.

That takes us to the second possible reason for intervention. On the B6 study, did taking B6 actually help anyone? The evidence on that was inconclusive. I am not a scientist or a consumer of the products, so I have no way of making a personal judgment on the matter. One could go only by the number of people who claimed positive effects. There are many reasons why someone might claim a positive effect for consuming a particular product. We are all reasonably well aware of the fact that consumption of particular items may make people feel good, but may not have any medical or physiological impact at all, although they feel better for having taken it.

Mr. Peter Luff (Mid-Worcestershire): The hon. Gentleman plays a distinguished part in the Select Committee on Agriculture. I thank him for his contribution. Does he recall that two members of the Select Committee claimed benefit from such products?

Mr. Todd: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his compliments. Indeed, one member of the Select Committee did a trial run on B6, taking it in measures that were in excess of those suggested by the Government. She then consulted her family and they all said that she seemed much the better for it. I personally think that she is very nice just as she is now, but that was just one individual's subjective judgment.

Dr. Jenny Tonge (Richmond Park): I am horrified by that exchange. The medical profession would say that a double-blind, crossover trial must take place on any substance before we draw any conclusions. I would hate anyone to go away with the impression that one person feeling a bit better according to her family after taking something should be the basis for a judgment.

Mr. Todd: I take the hon. Lady's comment. In a way, it exposes exactly the point that I am making, which is

that many individual judgments are made on the matter. The scientific evidence is inconclusive. Select Committee members will bear me out: the information that we were able to obtain showed no clear judgment in favour of consumption of vitamin B6 for particular purposes.

Mr. Luff: Or against.

Mr. Todd: Or against. Therefore, people could simply make their own judgment. That is what hundreds of thousands of people did.

We heard no complaints. We were assured by the industry that it was careful not to attribute powers to the product that were not demonstrable. However, one cannot stop other people—in magazine articles, for example—suggesting the use of a product to deal with a particular problem. That often happens in the sector. People read a piece in a magazine that says that consuming a few more vitamins of a particular sort will do them a lot of good, and they go into a health shop and buy them. Perhaps the product does make them feel better—although we do not know whether they feel better because of the product. However, quite often, endorsement and marketing of products are effected by such informal means.

One cannot stop informal advertising. Moreover, we already have laws against misleading advertising. The MCA has also recently sought powers to control advertising claims for licensed medical products. There is an argument that such controls exist already. However, I am prepared to accept the view that there may be abuses that are best dealt with by the MCA. There is already such a proposal in an earlier MCA regulation that has not yet received parliamentary approval. However, that is not my specific concern today. The MCA would be applying the rules on advertising within the licensed sector, on products that have been licensed as a medicine—not the products that we are discussing today, unless the MCA chose to classify them as medicines through the process that I described earlier.

There is a third strand of regulatory activity, at European Union level. Since 1991, the European Commission has sought harmonisation of regulations for the sector. So far, the United Kingdom Government have rightly said that any regulation should be based on safety rather than need. Therefore, using the distinction that I drew earlier, the UK Government maintain that it should be a matter of whether a product is harmful, not whether it is demonstrably good for people. Although that is the correct view to take, it is not exactly the view that is taken in all other European countries—which is why the issue has been batted around for quite some time already.

The issue of efficacy should not be the determining factor in deciding EU regulation. However, the MCA's proposed involvement in the matter may make efficacy precisely the determining factor. Surely one should argue that there is inconsistency in the Government's approach to the matter. I believe that, provided manufacturers or marketers of the products make no medical claims for them, consumers should be left to make their own judgments.

The issue of dietary supplements evokes strong passion. Since becoming involved in it, I have discovered that people write extremely passionate letters on the benefits of the products that they have been consuming, and that, when they get on the telephone, they tell one about the products at considerable length.

One person told me: "Do not prevent us from taking responsibility for our own health." There is a broader philosophical issue—which we could debate at much greater length—on the balance between reliance on the medical profession to tell us about our health and reliance on individuals to make their own judgments on how they themselves should manage their own health. The person who told me that individuals should assume responsibility for their own health made an important and profound point. Individuals should own the issue of their own health—on which they, too, should make some judgments.

Furthermore, I do not think that it benefits the United Kingdom medical profession to regard itself as the sole arbiter of how health should be provided to individual citizens. Going down that route will lead only to overload and a complete lack of individual responsibility for what one consumes and how one lives one's life—all of which are much more critical factors in determining good health than whether one regularly visits the doctor.

Dr. Tonge: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that, recently, the Government have shown some inconsistency on those issues? We are not allowed, for example, to make judgments for ourselves on beef on the bone. We have absolutely no chance of making a judgment on genetically modified foods, as substances that have been genetically modified are already in the food chain. Does he agree that the Government have to get their act together and decide just where they will stand on the issues?

Mr. Todd: The hon. Lady is dragging a very large red herring right across a debate that could engage us for quite some time. However, I should briefly deal with the two points, which deserve a quick response.

On the beef on the bone ban, I should say—for the benefit of Conservative Members who do not know me so well—that I am not by instinct a regulator, but have always taken the view that individual citizens should make judgments for themselves. Therefore, I took some persuading that the Government's action on beef on the bone was the correct course to take. However, the main persuader in the issue was the overriding objective of lifting the beef ban. A critical factor in attaining that objective was the Government's stance on bovine spongiform encephalopathy and on the possibility of Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease among human beings.

The need to deal with the critical factor of credibility led me to believe that the beef on the bone ban was necessary, to ensure that our European partners—with whom we were, and still are, negotiating to lift the ban—were persuaded of the seriousness of our intent. That was the justification for the ban.

On genetically modified foods, I take the view that the Government are very seriously engaged in ensuring that consumers have, by means of proper labelling, proper information on what they are purchasing. We are operating on that issue within an EU framework, in which we must try to persuade others of the validity of our point of view. Fortunately, we have greater sympathy within the EU on that matter than we would if we were negotiating with the Americans, who take a much more cavalier approach to the subject.

Certainly within the EU, we have been forcefully defending the position of providing greater information, both in labelling products themselves and in stating on

[Mr. Todd]

labels the fact that GM-derived ingredients may be involved—or the fact that enzymes have been used that are not left in the food ultimately, but that nevertheless have a GM link. Currently, all those elements are subject to Government action.

I therefore believe that the Government are responding properly to the concerns mentioned by the hon. Member for Richmond Park (Dr. Tonge).

I believe that consumers should be left to make their own judgments on dietary supplements. It simply should not be the Government's business to prevent someone from taking a product that is not known to be unsafe if they feel that it does them good. Let us establish a clear framework of how to regulate those products. If further regulation is needed, we should consult the public on their perceptions, and then act. Without such action, I believe that we shall risk taking incoherent action that is damaging to businesses and totally inexplicable to many consumers.

9.57 am

Mr. Philip Hammond (Runnymede and Weybridge): I congratulate the hon. Member for South Derbyshire (Mr. Todd) on securing this important debate and am grateful for the opportunity of stating the Opposition's view on the issue. I am grateful also to you, Madam Speaker, for allowing me to speak early in the debate. I apologise to the House and to the Minister for the fact that I shall have to leave before the debate ends, so that I may attend a Standing Committee. It is only one of the drawbacks of being somewhat short-handed on the Opposition Benches.

The British approach to dietary supplements, both by the current Government and the previous Government, has always been safety focused, concerned with the safety of consumers rather than with their dietary need. We strongly support that position. Although the direction in which the Medicines Control Agency is travelling has caused the industry some concern, the line taken in principle by the Government seems to be—as the Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food said, and as my hon. Friend the Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Mr. Hayes) quoted—that dietary supplements are "drugs masquerading as foods".

The British approach now has to be placed within the European context. Within the European Union, there is clearly a significant interventionist tendency focusing on dietary need—which often is expressed in terms of multiples of recommended daily allowances—rather than on safety. The European Union is therefore moving towards developing medicines standards in which not only safety and quality, but efficacy, have to be proved.

Safety must be the paramount consideration. Any substance, however it is classified, should be subject to removal from open sale if it is harmful. However, any such judgment must be based on sound science. We must have no repeat of the B6 fiasco. Therefore, the regulatory framework governing dietary supplements has to be the servant, not the master, and ensure that only safe products are on sale and that only justifiable claims for those products are made. It must not have the effect, however unwitting, of removing from sale products that are perfectly safe, that make no unjustifiable claims and that are widely used.

The great fear, which the hon. Member for South Derbyshire has expressed, is that extending medicines legislation to cover products that common sense tells us have little similarity with complex pharmaceutical compounds—the Medicines Control Agency has already publicly acknowledged that it is taking that action by embarking on action against products that are "medicinal in function", even if there is no concern about their safety—with all the associated costs of satisfying medicines standards, and introducing an efficacy hurdle, will effectively remove the products from sale by administrative action. Such a move would be a sledgehammer to crack a nut.

We must ask ourselves whether there is any evidence of serious safety risks from these products. Is any damage being done to consumers? Is the NHS suffering a burden of additional cost in treating ill effects caused by the products? Quite the opposite, I suggest, even if in some cases, as I think the hon. Member for South Derbyshire suggested, the benefits of taking them may be as much psychological as physiological.

I should like to suggest two possible ways of dealing with the problem. First, I question whether it is sensible to define everything as either a food or a medicine. Might it not be sensible to create a third category for supplements, with no requirement to prove the efficacy of the product—in other words, no requirement to prove need—but with a streamlined procedure for dealing with any science-based safety concerns? Secondly, if there is to be greater regulation of supplements, might we as a minimum consider introducing some grandfather rights so that products not hitherto subject to an efficacy test but on sale in substantial amounts throughout the country can continue to be sold unless they are demonstrated to be unsafe?

Dr. Peter Brand (Isle of Wight): Is the hon. Gentleman aware that many prescribed drugs are on the pharmaceutical register only through grandfather rights? Digitalis and aspirin never went through the rigorous tests that are now mandatory, and they probably would not have passed them.

Mr. Hammond: I take the hon. Gentleman's point. It is with that analogy in mind that I suggest that if the regulations are tightened it will be appropriate to protect the existing industry and consumers, where there is no suggestion of a safety hazard, by introducing a system of grandfather rights that would allow products to remain on sale.

The burden of proof in relation to an established product must lie with the accuser, in line with the long tradition of British justice. In any regulatory regime, the Medicines Control Agency cannot act as policeman, prosecutor, judge and jury in its own case. The consultation document MLX 249 takes a worrying step in that direction. That, as the Minister will be aware, seems to be part of a trend. Amendments to the Medicines (Advertising) Regulations 1994, which have also been laid and are due to be considered by a Committee of the House, appear to be headed in the same direction. They would extend the powers of the MCA and give it the right to act as judge and jury in its own case.

Other European Union countries operating under the same directive have managed to allow sales of supplements and herbal products either as foods or

medicines, with a simplified regime. Any licensing regime in the United Kingdom must be appropriate to the products involved. The objective must be the safety of the consumer, not a constraint on his, or perhaps in this case I should say her—it often is a woman—buying only what she needs as opposed to what she wants. If we adopted that test, we would ban half the goods on sale in the high street today.

The regulatory burden must be proportional to the risk, and so far I have seen little evidence of any risk. Action can be justified only to protect the public, not to conform to what, for most of us, is an alien concept of state intervention to allow us to do only that which is good for us, as opposed to preventing us from doing that which is positively harmful.

We need as light a touch to the regulatory regime as is consistent with the safety of consumers. I think that the Government recognise that principle. As always, within the limits of the paramountcy of public safety, we should support an established industry which has many valuable small firms within it that make an important contribution to the economy. Above all, any regulatory change must ensure continued access to existing products from a diverse range of suppliers in a competitive marketplace, unless there is clear and compelling scientific evidence that demonstrates that they are unsafe.

The expert group on the safety of vitamins and minerals established after the B6 fiasco has only just begun its deliberations. As the hon. Member for South Derbyshire said, it has probably another year or 18 months of work ahead of it. I urge the Government to allow the group to consider the wider issues, and to withdraw the proposed regulatory changes outlined in MLX 249 until that group has finished its work and reported its conclusions so that the Government may come to an informed decision.

In among all the talk of medicines, supplements and dosages, it is clear to me that what is most urgently needed in the debate on dietary supplements is a dose of common sense. I hope that the Minister will deliver that when she replies to the debate. I am only sorry that I shall not be able to hear that reply in person, but I shall read it with great interest in *Hansard*.

10.6 am

Dr. Brian Iddon (Bolton, South–East): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for South Derbyshire (Mr. Todd) on his timely Adjournment debate. I have nothing to declare other than an interest in the topic that has been created by workers in a factory in my constituency who make health products and by hundreds of constituents who wrote to me during the B6 saga. I do not use health products myself, although I must confess to having been brought up during world war two on a lot of spoonfuls of cod liver oil and rosehip syrup. I made a lot of pocket money by collecting rosehips from hedgerows in the fields where I used to play as a young lad.

It is worth reminding the House that the B6 saga was a long struggle and I congratulate the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on referring the subject to the group that has already been mentioned by other hon. Members. I had intended to go over the history of B6, but in view of the time, I shall go to the crux of the debate.

I pointed out during the Adjournment debate on vitamin B6 that, whereas medicines and foodstuffs are closely regulated, the group of products that we are discussing this morning fall into a regulatory no man's land and attempts to use medicines law or foodstuffs law to regulate them will cause and have already caused problems.

MLX 249, which is partly causing the present controversy, is a proposed amendment to the Medicines for Human Use (Marketing Authorisations Etc.) Regulations 1994. It was issued recently by the Department of Health. A consultation letter was sent out on 6 November last year by the Medicines Control Agency and responses were requested by 31 December 1998. Note the very short time for consultation over one of the busiest holiday periods of the year. I shall come back to that in a moment. The proposal was to put the regulation in place by statutory instrument by 1 April. The MCA claims that it wants to make the decision-making process more transparent and put the classification process for medicinal products on a statutory basis.

MLX 249 relies for its existence on European directive 65/65, which was incorporated in UK law in 1995. That led to MAL 8, which is the MCA's interpretation—I underline that word—of the directive. Other countries have interpreted the same directive differently. Although the directive excludes foodstuffs, it has produced a broad definition of a medicine, which supersedes that given in the Medicines Act 1968, causing panic throughout the health food industry. The definition is:

"Any substance or combination of substances which may be administered to human beings or animals with a view to making a medical diagnosis or to restoring, correcting or modifying"—

I underline the next word—

"physiological functions in human beings or animals is likewise considered to be a medicinal product"

according to directive 65/65. Note the use of the word "physiological" instead of "pharmacological". The definition could classify water as a medicine, along with many other substances.

In a court action last year, the MCA used directive 65/65 and MAL 8 to remove melatonin from the shelves of health product stores and supermarkets. The industry is very worried that many other products will follow suit.

In a letter to me dated 2 February this year about MLX 249, my noble Friend Baroness Hayman, Under-Secretary of State at the Department of Health, said:

"The proposed legislation has no bearing on herbal remedies exempt from licensing".

She goes on to say that

"all the current exemptions from licensing for medicinal products will continue to apply."

However, at a meeting in Committee Room 18 on 19 February this year, John Neale, manager of the borderline unit at the MCA, took an apparently contradictory view when he said:

"The proposals will improve the MCA's prospects of success in court"

and

"make it extremely difficult for a manufacturer to prove a product is not a medicine".

He also said:

"We already have all the powers we need to do our job".

The health products industry regards such remarks as a threat to their business.

[Dr. Brian Iddon]

In response to a parliamentary question on 18 January this year, my right hon. Friend the Minister for Public Health admitted that at that time her Department had

"received 69 letters from hon. and right hon. Members and 278 representations from other interested bodies and individuals. Three representations broadly support the proposals. The remainder are critical of the proposals to some degree."—[*Official Report*, 18 January 1999; Vol. 323, c. *380*.]

In the time available for the debate, I am not able to refer in equal detail to the MCA's other proposed new regulations, MLX 239, on advertising, and SI 267, which was laid subject to negative resolution.

Miss Melanie Johnson (Welwyn Hatfield): I have a registered interest with a pharmaceutical company in my constituency. I am concerned about the lack of a satisfactory appeal mechanism to an independent body under SI 267. Companies could be in the invidious position of committing a criminal offence, on the judgment of the MCA, without being able to appeal to a higher court. I should like my right hon. Friend the Minister to address that.

Dr. Iddon: I fully endorse that point, which I was going to make in my next few sentences.

If all the proposed regulations are accepted, the health food industry will be far more complicated to run. Many small firms will not be able to afford the costs involved. The MCA is a quango. As my hon. Friend the Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Miss Johnson) has just said, there is no right of appeal against its decisions. That is an important point that needs to be emphasised.

The 1997 Labour party manifesto made a commitment

"to monitor the scale and quality of regulatory activity".

As a result, the deregulation unit in the Cabinet Office, established by the previous Administration, became the better regulations task force. One of its first jobs was to produce a very important document, which many hon. Members may not have seen, called "The Better Regulations Guide and Regulatory Impact Assessment", which was published in July last year.

On consultation, the document says on page 9:

"Above all, allow enough time".

It goes on:

"Lack of time is one of the most frequent complaints about Government consultation. Eight weeks should generally be the minimum period."

On page 34, it says:

"Always consider the option of 'do nothing' or 'do minimum' as it may not be possible for Government to improve matters, or the costs of doing so may outweigh the benefits".

I have written to Lord Haskins, chairman of the better regulation task force, suggesting that some Departments are not taking much notice of the good advice given in the Government's booklet.

Vitamins, minerals, dietary supplements and herbal products are clearly not foodstuffs or medicines, but as I have tried to show, two Departments—MAFF and the Department of Health—have tried to regulate them. We are in a regulatory mess. Indeed, that is why the debate is being held.

What should the Government do? Clearly, there is a need to do something. The two Departments that I have mentioned have rejected the "do nothing" and "do minimum" options. The Government could try to make the existing regulatory frameworks work, as they appear to be doing, but they are clearly having great difficulty. I agree with the hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Mr. Hammond) that a third way is needed. I suggested that at the recent annual Health Food Manufacturers Association conference in London. The Government should consider establishing a separate regulatory framework to cover the substances in question. The principles of safety, quality and efficacy, based on bibliographic evidence and traditional usage, should be the key drivers for the regulations, as they always have been.

There is nothing new about this idea. Canada and Australia have tried it already. Following a letter from the Canadian Health Minister, dated 13 November 1997, the Canadian House of Commons Standing Committee on Natural Health Products published a document entitled "Natural Health Products; A New Vision" in November last year. It contains 53 recommendations. Health Canada was recommended to set out an appropriate definition of natural health products in conjunction with a new separate natural health product expert advisory committee. The relevant food and drugs legislation would then be amended accordingly. There were also recommendations to create a new regulatory authority for such products, to build appeal mechanisms into the processes, to seek advice from those involved in the production of natural health products and, importantly, to promote research on their efficacy and safety.

We have reached the critical stage in Britain at which we need to review the existing regulatory procedures and seek a third way. We could refer the matter to the better regulation task force or, like the Canadians and Australians, we could set up a commission to look at the quagmire that we appear to be getting into. I look forward to the response of my right hon. Friend the Minister for Public Health.

10.19 am

Dr. Peter Brand (Isle of Wight): I congratulate the hon. Member for South Derbyshire (Mr. Todd) on allowing us all to appear so liberal this morning—even if only with a small "l". Citizens of this country can expect the Government to protect them in two ways: from being poisoned and from being ripped off. We are talking about substances which, in high concentrations, may well be poisonous, and substances for which claims are made that would make the average snake oil salesman blush. It may be that those claims are not made by the manufacturers, but they somehow find their way into advertising.

I am concerned that large sums of money are being spent by vulnerable people who are hoping to improve their lives. We must strike a balance, and I like the third way that seems to be breaking out all over the place—it is obviously catching.

The important issue is who decides what should be referred to the MCA. It is wrong that the agency has the power to trawl around to see what else might be within its remit. It is important that the shady line between what is a drug and what is food be addressed. I was disappointed that the draft Food Standards Agency

legislation does not address the issue of who determines what should be treated as a pharmaceutically active and dangerous drug, and what is a food. Physiological functionality includes everything that we breathe, do and take in.

I made myself extremely unpopular in my party by supporting the Government's line on B6—and then they caved in. B6 was an extremely good example; in itself, B6 can be a beneficial substance, but taken in high doses, it can be harmful. I thought that the compromise of allowing it to be freely on sale at a reasonable, rather than high, dose was a good safety measure—rather like selling aspirins only in packages of 30.

Dr. Iddon: At three times the cost.

Dr. Brand: That is not a debate for this morning.

The same issue can arise in terms of herbal remedies. As a GP, I am much more relaxed with people using herbal remedies. It is cheaper to use the natural product, and it is extremely difficult to take a pharmaceutically active substance in high enough doses to do oneself much harm. I am worried about the relentless drive to try to identify the active ingredient in whatever herbal tea we might be drinking, so that it can be concentrated and flogged off at a high price.

I am surprised that we have not had more support from hon. Members concerned about the debate on herbal cannabis and cannabinoids, as there is a similarity. It is dangerous to say that we need to identify every active ingredient in everything. That means we deny people a substance which may have some benefits—even if it is only as a placebo.

I urge the Government to set up a mechanism where we can identify what needs to be considered by the MCA. The FSA should have a responsibility in this area, and we need to work much more closely with the Advertising Standards Authority, which has a major responsibility in sorting out what is and is not a reasonable claim.

It is perfectly proper for any food or substance to be able to claim that it may be good for your health in general. "A Mars a day" helps whatever it is you want to do—that is a perfectly reasonable claim. It can be believed or not, and most people are not fooled. However, I would be extremely worried if it were claimed that a Mars could cure colitis, or stop cancer. There is a problem about claims being made for substances, as vulnerable people may be taken in. They may not help themselves by spending money that they do not have, and by taking substances in high doses—or to the exclusion of a more balanced diet—which may be harmful.

I urge the Minister to rethink. There is an opportunity to set up an agency with an overarching responsibility for food safety and nutrition. If we include the third category of substances, and align them more closely to food than to drugs—the link with drugs has already been established in terms of the FSA—we may find a way forward, provided we are prepared to be patient and to let the status quo carry on for the time being.

10.25 am

Mr. David Tredinnick (Bosworth): I congratulate the hon. Member for South Derbyshire (Mr. Todd) on obtaining this debate. He mentioned the B6 saga last year, and history seems to be repeating itself. The MCA's proposals on borderline substances have all the hallmarks of the proposals for B6. The Minister's hair should be standing on end, because those proposals caused enormous problems for the Government. If this proposal goes through, it will be devastating for consumers, manufacturers, and practitioners of herbal remedies and vitamins.

If Uncle Joe Stalin had been going through his red box in the Kremlin and this proposal had come up, he would have said, "I like it very much. It is good. It is disempowering the people. It is giving one of my Government agencies the opportunity to be judge, jury and de facto executioner." Does that really fit in with the Government's philosophy? It is bad luck for the Government that they have chosen 1 April to implement the measure—April fool's day. It is hardly a good omen.

The pressure on the Minister resulted in the extension of the consultation period, which was widely welcomed. However, as the hon. Member for Bolton, South-East (Dr. Iddon) said, that consultation period included Christmas; it was woefully short and quite inadequate.

When the MCA circulated proposals for the revision of the so-called 1994 regulations on medicines for human use last November, a flood of correspondence came into the offices of Members of Parliament—not least mine, as I am the treasurer of the parliamentary group for alternative and complementary medicine, a position that I have been proud to hold for three Parliaments. I have been doing the job for 10 years, and I regard it as valuable.

Dr. Brand: The hon. Gentleman is looking very fit on it.

Mr. Tredinnick: I thank the hon. Gentleman; perhaps it is because I take a few supplements. Many complementary and alternative practitioners in this country are scared out of their wits by the proposal. An experienced traditional Chinese medical practitioner—a qualified UK physiotherapist and acupuncturist—said to me, emotionally, last week that the proposal, if it goes through, will make her a criminal. The hon. Member for Richmond Park (Dr. Tonge) may look askance, but the facts do bear that out.

The document would give the MCA new legal powers to allow it to decide, unilaterally and virtually without reference to anyone other than its own officials, whether a so-called borderline substance—one of the vitamins or supplements—was a medicine or not. The decision would be binding in any criminal or civil proceedings, unless shown to have been made unreasonably. Do the Government really believe that that is fair?

On 19 January, the parliamentary group of which I am treasurer met John Kneale, the manager of the policy and borderline unit at the MCA. I pay tribute to him for coming along—he did not have to. We were grateful to him for speaking to representatives from the industry and colleagues. He said:

"I do not believe that the MCA would be able to review products that have been on the market for a long time."

He tried to reassure us that the MCA was not taking powers that it did not already have, but he went on to say:

"The manufacturer would have to seek to show through the court that the MCA's decision was unreasonable. It improves the MCA's possibility of success in court."

[Mr. Tredinnick]

The burden of proof is transferred from the accuser to the accused, which gives the MCA too much power and will result in the criminalisation of a practitioner through an MCA decision made without the necessary element of natural justice required to safeguard basic constitutional rights. Power is transferred to a prosecuting authority to adjudicate without accountability. Such a power exists nowhere in any other democratic society and if granted will unquestionably be open to abuse.

The current UK legal system operates to protect the innocent as well as to convict the guilty, placing the burden of proof on the state. That one simple aspect of British justice helps to prevent a large number of miscarriages of justice. If the proposal goes through, there will be widespread injustice, because arbitrary decisions will be taken, they will be disputed by those affected and there will be little recourse.

How does that sit with new Labour's so-called philosophy of open and accountable government? I suspect that the Government were hoping to slip the proposals through. They certainly were not checked by their spin doctors. Someone slipped up, however. If the proposals go through, it will be highly damaging for the Government's image and credibility in both the short and the long run. My hon. Friend the Member for Southend, West (Mr. Amess) may castigate me for trying to tip off the Government about these problems and may say that we should let them ride it out.

Why is all this happening? The whole exercise is being carried out not to protect or benefit consumers, health manufacturers and practitioners, but to make life easier for officials in the UK and to appease the bureaucrats in Brussels. At the meeting of the all-party group on alternative and complementary medicine, the borderline unit manager said:

"We are bound by European legislation."

However, we have exemptions, as in many other matters. We are fighting to maintain those exemptions, while the European Community as a whole is revising its position.

There is every indication that there will soon be new legislation on herbal products from the European Commission, as it tries to homogenise the law in Europe. The great concern is that the UK Government will try to pre-empt what is happening in Europe and introduce a draconian measure at a time when the whole process is being thought through at a more leisurely pace on the continent.

Herbal remedies are traditional medicines whose therapeutic use has been tried and tested over hundreds, or even thousands, of years. Such plant medicines invariably comprise many chemical components whose overall effect cannot simply be assumed by reference to perceived active constituents. Apparently unimportant fractions of a plant may act in vivo to buffer or amplify its principal pharmaceutical characteristics.

The essential features of herbal medicine have important implications for their assessment and licensing, but current European Union medicines licensing procedures are generally designed to evaluate and validate single chemical entities—not several chemical entities—as medicinal products.

Dr. Howard Stoate (Dartford): I am rather concerned by the assertion that a medicine must be safe simply because it has been around for hundreds or thousands of years. All medicines require the rigour of full medical examination.

Mr. Tredinnick: The hon. Gentleman may have the opportunity to make his own speech later on. Most medicines used by traditional Chinese medical practitioners have been used for a very long time.

Plant medicines cannot be patented, so the enormous sums required to bring a new product to the market cannot be recouped. The cost of licensing compound herbal medicines would be so high as to be unrealistic for all but the largest companies. The smaller companies referred to by the hon. Member for South Derbyshire and others would be put out of business.

It seems entirely wrong—this is borne out by all the letters that we have received—to classify pharmaceutical drugs in the same category as herbal medicines derived from natural sources, including many foods, such as cardamom, cinnamon, garlic, ginger, chinese dates, peach kernels, orange skins, borage, celery, parsley, rhubarb and all spices.

At a presentation to the all-party group by the Association of European Self-Medication Industry, known as AESGP, we were told that the European Commission was considering issues concerning the internal market and herbal medicine. The association stressed that there is a wide divergence of opinion in the European Union but that strenuous efforts are being made to develop a sensible pan-European policy.

The Minister would be well advised to wait and see. Products not classified as medicinal products belong in most cases to the food and cosmetics category, even though they sometimes contain plants with pharmacological properties. In Ireland, Spain and the UK there exist preparations defined as medicinal products that are exempt, under specific conditions, from licensing requirements. We have to protect that position in the short term.

It will be the role of the European Commission to evaluate and assess the consequences of possible divergence in the legal position and/or the assessment of herbal medicinal products, and to agree a plan on how best to safeguard public health while allowing the free movement of herbal medicinal products throughout the European Union.

At a time when every country in the European Union has its own specific problems, it is not appropriate for the Government to take the arbitrary action that they propose. The issue is under debate and we do not need these draconian measures.

I offer the Minister the hand of friendship in finding a way out of this maze. There are three possible solutions. She could back off and leave everything as it is, which would satisfy most people, because nobody really wants the change. The second honourable way out would be to wait and see what happens in Europe; so much is going on that it seems foolish to pre-empt it. What is the third option? Several hon. Members have mentioned the third way. Having been a great fan of Mrs. Thatcher, I have not always been keen on the third way, but in this instance it is probably the right way forward.

The all-party group has consulted widely among our large membership to ascertain whether that idea should be pursued. In the United States, the Dietary Supplement

Health and Education Act 1994 defines dietary supplements as a special category between foods and medicines. They are defined as products that are

"safe within a broad range of intake",

and for which

"safety problems within the supplements are relatively rare."

Such supplements include all the medicines that we have been discussing.

The way forward is not to allow the proposals through at this time. The Minister must back off or, perhaps better still, wait for Europe or consider the third way.

The Government should not rush into any legislation that would harm the future of herbal medicines, food supplements and vitamins. The B6 fiasco last year, followed by the present proposals, have raised great fears in the industry. That fiasco should have served as a warning to the Government that all European countries treat such products differently. This is not the time to classify celery and beetroot as drugs, or to break well-established principles of English law. The Government should agree to consider a third, new category between foods and pharmaceutical drugs, thereby getting themselves off the hook and making consumers and producers happy.

10.40 am

Mr. David Amess (Southend, West): I congratulate the hon. Member for South Derbyshire (Mr. Todd) on the way in which he introduced the debate. He has certainly given the House an opportunity to explore all the various issues. He was right to represent the producers of the products in question in his constituency. If I had such producers in my constituency, I would have done the same. Sadly, I do not, but I have many constituents who use the products and a number of health food shops that supply them.

I pay tribute to Consumers for Health Choice, which has done a splendid job in educating Members of Parliament such as me on the various issues. Until the row about vitamin B6 last year, I knew precious little about the issues. I may regret what I am about to say, but I am not a natural pill taker. I would try anything to cure hay fever and have done so over the years. I was told that I would grow out of it, but I am taking a long time to do so.

I have been overwhelmed with letters and petitions on the matter from my constituents. Given that, in terms of the number of senior citizens who live there, Southend, West is 33rd out of the 659 constituencies, I can only conclude that those people are doing extremely well on those products so far.

Before the Minister responds, I simply want to draw attention to three pieces of information that I have received from constituents. One lady wrote that she used these products

"daily to try and stay healthy so as not to burden the state . . . I understand the Government is now trying to sweep vitamin products off health food shop shelves, by trying to licence them as medicines."

That lady wants the Government to tell her

"why these proposals are being rushed through with such urgency (1st April 1999)".

She points out:

"The only people that would benefit at the end of the day would be the pharmaceutical companies",

who, according to her, apparently already make "vast profits."

Another lady mentions the fact that 1 April is April fool's day and says:

"it is no joke for the many independently minded people who wish to take responsibility for their own health and avoid as long as possible being without any free choice of health therapy."

She asks me to

"protest against this underhand plan to tack on the power to restrict . . . liberty by avoiding free debate on this vital issue."

She continues:

"We want nutrition to be our first line of health defence and we want freedom of choice in medicine."

Finally, one supplier of such products in my constituency believes that the Medicines Control Agency wants

"to include far more than is necessary under their control umbrella and once they have gained the changes in the law will become judge, jury and executioner in the removal of anything they see fit from our shelves without consultation."

The letter continues that, as regards health food shops,

"there is in place effective control on products under the Medicines Act that has worked well for years. Freedom of choice is again in jeopardy".

I entirely agree with my hon. Friends the Members for Bosworth (Mr. Tredinnick) and for South Holland and The Deepings (Mr. Hayes). I do not want to cause trouble between the Department of Health and the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. However, it was unfortunate that the Minister responsible for food suggested, when he gave evidence, that these products were somehow masquerading as food or were foods masquerading as drugs.

If the hon. Member for South Derbyshire achieves anything today, I hope that it will be to persuade the Minister for Public Health to adjudicate on the difference between the two Departments and to put the fears of all our constituents at rest.

10.45 am

The Minister for Public Health (Ms Tessa Jowell): I shall begin not exactly by registering an interest, but by pointing out that my brother is a senior executive in Glaxo Wellcome. For that reason, I do not take part in departmental discussions or decisions about pharmaceutical licensing. I am responsible for complementary medicine, but I want the House to be aware of that fact in the context of my responding to this debate on a matter that would normally be handled by my noble Friend Baroness Hayman.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for South Derbyshire (Mr. Todd) on taking this opportunity to raise a matter that is of great cross-party concern. I hope that, in the time available, I can generate a little more light than heat and put the record straight on a number of important issues for those hon. Members here today and for the many people who are enormously concerned about the issue.

First, let us deal with the facts of the current controversy. I am concerned that much of the criticism of the proposals has been an unwarranted cause of worry and worse for manufacturers, retailers and consumers alike. I say that as someone who has ministerial responsibility for complementary medicines and who recognises the

[Ms Tessa Jowell]

enormous public interest in this new and developing area of medicine, which is of potential benefit. We should be clearer and more systematic about the evidence for the benefits that many people anecdotally report. I approach this debate by making clear my sympathy for complementary medicine in general and my understanding of many people's enthusiasm for and reliance on methods of complementary medicine.

As has been clear throughout the debate, the problem is the lack of a legal definition of the term "dietary supplement". Many of the products described as such inhabit an increasingly grey area between foods and medicines. As the law stands, those products for which claims are made for the treatment or prevention of disease, or which are administered to restore, correct or modify physiological functions, fall within the definition of a medicine and are subject to the requirements of the Medicines Act 1968 and the appropriate European directive. Such products normally require a marketing authorisation—that is, a licence—before they can be sold or supplied.

Products that are licensed as medicines are excluded from the definition of food in the Food Safety Act 1990. Products that are not licensed are automatically regarded as foods and are subject to the general provisions of the 1990 Act, which effectively requires that they should not cause harm, and to the Food Labelling Regulations 1996, which control the labelling and advertising of food. Among other things, the regulations prohibit claims in labelling or advertising that a food has the property of preventing, treating or curing a human disease, and lay down conditions for the use of nutritional claims and certain descriptions that may mislead.

As regards policy, the Government have stated on a number of occasions that we believe that the quantity of vitamins and minerals in supplements sold under food law should be limited only in cases in which it is necessary to protect the public. Any limits should be based on safety considerations, judgments about which are made on the basis of expert scientific advice.

I would not pretend for one moment that such advice might never give rise to controversy, but the boundary between categories of product can be difficult to determine. Garlic, evening primrose oil and vitamins in general may be dietary supplements or medicinal products. The determining factor is whether they are sold with claims to treat or prevent disease. If they are, and if the manufacturer wishes to continue to make those claims, he must apply to the MCA for a licence for the product.

It may be helpful to remind the House of the responsibilities of the MCA. The agency has a duty, on behalf of the licensing authority, to implement and enforce the provisions of the Medicines Act 1968 and other medicines legislation. It does so to protect public health, and specifically to make sure that the medicines that sick people use are safe, of high quality and effective. The MCA has a very important role in protecting consumers.

Part of the MCA's duties involve deciding whether a product is or is not a medicine. The criteria against which it makes those decisions is a matter of European Union law.

Dr. Brand: Does the Minister think it appropriate for the MCA to be both the prosecution and the jury in these matters? Should not the MCA take up only matters referred to it rather than deciding for itself what its remit should cover?

Ms Jowell: I do not accept that point. The routes by which matters of concern are raised with the MCA are many and varied. Many of the grounds on which inquiries are raised about products that are in a grey area are identified by public concern or by general practitioners, such as the hon. Gentleman himself, on behalf of their patients.

Unless EU law changes, there will be no change in the status of products sold as food or as herbal remedies exempt from licensing. Those products will continue on open sale without the need for licensing. It is claimed that if the consultation proposals became law, the MCA would sweep supplements and herbal remedies from the shelves unless they were licensed. Those claims are completely unfounded.

What would the proposals do? They would make the process by which medicines are classified more transparent, consistent and credible among the wider public. That is important because the present purely administrative arrangements for classifying medicines are sometimes criticised by manufacturers on the ground that they have not had a full and fair hearing. It is the Government's view that decision-making processes should be as open as possible. We believe that introducing a new statutory process, on top of the agency's present administrative arrangements, will make for greater clarity and transparency.

The Government also believe that if manufacturers are given greater access to the classification process, they will be able to have faith in decisions under it, and it is important that they should have that faith. We believe that introducing a statutory right for manufacturers to participate in the process and put their arguments and cases to a review panel would effectively address the criticisms sometimes made about the alleged secrecy of the present classification arrangements.

At the same time, the proposals would improve the effectiveness of the MCA's compliance and enforcement processes by reducing the scope for delay and evasion. In that way, we would demonstrate the UK's commitment to full implementation and enforcement of medicines legislation. We believe that introducing a new offence of non-compliance with a final decision will bring greater precision to compliance and enforcement activity. The proposed presumption in favour of the MCA in any subsequent proceedings should also strengthen the effectiveness of enforcement activity.

Let me say something about what the proposals do not do. They do not give the MCA a new and unaccountable power to decide whether or not a product is a medicine. The MCA already has that power, as the Court of Appeal confirmed last year. The MCA exercises its powers in accordance with EU and UK law, legal precedent and its published guidance. The MCA also has the power, on behalf of Ministers, to seek to enforce its decisions in the courts.

I want to deal with some specific criticisms levelled at the proposals. It is suggested that the consultation exercise is too short and secret. In fact, the initial eight-week timetable was within the MCA's normal six to eight-week limit. We have extended the consultation period for an

additional month, and implementation of the proposals is not tied to a target date of 1 April. We have already said that we are prepared to listen further, and so we should.

A second criticism is that the statutory review procedure would not be independent of the MCA. We propose that the members of the review body should be officers of the MCA. As the Court of Appeal has recognised, the MCA is a specialist body with accumulated experience in relation to medicinal products, which has had to develop a consistent policy for similar products. Under EU law, it is the licensing authority's duty as the competent authority to make final decisions on classification.

The third criticism is that the proposal to introduce a new offence of non-compliance with a final MCA decision is unnecessary. In any subsequent legal proceedings, the MCA's decision would be deemed correct, unless the manufacturer could show that it was unreasonable. The proposals are said effectively to prevent a manufacturer having any chance of a successful defence in court, but that is not the case. The European Court of Justice has recently agreed that the courts should not have to reassess the merits, as distinct from the legality and reasonableness, of the MCA's final decisions. Accordingly, we do not accept that it should be necessary for the courts to reassess the merits of MCA decisions.

If the MCA were to take proceedings because a manufacturer would not comply with a final decision, our proposed change would shift the burden of proof to the manufacturer, who would have to prove that the decision was unreasonable. We believe that that is justified. The decision would have been arrived at only after thorough and open assessment and review. Manufacturers will have repeated opportunities to make their case.

Perhaps the most alarming claim has been that dietary supplements will have to be licensed from 1 April as prescription-only medicines. That is emphatically untrue. The proposals will not affect the status of dietary supplements, and the idea that they would be available only on a doctor's prescription is equally unfounded.

We will consider carefully the criticism that the shift in the burden of proof in proceedings is oppressive and lacking in natural justice. We recognise that manufacturers would find it extremely difficult to prove a final decision by the MCA to be unreasonable. We are sensitive to the need to show that justice is done. Consequently, we will look particularly carefully at this part of the proposals, to ensure that they go no further than our obligations as the licensing authority require.

In conclusion, we want the people of the United Kingdom to have confidence—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael J. Martin): Order. We now come to the debate in the name of the hon. Member for Totnes (Mr. Steen).

Government Housing Projections

11 am

Mr. Anthony Steen (Totnes): I am grateful for the opportunity to raise a matter that is of great importance, especially to my hon. Friends, although there do not appear to be many Labour Members present. I can see the odd Liberal.

Mr. John Burnett (Torridge and West Devon): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Steen: I have not yet started and there is no way that I will give way to the hon. Gentleman now. If he sits still for half an hour, I shall give way to him.

Last December, I was fortunate enough to obtain a half-hour Adjournment debate on the housing projections and the 4.4 million new units that will have to be built by 2011. The Minister explained that the whole thrust of the previous Government's policy of predict and provide was to be replaced by a new and radical planning model, based on the principle of plan and manage—the new buzz words. I have been fortunate enough to obtain an hour and a half debate some three months later and the same Minister is here to reply on behalf of the Government.

I do not know why the Government wheel in their Jeremiahs on such occasions. On 9 December, instead of making an optimistic and constructive contribution, the Minister said that it was all too late, and that new Labour's new solutions would not come into play until the 4.4 million homes in the 1991 housing projections had been built. That is probably why he has been wheeled in by the Government. His sole role is to say, "Too bad. All those houses will have to be built. We will build them in the towns and in the villages. We will build them all over the countryside, wherever we can squeeze them in." That is probably why the Minister is before us today, and he will probably say the same thing again. I hope not.

The Government have been assisted by the Liberal Democrats on Devon county council who have just approved the Devon county structure plan, which gives the go-ahead for the building of 70,000 new housing units for the county between 1995 and 2011. If that plan is carried out, 90,000 new housing units in total will have to be built in one of the most beautiful counties in Britain. That will increase the population from 1 million to nearly 1.25 million, or by some 20 per cent. On 15 December, the *Herald Express*, the local newspaper in Torbay, claimed that the number of people living in Torbay is set to rise to 133,600 by 2021, an increase of more than 10,000. I am pleased to see that my hon. Friend the Member for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls) is in his place, as one would expect, because the paper also pointed out that the population of Teignbridge is expected to expand from 116,700 in 1996 to 135,000 in 2021, an increase of 15.6 per cent. South Hams, a large chunk of which is in my constituency, faces a 17.2 per cent. increase, rising from 79,300 to 93,000. It is not surprising that the population of Devon will increase to 1.25 million. We are talking not about redistribution of the existing population but about a net increase.

Formal approval of the county structure plan and the Secretary of State's confirmation of the figures means that it will be difficult to change them. However, it is not too late to decide where the houses will go and at what speed

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they will be built. That is why the Government's plan and manage policy is critical. If it were applied, it would ensure that priority was given to building on brown-field sites. As things stand, there is little planning policy guidance and no attempt to ensure that developers are directed to build first in urban areas.

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge): The logic of my hon. Friend's point is that, if the Government are content to say that the previous basis for planning was wrong and that plan and manage is the way forward, they cannot refuse to impose their policy change on the present figures. The Government can take one position or the other, but the current situation is untenable.

Mr. Steen: I hope that the Minister heard that point, because he was engaged in a conversation. If he does not answer that point when he winds up, I hope that my hon. Friend will remind him of it.

As matters stand, the 4.4 million homes will be built under the housing projection. The structure plans have been completed in Devon, and the district councils now have to formulate local plans for the placement of those houses, paying regard to environmental sustainability—again, the new buzz words. I am glad that a few Liberal Democrats are present, because those are their buzz words, albeit they mean as little in reality as new Labour's buzz words, plan and manage.

The Government have a 60 per cent. brown-field recycling target. We accept that figure, although we would increase it slightly. My right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition has said that if we were in office, the figure would be nearer 65 per cent.

Mr. Graham Brady (Altrincham and Sale, West): Would my hon. Friend care to comment on the fact that the term "brown-field" can mean different things to different people? As the Minister is well aware, the Labour council in the borough of Trafford is seeking to build houses on playing fields, which count as brown-field sites for the Government's purposes.

Mr. Steen: That is news to me, and I hope that it is news to the Minister. I hope that he will ensure that the council does not build houses on playing fields, but I fear that he will squeeze them wherever he can fit them in, including on playing fields. I hope that he will deny that and issue a PPG note on the issue. I am prepared to give way to him now if he would like to deal with that point.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Mr. Nick Raynsford): Following the convention of our Wednesday morning debates, I suggest that the hon. Gentleman focuses intelligently on the issues, instead of bandying abuse across the Chamber, which does not ensure a sensible debate on serious issues about how genuine housing need is met in a way that is sustainable and does not damage the countryside.

Mr. Steen: I would not have given way if I had known what the Minister was going to say. It was very unhelpful. I wanted him to deal with playing fields, but he clearly does not wish to do so yet.

The Government's 60 per cent. brown-field target is an admission of the fact that building in the countryside cannot continue at the rate that it has in the past. The aim is to recycle vacant, derelict, dormant, unused and brown-field land in our cities. That is nothing new, however: it was the aim from the 1970s onwards. In the 1980s, the Conservative Government set up a register of dormant, derelict, vacant, unused and under-utilised public land. I was much involved with that register and with what should be done with the 200,000 acres of unused vacant land that was then in public ownership.

In my excellent book "Plums", which I know many of my colleagues have read, I suggested that public vacant land should be auctioned off, with a covenant to ensure that it would be developed within five years. I proposed private regional development corporations, listed on the stock market and with the task of developing vacant land and public ownership profitably. The Minister for Housing and Planning at the time, my hon. Friend the Member for West Worcestershire (Sir M. Spicer), was on the point of acting to implement my proposals when, unfortunately, he was promoted. The privatisation of rail, water, gas and electricity all followed, and that switched much of the vacant land from public to private hands. Public vacant land became private vacant land and, as a result, the number of acres of public vacant land has dropped dramatically. However, the utilities still own much private vacant land that could be developed.

The brown-field recycling target is nothing new, only a variation on an established Conservative theme. The *Western Morning News* reported on 20 February 1999 that 58,000 of the new housing units planned for the west country could easily be built on brown-field sites in the west country. As a result, the figure for green-field building could be reduced and the figure for Devon could be reduced pro rata.

Mrs. Angela Browning (Tiverton and Honiton): I apologise to my hon. Friend for missing the first few minutes of his speech.

The point from the *Western Morning News* about the availability of brown-field sites was taken from a report that has only recently been published by the south-west regional planning conference—the body that made the recommendation about the county structure plan numbers to Devon county council in the first place. Does my hon. Friend agree that, valuable as the report is, it would have been much more helpful if we had had such a report two and a half years ago when we began work on the country structure plan, rather than receiving it at the tail-end of the process, after the Prime Minister had issued a diktat to East Devon district council that it must now get on and plan those houses?

Mr. Steen: As always, my hon. Friend makes a telling and important point. One cannot deal with housing allocation if one does not have the information necessary to put houses in sensible, wise and productive places. I hope that the Minister will take that point seriously because it is a grave and important one that will add to this debate.

I have mentioned the problem of brown-field sites. Another problem stems from the failure to provide an arrangement by which local authorities can trade housing allocations. Districts cannot swap with districts, nor can

counties with counties or regions with regions. North Devon might want to trade with the Torbay area—after all, both their councils are Liberal Democrat run—with the result that the houses planned for a highly congested and overbuilt area could be moved to one where there is more space.

The Minister is bound to say that that is not his fault, because those figures originated from the Office for National Statistics in the late 1980s and the then Secretary of State for the Environment, my right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer), handed them down to the regions. At this stage, I shall not argue with the Minister about the figures—we have already gone around that course—although, as I have said, I think that they are suspect and are based on the predict-and-provide philosophy. They are treated as though they are divine guidance. My criticism is of the way in which the figures are handed down vertically: Government, regions, county, district, parish. There is no lateral integration and no way in which local authorities can deal with each other and trade in housing figures.

The ONS figures are merely a repetition of past trends. Past performance is not a guide for future demographic trends. The current structure plan is formulated on the basis of what has happened in the past. Can that make sense for the future? Surely, such calculations must be unreliable. For example, in the 1980s we believed that the economy would continue to grow and that that trend would never stop. Banks lent more and more money so that people could buy land and houses, and prices went up. However, it all went terribly wrong and many people burned their fingers; millions ended up with negative equity and debts.

The housing forecasts are based on exactly the same flawed assumption: that whatever happened in the past is bound to repeat itself in the future. Predict and provide—the basis for those housing forecasts—has become a self-fulfilling prophecy, and I pointed that out to the Minister last December. The buzz phrase is no longer predict and provide, but plan and manage. At the moment, it is merely a buzz phrase; the predict and provide approach continues to hold sway in planning credence. What is the point of changing the whole basis for housing number predictions, if there will be no effect until the date of the next structure plan? The Minister protests that the Government are doing something, but what is it please?

The figure of 4.4 million new homes for the United Kingdom—and 438,000 new homes for the south-west and 90,000 in Devon—should not be considered as a target that must be reached, but that is how planners and local politicians continue to regard it. The truth is that those figures are not targets, but merely projections—an informed guess or an estimate of what might be needed. The use of those housing figures as targets is the reason why councils and developers struggle to build houses, so that the targets are fulfilled at any cost.

It is just like the building of the M25; that, too, became a self-fulfilling prophecy. We thought that building a huge road around London would put a stop to gridlock and end traffic problems, but more and more cars used the road and the traffic jams are legendary. It is the same with house building; the more houses are built in an area, the more people come from outside to live in them and the more the demand increases.

Does the Minister agree that the figure of 4.4 million is not a target, but a projection; and that such projections forecast the maximum number of housing units that can be built if all the conditions are right? Why was there nothing in yesterday's Budget to give incentives for developers to build in towns and disincentives to them to build in rural areas? Furthermore, if that was a recognised aim of the Government, planning appeal inspectors could refuse permission to build on green-field sites by arguing at the appeal stage that there were plenty of brown-field sites left for development in neighbouring towns and cities. That would discourage developers from using the appeal process as a form of blackmail against councils that are afraid of spending council tax payers' money to defend such appeals.

Under the present system, councils and Government alike are obliged to allow developers to build wherever they want within the local plan area. In addition, councils feel pressurised by a time scale that forces them to allow building by a certain date; they are obliged by law to find sufficient land to designate for house building to fulfil the housing targets that have been handed down to them. The local plan highlights where those houses are to be built, but contains nothing to prioritise the use of brown-field sites in urban areas. That is because different local authorities deal with urban and rural areas and they are not able to liaise over the housing figures.

Councils should strengthen the incentives for brown-field site building by telling developers, "Until you find the building of sufficient infrastructure to serve this new development and to provide good quality of life for the residents, there is no way that we shall give you planning permission". If that were the case, South Hams—an area whose natural environmental beauty has been recognised by no less an authority than the House of Commons Library and which has been described as one of the most beautiful places in England and Wales—could say no to developers. Furthermore, the local council would be assured that its decision would be upheld by planning inspectors on appeal. That would force developers to look at towns for building purposes—the Plymouths, Torbays, Exeters and Bristols.

Mr. Adrian Sanders (Torbay): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing this debate. He says that houses should be built not in South Hams, but in Torbay, of which he represents a quarter; and no doubt he does not want those 3,000 to 6,000 extra houses to be built in Brixham, Galmpton or Broadsands. The hon. Gentleman is being honest, so he is saying that those houses should be built in areas such as Occombe valley, Cockington or Preston Down road. The hon. Gentleman nods his head; I am grateful to him for that confirmation.

Mr. Steen: If I was nodding, it was because I was getting bored with the hon. Gentleman's remarks.

The "not in my backyard" principle is a good planning principle because it expresses self-interest and there is nothing like self-interest to ensure that the right decision

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is reached. Clearly, the right decision is that it is better for those new homes to be in the hon. Gentleman's constituency than in mine.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Steen: I shall give way when I have dealt with the points made by the hon. Member for Torbay (Mr. Sanders).

There are many badly designed homes and buildings in Torbay, as the hon. Gentleman will agree. Torbay has grown like Topsy. If there was better planning and better design, the space could be used more productively.

Mr. Tyler: I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman has abandoned his main thesis, which concerned the inadequacy of the predict-and-provide approach. We all now realise that the previous Government's failure to move away from that principle is why we are in the current position. Will the hon. Gentleman turn westward and consider the circumstances of his hon. Friend the Member for South–West Devon (Mr. Streeter), who is determined to have an even larger development on green-field sites than is currently proposed? What does the hon. Member for Totnes (Mr. Steen) say to his neighbour?

Mr. Steen: The hon. Gentleman raises a perfectly acceptable point. I must not be drawn too far from the thesis of predict and provide, as he was clearly following it with interest. I hope that the Minister will withdraw his unnecessarily unkind remarks about my not getting involved in a serious discussion. I see the Minister smiling. I am sure that he was overcome momentarily and is now back to his normal, happy self.

It is not for me to answer the hon. Gentleman's question. My hon. Friend the Member for South-West Devon (Mr. Streeter) is well known for his oratory, clarity and good sense. I am sure that, when the time comes, he will be able to respond to that point.

Mr. Gary Streeter (South–West Devon): The time has come. Does my hon. Friend agree that the real glory of Devon is to be found not just in Dartmoor, in the rolling hills of South Hams—which he and I are privileged to represent—or in our coastline, but in our beautiful, picturesque villages? We do not want a new town or to see existing villages overwhelmed by new building. We must protect and preserve our existing villages in south Devon at all costs.

Mr. Steen: That is the right answer. The only snag is that, in the 1960s and 1970s, the planners and the county council in Devon said, "We want to protect villages and hamlets, but we realise that we can do that only by ruining one area completely by building a new town". I used to represent that new town of Ivybridge, which is now in my hon. Friend's constituency. It was a tiny hamlet of 1,500 inhabitants but now has 12,000 or 13,000 inhabitants. If that was the only place ruined, one could accept it. However, the planners not only ruined Ivybridge but have continued to build in all the villages and hamlets that they said they would not touch because they were building a new town in Ivybridge. Will the Minister address that important issue? If a new town is built outside Plymouth—large or small—will the hon. Gentleman put an embargo or guillotine on any further attempts by planners and local politicians to build in the villages or hamlets? That is the real problem.

I do not want to be drawn too far away from the point that I was pursuing. We must find a way of forcing developers to consider building in towns. I mentioned Plymouth, Torbay, Exeter and Bristol before the hon. Member for Torbay jumped up. Unlike their American counterparts, our cities are grey, often unfriendly and not fun places because they empty at the end of the working day when everyone rushes home to the suburbs. British cities are like doughnuts: they have empty centres where the jam used to be. Jam is made by combining a mix of ingredients: by including all ages, lifestyles, earning levels, types of marital status and so on. Our cities need to be vigorous, vital and exciting places in which to live and work.

That will not happen if developers continue to build on green-field rather than brown-field sites. By doing so, they make the urban sprawl worse—compounding the problem by attracting the more upwardly mobile members of society out to the suburbs, leaving behind the poor, the elderly and the ethnic minorities. Many of our cities are drab and dreary because of permissive planning policies that encourage building on green-field sites, which constantly robs the cities of the kind of people who could invigorate them—the upwardly mobile. We must ask what building by numbers is doing to our countryside as well as what it costs the taxpayer to build the extra infrastructure required by green-field developments.

The Devon county structure plan demands that two new settlements be built on green-field sites. One of them would be built near Plymouth and the settlement of 2,500 housing units would constitute 35 per cent. of the current demand from Plymouth. However, will that local demand be met given that, despite the fact that its supposed aim is to meet existing demand, the new town will be advertised all over the country? If taking up the Plymouth overspill is the real aim, why not build on existing vacant land and fill existing housing in that city? Why not put under-utilised sites to better use? There are many of them: shops with a vacant upper storey, vacant land in both public and private ownership, and disused dockland sites. Plymouth is a good example of an unplanned city that has grown up by accident rather than design.

Why are we not regenerating our cities? In the 1960s and 1970s, the then Prime Minister, Harold Wilson, launched several urban development initiatives, including the urban programme, the community development project, the education priorities and the young volunteer force, of which I was a director. Those initiatives switched the rates from rural to urban areas in order to finance the needs of rundown inner cities. The Labour Administration in the 1970s switched the rates from rural areas to urban areas in an attempt to regenerate them, and I welcomed that move.

In the early 1980s, my right hon. Friend the Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine), then Secretary of State for the Environment in the Conservative Government, launched a crusade to regenerate our cities. Fortunately, I was the Member for Liverpool, Wavertree at the time, so I

benefited from that policy. Yet our inner cities continue to empty outwards simply because people can move into a never-ending supply of housing built on green-field sites.

Green-field development prompts the need for schools, shops, sewerage, telecommunications, transport, medical and hospital services and leisure facilities. Who pays for that? It is not the developer. The developer simply connects the houses to the local sewerage system and possibly installs a few telephone and electricity lines. There is a myth doing the rounds that green-field development is much cheaper than redeveloping rundown areas in the towns. It is not cheaper: it is a question of who pays.

Green-field development is not cheap for the taxpayer, who must pay for all the services that new communities require. The only person for whom such development is cheap is the developer, who buys the land, builds the buildings and connects them to the main services. That is why green-field building land is so expensive to buy. I am told that Plymouth brown-field sites sell at about £50,000 per acre, while green-field land outside Plymouth sells for £800,000 an acre. The fact that it is so disproportionately expensive should alert us to the fact that something is wrong. Developers must be, and are, making good profits—so much so that the high cost of green-field land is worth paying.

It is left to the public authorities to pay for the long-term infrastructure and employment provisions of new communities. The council tax payer and the central taxpayer pay. Who pays for the buses that will have to serve the new areas? Is it the developer? No, it is the taxpayer. Who will pay for a new sewerage plant that might have to be built? Is it the developer? No, it is the water rate payer. Who will pay to resurface the roads and build new ones to cope with the extra traffic? Is it the developer? No way. It is the taxpayer, through the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions.

When the new green-field developments are advertised in the national newspapers and people—many of them retired—flock to the west country, who will pay for the extra hospital services needed to cope with the influx of elderly people or for the schooling of young families? Is it the developer? Of course not, it will be the taxpayer. Moving people from the cities to the suburbs costs taxpayers money. Who pays to decommission schools and other services in the town and set up new ones in the suburbs? It is not the developer, but the taxpayer.

Why should the taxpayer be drawn in behind the developer who makes the profit on green-field land development, leaving behind problems of declining cities and infrastructure costs for others to deal with? If developers want to build on green-field sites, they should provide the necessary infrastructure. However, there is another problem: developers can pay only if the development is big and profitable. They can pick up the cost of green-field development only if that development is large enough to generate sufficient money. That is why planners advocate building new towns: two dozen starter homes will not make enough money to enable a developer to build a road or a school.

The infrastructure is already in place in our cities. So why build on green fields, destroy the countryside and create endless unnecessary problems when pleasant homes can be built in the towns at less cost to the taxpayer? It is only bureaucracy that is preventing such development: the bureaucracy of handing down housing figures from Whitehall based on the predict-and-provide policy, the refusal to allow local authorities to trade with each other and the Government's failure to implement their brown-field sites policy.

There is no point arguing about the housing figures: rightly or wrongly, they are being treated as targets by the Government and by the Liberal Democrat-run Devon county council, which has rushed to approve them in the face of Conservative opposition. My argument is about where those houses will be built. I object to the inflexibility of the planning system. Once the figures are handed down from Whitehall, like the ten commandments from Mount Sinai, they are set in stone—mostly in our green fields.

I welcome house building—we need it and local people need it—but it needs to be in the right places. I welcome the building of houses for young people in urban areas so that they can bring back vibrancy to the centre. I welcome the regeneration of ugly urban areas into pleasant residential spaces convenient for young and old alike and close to existing shops, schools and hospitals. I should like to stop the brain drain in which young people continue to leave in droves counties such as Devon and other parts of rural England and retired people flock there in their place, occupying many of the green-field housing developments. I should like enlightened developers, guided perhaps by Government funding, to reclaim poisoned or brown-field land and build land-efficient houses on it.

Mr. Burnett: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Steen: Does the hon. Gentleman think it wise to intervene?

Mr. Burnett: I think it is very wise. Will the hon. Gentleman treat us to his rather idiosyncratic views on fiscal or taxation proposals on development property?

Mr. Steen: I hoped that the Chancellor would treat us to those yesterday, but he did not. If we are to shift the emphasis of building to regenerate our urban areas, clearly there must be tax incentives for the developers, and there are none at present. I was severely disappointed yesterday because I was looking forward to the Chancellor, in his giveaway Budget, giving away what we want.

Mr. Burnett: Does the hon. Gentleman recall that his last debate on this matter was attended by the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke)—a most distinguished former Chancellor of the Exchequer—who distanced himself from the hon. Gentleman's proposals? Does he further recall the chaos that followed the introduction of development land tax and development gains tax?

Mr. Steen: I am glad to say that I do not. My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke) would have been present today—he wanted to contribute to the debate and support what I am saying—but unfortunately previous engagements prevented him from attending. The hon. Gentleman could have asked him that question if he had been here.

[Mr. Steen]

I shall recap because other hon. Members want to speak. The figures are not targets that have to be met by projections; they are not the holy grail. The Government are repeating exactly the same pious imperatives that the Conservatives did in the 1980s. They are pulling out and dusting down the vacant land registers in the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, and if they are not doing so, they jolly well ought to. They were right to state that many houses could be built on brown-field land, but the whole initiative has been precluded from the current structure plans. We do not want jam tomorrow; we need it today.

Talking about jam brings me back to my earlier image of our cities as doughnuts that have no jam in the centre because the planning process has encouraged green-field site development. Cities will be neglected as long as we continue to encourage developers to make large profits on green-field sites because they do not have to pay for the infrastructure costs.

The Government claim to be passionate about the environment. The Liberal Democrats claim to be positively frenzied about sustainable development. Those are meaningless claims because there is no yardstick against which new developments are judged. Some areas of this country—south Devon is one—have reached the maximum size that is possible without there being an adverse effect on the quality of life of the people who already live there. Surely that must be the meaning of sustainable development.

If people's lives are affected by a flood of new housing and new people, the quality of their life changes—and that cannot be sustainability. That is why I have great problems in understanding why the Liberal Democrats on Devon county council talk about sustainable development when they continue ploughing up the land for houses. Perhaps one of the Liberal Democrats present, who have been eager to intervene, could tell me what sustainable development means to them, because it is not working.

Developers cannot be expected to provide infrastructure if the size of the development does not generate sufficient profit for them to do so. The planning gain has to be substantial if new sewers, hospitals and roads are to be built by the developers who cause the need for them rather than retrospectively by the taxpayer. Most of that much-needed infrastructure is already in place in our cities.

Building new towns in east and west Devon will make matters worse. They will further empty the population from the cities and cost the taxpayer an enormous sum in building new services for them. That is not to mention the cost of decommissioning old infrastructure in abandoned urban areas. I remember that, in Liverpool, schools in the inner city were constantly being closed, which cost a fortune. Taxpayers would have to meet the cost of decommissioning all sorts of infrastructure in Plymouth, Exeter and other cities as the people moved out.

It is likely that national advertisements will continue to encourage people from outside the county to drift to the south-west. That rise in migration into Devon is currently at the rate of between 32,000 and 35,000 people a year. That is equivalent to seven or eight times the population of Totnes—or Kingsbridge, which is in my constituency—entering Devon each year. Those figures have been rising as we build more and more houses.

The Government cannot be excused for failing to recognise what is happening and how it will damage the beauty and quality of the environment in the south-west. The Liberal Democrats have even less excuse for letting that damage take place under their very noses. They have approved a massive programme of unsustainable development, and they are answerable to the electorate in Devon for what they are allowing to happen. That electorate must remember that they will have an opportunity to get rid of the Liberal Democrats on 6 May.

Mr. Sanders: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Steen: No, I have given way enough.

Buzz words such as "plan and manage" are fine, but they are meaningless if they allow the building of 90,000 houses all over Devon. Such a level of house building is simply not sustainable. The Liberal Democrats know that; the Government know that and I know that. Politicians in authority and the Liberal Democrats in Devon have no excuse for not taking action to stop that house building. They have the means but not the will or the inclination to stop it.

Mr. Sanders: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Steen: No, if the hon. Gentleman wants to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, he can make his own points, provided that I do not go on for too long. There are politicians without backbone and the Liberal Democrats are good examples. They are always passing the buck.

It is not too late for the Government to ensure that new homes, many of which are needed for local people, are built in the right place. Our cities are crying out for new investment, new enterprise and new opportunities. The countryside is Britain's finest asset. To concrete over thousands of acres in the next 12 years will be environmental vandalism of the worst possible kind. The electorate will not forget that betrayal at the next general election.

11.36 am

Mr. David Drew (Stroud): I am grateful for the opportunity to participate in this debate on well-worn territory. I initiated a debate on this subject last year, and I have intervened on the hon. Member for Totnes (Mr. Steen) in a half-hour debate. Some of us are interested in these issues and continue to battle on.

My stance is fairly well known. I support the Government's approach, but I have not been uncritical on certain points, including housing numbers. I shall concentrate on the household projection and its implications, but first I shall set the issue in context because the Government have done much good work and have had a difficult task given the problems that they were left by the previous Administration.

I was interested to hear the speech of my hon. Friend the Minister for the Regions, Regeneration and Planning to a conference of the Economic and Social Research Council on 2 March, and I heartily agree with many of his remarks. It is only too clear that, unless we take action, we will face difficulties in future. I support, as I am sure all hon. Members do, the movement away from predict and provide and the emphasis on brown-field development, with the

60 per cent. target. I should like to know how the Conservative party could raise that figure, because it has a history of having much lower targets.

There is undue criticism of the Rogers task force. I invited the task force to Stroud. It is doing much good work, but it is not yet ready to complete its report. We shall find out what the report says about fiscal measures and planning changes and I hope that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor will then deal with those. Perhaps now is not the right time for that.

The Labour party is committed to considering the whole area of planning guidance. A number of consultation papers have been issued and I am sure that hon. Members have responded. We look forward to the results. We view the emphasis on the regional dimension as an important departure which should be heartily supported. In a nutshell—I use an analogy from another policy area—we are seeking a firmer, faster and fairer method of planning and implementation.

We have a sword of Damocles hanging over us in the form of the 4.4 million household projection. There is a rumour—perhaps it is now more of a prediction—that the figure is likely to increase when the Government issue their new projection. Paraphrasing the argument of the hon. Member for Totnes, I juxtapose the encroachment into the green-field areas, while our inner cities continue to decline. We must grapple with that problem and turn a lose-lose situation into a win-win situation.

We have long experience of the problems in my county. The debate so far has focused on Devon and Cornwall, but the pain is felt in Gloucestershire and in my district, Stroud. Any meeting on housing is always packed with members of the public, who have an understandable interest in the subject. I congratulate the councillors who have tried to grapple with the issue; it is not always pleasant.

We heard reference to NIMBYism. One person's self-interest is another person's demoralisation and the denigration of his area. The planning process must work properly, or the less privileged will lose out and those who have no voice will always be dumped on. As a politician, I am not prepared to see that happen. We are in politics to do something about it.

There is a need for balance. We must conserve our landscape, where appropriate, but we must also allow evolution in rural as well as urban areas. That means building not on every green-field site, but on appropriate sites in an appropriate way. I shall return to that theme later.

The central tenet of my argument is that there is a fundamental difference between the need for housing and housing need. Recently, we have concentrated on the need for housing, and on delivering what developers tell us there is demand for. We have failed to grasp that those in real need are being let down, in both rural and urban Britain. Contrary to what has been alleged from the Opposition Benches, I have villages where people are crying out for social housing and where the young people are being driven out. That is social exclusion of the worst kind. Why should future generations not be able to carry on living there?

Mr. James Gray (North Wiltshire) *rose—*

Mr. Drew: I am aware that the hon. Gentleman wants to intervene, but I am sure that he will understand that I want to keep my remarks fairly brief. Perhaps he will catch your eye in due course, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

There is social exclusion, unfairness and unsustainability. If a village is not living, evolving and moving, it is not a place where many people want to live. They do not want their villages pickled in aspic, to remain as they were in the 19th century. That is not sensible.

Experience has shown that, if development is carried out properly, it can work well. Too often, the problem in rural Britain is that a development is proposed which may include affordable housing or even social housing, the principle is agreed to and the planning application is allowed, but suddenly the developers change their mind and propose a development of four or five-bedroomed executive homes. Lo and behold, the very people for whom the housing was intended are excluded. There are many examples of that, which the Government must tackle.

The problem of the dereliction of urban Britain is not confined to the cities. In the market towns of my region, there is much evidence of the need for regeneration through sensible housing policies, including the possibility of people living over a shop. There are too many barriers, social and economic, to such development. I hope that the urban task force under Lord Rogers will offer new ideas to move it forward.

The difficulties originate in the ever-growing number of housing requirements. I am a critic of the trend-based forecasting on which the Office for National Statistics relies. My argument is that what happened in the past is not necessarily what is happening now, let alone what will happen in the future. I know that consultation has been offered, to examine alternative methodologies and mechanisms. I welcome a debate on alternative approaches to projections.

I readily agree that projections are necessary for planning. If we do not know what we are planning for, it is difficult to know whether we are delivering what is required. However, there is a need for alternatives such as the bottom-up approach, and ways of dealing with issues such as net migration flows, which are particularly relevant in the south-west.

Household projections are not the same as housing projections. I readily admit that questions of social engineering arise, about which some hon. Members may feel uneasy. If the Government are not prepared to consider such matters, who will? We need to understand the effect of the growth in single households. That is not a good thing in itself, although it may be what people want. An analogous case is that of the motor car. We know that more and more cars will eventually lead to increasing congestion and misery.

I have outlined some of the issues that the Government must take up and introduce into the planning procedures. They have a difficult task, but they have made some movement. We need new planning procedures sooner rather than later. I hope my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary will tell us that those will be discussed shortly. We all have a part to play. People feel that they have been excluded in the past, and they have strong views to express. I hope that the debate today will take matters forward.

11.46 am

Mr. Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington): As the dust settles on Mr. Brown's Budget, we should reflect on two missed opportunities—the absence of a green-field

[Mr. Tom Brake]

development tax, and the absence of any moves towards equalising the VAT on new build and conversions. Those measures would have helped to reduce the rate of urbanisation, which is running at a rate of 110 sq km a year, and increased the percentage of new homes built on previously developed land, which all parties in the House support.

Such measures would have helped the Government towards their somewhat unambitious target of 60 per cent. of development on brown-field land and reduced the impact on our countryside of the 4.4 million or possibly 5 million—I believe that an announcement is expected shortly—new homes that will be needed by 2016.

The absence of any measures to equalise VAT on new build and conversions will make it virtually impossible to bring into circulation the hundreds of thousands of empty homes in England and Wales. That view is supported by the Empty Homes Agency. I spoke to its chief executive, Ashley Horsey, this morning. He said:

"The Government claims to be promoting brownfield development and looking for an urban renaissance. Such action is meaningless if they are not prepared to take real effective action."

It is worth reminding hon. Members of the facts about empty homes. There is a 4 per cent. vacancy rate in the United Kingdom. That is the equivalent of almost 800,000 empty homes. In Holland, the vacancy rate is 2.3 per cent. By matching Holland's vacancy rate, we would create 300,000 to 350,000 new homes.

There are also empty flats above shops. According to a report produced by the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, about 1,500 flats were created above shops between 1992 and 1995. Assuming that conversion has continued at that rate, about 20,000 flats could be created above shops.

Office conversions offer further potential accommodation. Estimates suggest that 20,000 flats could be created in London. Assuming that that figure could be doubled across England and Wales, there is the possibility that a total of 400,000 new homes could be created from office conversions and by utilising empty homes and flats above shops. That figure represents 10 per cent. of the need. We can all imagine how much safer and more attractive our cities and towns would be if those empty homes were brought back into use. By ruling out a green-field development tax, Gordon Brown has sent the wrong signal—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael J. Martin): Order. That is the second occasion on which the hon. Gentleman has made such a mistake, and I hope that he will not do so again.

Mr. Brake: I apologise, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

By ruling out a green-field development tax, the Chancellor has sent the wrong signal to developers.

Mr. Drew: Until we have the urban task force's report, no recommendation is in place as to how that would take effect.

Mr. Brake: I thank the hon. Gentleman and I note what he says.

Mr. Brown's Budget was—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. If the hon. Gentleman continues in this way, he will have to resume his seat. He knows the conventions of the House.

Mr. Brake: I am sorry, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The Chancellor's Budget was, without doubt, a bad Budget for brown-field sites; but other developments could make the Government's task of minimising the environmental and aesthetic damage of new housing estates harder—the creation of the regional development agencies.

In evidence to the Environment Sub-Committee yesterday, the Minister for the Regions, Regeneration and Planning said that the RDAs' role would be to make good the economic deficit in the regions. That is a perfectly valid objective for the RDAs, but another must be to ensure that development is sustainable. That objective is given much less prominence.

Mr. Burnett: Does my hon. Friend agree that we have had a monumental dollop of hypocrisy from the hon. Member for Totnes (Mr. Steen)? Does he recall that the previous Government dictated—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. We must always have temperate language in the House. I would not associate the hon. Member for Totnes or any other hon. Member with hypocrisy.

Mr. Brake: The RDAs will have to track an environmental indicator—the percentage of new homes built on previously developed land. But that is only one such sustainable development indicator. The RDAs will have to pay regard to many more economic indicators.

With the proliferation of the different bodies that will operate at a regional level—the RDAs, the regional chambers, the regional planning conferences, the regional government offices and Whitehall—the potential for confusion about household projections and the preferred locations for development is enormous.

Confusion is the best case scenario. The worst case scenario is a bloody battle between the RDAs and the regional planning conferences, with the former seeking to promote industry and housing in an environmentally sensitive area, and the latter fighting any such development. The potential for chaos is not helped by the Government's unwillingness to state whether regional planning guidance or the RDAs' regional strategies will be pre-eminent.

I hope that PPG11, which is to be reissued at the end of the consultative process, will clear up some of those uncertainties, but the draft has not made a good start. It says:

"the Regional Planning Bodies should work with the Government Office and other stakeholders to establish the level of housing required to meet the region's housing needs. In making this assessment the Government's latest published household projections should be taken into account."

It goes on to say:

"the Regional Planning Bodies should take a realistic and responsible approach to future housing provision",

and

"once the housing requirement in RPG has been established and confirmed by the Secretary of State".

That still smacks of intervention by the Secretary of State. We might yet find that the corpse of predict and provide makes a full recovery on the mortuary slab.

One final aspect which has not been given sufficient consideration in this or other debates about household projections and new residential developments is water provision. As more water is taken from the environment to meet increasing demand, more and more wetlands are drying out. That has been confirmed in reports produced by English Nature, the biodiversity challenge group and the Environment Agency in recent years.

All the new households that will be built will need water, and it is estimated that about 214 million litres a day will be needed. London will need an extra 25 million by 2016. Yet the water supply is already stressed and any further increase in demand will exacerbate the problems, and probably cause drying out on other sites as well.

To cope with the increased demand, new reservoirs and new river transfer schemes will be needed. It is essential that the Government issue new planning guidance to planners to ensure that water is seen as a constraint on new development. That is in line with the recommendation of the Select Committee on the Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs, which stated:

"water supply should become a major part of the consultation and planning process. Planning authorities should be given the power to insist that water efficiency measures are included in new houses and to refuse developments where they are concluded that it would not be possible to provide adequate water supplies without damage to the environment."

That national planning guidance must be produced quickly to address issues such as from where the water resources would come and how any additional water demands would be met.

I hope that the Under-Secretary will respond positively to some of my concerns in relation to a green-field development tax, VAT equalisation, RDAs, regional planning guidance and water resources, but he will find it hard to convince the House that the Chancellor's Budget has not scuppered the Government's chance of hitting their 60 per cent. target of development on brown-field sites.

11.56 am

Mrs. Linda Gilroy (Plymouth, Sutton): I share the privilege of representing a constituency in what I hope hon. Members will agree is probably the most beautiful county of Devon. In the few minutes available, I want to tackle some of the issues concerning where the new houses can be built, because some misleading statements have been made about the extent to which the cities can accommodate them.

The space as well as the distance are two of the attractions that generate the desire among constituents of many other hon. Members to go and live in the south-west, and particularly in Devon and Cornwall. As the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, my hon. Friend the Member for Greenwich and Woolwich (Mr. Raynsford), said in a debate instigated by the hon. Member for Totnes (Mr. Steen) on 9 December 1998, we do not live in a Maoist society in which we can ban such migration.

The population projections take account of population change and household formation, and that includes migration. Migration into Devon always comes under the closest scrutiny. For the reasons that I have mentioned—space, distance and beauty—in-migration is a significant factor in some parts of our county, but not within the Plymouth sub-region. Our principle need is for housing to meet the needs of our existing population.

Plymouth is an attractive city. The Shell guide praises its waterfront as one of pre-eminence in the world, and *The Independent* lists Plymouth as the 26th most interesting place in the world to be at the millennium, alongside other cities such as Moscow and Paris. *[Laughter.]* Hon. Members may laugh, but there are good reasons for that, to which I may return in another debate. I mean *The Independent*, not the local rag *The Sunday Independent*.

The aspiration of many hundreds of thousands of people is for country living in small villages and towns, or something more remote on moor or coast. I prefer city life, but I understand why many of those bringing up families and seeking a peaceful retirement should make such a choice.

If the hon. Member for Totnes and his colleagues believe in choice—I think that they do—he must respect those who chose to move to join us in the many privileges that we enjoy. I hope that he also seeks to represent the interests of those most in need, particularly housing need, in his constituency.

The hon. Gentleman will have noted paragraph 6.12 of the report from the panel that conducted the public examination of the Devon structure plan, which states:

"Having regard to the various representations on this matter, the Panel find that there is no convincing evidence to conclude other than that restricting new house building would serve not to stop immigration but to significantly worsen the living conditions of those at the lower end of the housing market."

The report continues:

"the Panel fundamentally rejects the view that somehow under provision is not a significant problem. Under provision is likely to hit those most in housing need in the community and damage the housing prospects of the next generation."

The projections for Plymouth predict growth, not from migration, despite the attractions of our city, but from changes in the household needs of the citizens of Plymouth. Meeting those needs will be challenging for us. The structure plan for Plymouth proposes that 6,800 dwellings should be built between 1995 and 2011. Plymouth city council has said that it will seek to provide those dwellings within its boundaries, but that is clearly a tough target. In all previous analysis, the council identified potential for 5,500 sites, and that figure has been based on existing allocations, estimates for conversions of properties into flats and windfall opportunities on small sites.

An extra 1,300 dwellings on top of that known potential is also a tough target. The council is working hard to apply the Government's philosophy, which is identified in the White Paper "Planning for Communities of the Future". However, even with greater use of recycled

[Mrs. Linda Gilroy]

lands, it will still be pushed to accommodate 6,800 dwellings, especially because, where redevelopment of poor housing is to take place—often because that housing is unfit and poorly laid out and of an inappropriately high density—the aim will rightly be to reduce density and maintain our precious and, many of my constituents would say, too few, open spaces.

One can say that some debates are timely, but I do not believe that of this debate. On 26 February 1999, the Devon structure plan was adopted by the five strategic authorities. They agreed that the housing proposals in the structure plan would stand, but there is also agreement that they should be closely monitored under the Government's provision of "plan, monitor and manage", as outlined in the White Paper. All five authorities are seeking to progress the structure plan positively. They are committed to a proper process of monitoring and review in the light of future events and the requirements of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State.

At regional level, the planning guidance for the period to 2016 is being considered. That, too, will provide a proper framework within which the interests and concerns of our local authorities and the constituents of Plymouth, Sutton and of Torbay—as well as the interests and concerns of the constituents of the hon. Member for Totnes—can be properly addressed. I urge the hon. Member for Totnes to take an early flight, as I did this morning, on a clear day and to reconsider, in the light of the space that he would observe beneath him, the contrast between the vast spaces of his constituency and the high density of the population of my constituency and that of my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Mr. Jamieson).

I reject the endorsement of the hon. Member for Totnes of the narrow-minded NIMBYism of some of his constituents, many of whom are the very same people who have sought to exercise their choice, as he did, to migrate to our beautiful county of Devon.

12.4 pm

Mr. Nigel Waterson (Eastbourne): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Totnes (Mr. Steen) on raising this issue and on his masterly exposition of the current situation, particularly in Devon. The beauty of his constituency is second only to that of my constituency. I look forward to visiting his constituency, before it all disappears under concrete.

As my hon. Friend explained, how typical it is of the Liberal Democrats to say one thing about the environment and do something quite different when they are in control. In my constituency, the local Liberal Democrats forced through planning permission to overdevelop Beachy Head, which is a major attraction for visitors to my constituency.

Mr. Burnett: Does the hon. Gentleman think that there is something rather incongruous about the position taken by the hon. Member for Totnes (Mr. Steen)? Does he recall that a housing figure for Devon of more than 100,000 units was dictated by the previous Government? Devon county stuck to its guns and the Secretary of State has agreed to slightly more than 70,000 dwelling units.

Mr. Waterson: I always think that my hon. Friend is noted for his congruousness. The very best of the hon. Gentleman's case is that his colleagues on the council have collaborated in those overdevelopments.

I commend my hon. Friend the Member for Totnes for putting his finger on many of the central issues. He has long service in the House and told us some of the background to recycling land, which is nothing new. However, I suspect that his excellent book "Plums", which I read a long time ago, is out of print.

My hon. Friend described how predict and provide had been replaced by plan and manage. How right he was that these figures should be treated not as targets, but merely as projections, and he drew attention to a central point—the Government's failure to implement their brown-field site policy.

There is considerable expert and political argument over the projection of 4.4 million homes needed by 2016. We have heard that that figure may increase. However, the Government's view seems to be that that is the best available figure in all the circumstances. Conservative Members remain highly sceptical, particularly bearing in mind the fact that there are supposed to be 1 million empty dwellings in this country.

Where are all those new homes to go? The Government still seem to be fumbling for a policy. In the meantime, there are constant encroachments on the green belt, often with the connivance of the Secretary of State. The worst example is the go-ahead given for 10,000 new homes on green-belt land near Stevenage. Nearer my constituency, the Secretary of State is forcing West Sussex to build 58,700 new houses by 2011. We have heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Totnes about the parlous situation in and near his constituency.

Nationally, if new housing continues to be built on green-field sites at the present rate, an area the size of Suffolk will disappear under concrete by the time today's school leavers reach retirement age. The green belt must be protected if we are to avoid urban sprawl, and I am proud that, under the previous Conservative Government, the size of the green belt was doubled.

A great deal of the Government's hopes are pinned on the development of brown-field or recycled sites, but there is growing evidence that their faith is misplaced. Their declared target is for 60 per cent. of new developments to be built on brown-field sites, which is a belated increase from 50 per cent after sustained pressure from Conservative Members, among others. *[Interruption.]* The Under-Secretary laughs, but he may remember his description of a target of 60 per cent. as a "recipe for disaster".

We have suggested two thirds of new development as a target and, according to the Select Committee, some witnesses suggested that 75 per cent. is feasible. Let us be fair and judge the Government on their stated target.

Mr. Sanders: Is not the problem that brown-field sites tend to be where people are migrating from and green-field sites are in the parts of the country to which people are migrating? That is true nationally and in Devon, where the brown-field sites are in Plymouth.

People do not want to move to Plymouth, however, and the green-field sites are in the county, which is where people want to live.

Mr. Waterson: The hon. Gentleman is being a little over-simplistic, but there is a problem of mismatch as he describes.

Let us judge the Government on their stated target. The problem is that rhetoric and reality have parted company. The Government's performance in respect of brown-field sites is still limping along on a figure of 53 per cent. That is not so much urban renaissance as a new dark age, with concrete being poured indiscriminately.

What has become of the draft consultation version of PPG3? The Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, the hon. Member for Greenwich and Woolwich (Mr. Raynsford), said on 3 February that it would be with us shortly. He is stretching the word "shortly" a little, but no doubt he will tell us when we will see it. What has happened to Lord Rogers and his task force? I am delighted to learn that they visited Stroud, and no doubt there have been other sightings of them; but when will they produce something with which we can grapple?

We hear a great deal about a "sequential" approach to planning, but that in itself may cause delays and problems. The Under-Secretary may be aware of a study published recently by the Civic Trust and the House-Builders Federation, which focused on 54 potential brown-field sites identified as long ago as 1986. The study discovered that only 39 sites—72 per cent.—had been developed at all in the intervening time, and that only 29, or 54 per cent., had been developed for housing on either all or part of a site. It concluded:

"The Government's target of 60 per cent. of new homes to be built on recycled or brownfield land will not be realised unless action is taken to learn from past failings and the process is improved and strengthened".

The study helpfully lists a series of problems that arose in many of the case studies. It mentions the problem of contaminated land, and what it describes as

"a lack of flexibility, creativity, technical and market knowledge in some local authorities",

which, it says, can

"hinder . . . public/private partnerships".

The whole question of land assembly is often crucial to such developments. It is not a happy story.

Mr. Nicholls: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Waterson: No.

The Under-Secretary may also have seen "An Urban and Rural Renaissance", an excellent document produced by Shelter. According to the document,

"Current planning and housing policies are failing to ensure the provision of sufficient affordable housing".

Shelter makes clear just how many improvements in the planning system are needed to deal with the problems. All too often, that system fails us in terms of the identification and use of brown-field sites. Such studies are important, and worrying.

In his remarkable speech, my hon. Friend the Member for Totnes made an excellent point: he said that there should be an incentive for developers to build in towns, and a disincentive for them to build in rural areas. I could not agree more; how sad that the Government, in the shape of the Chancellor of the Exchequer, ducked the issue only yesterday.

Perhaps the Under-Secretary has noted, and will comment on, an excellent proposal made by my hon. Friend the Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo). My hon. Friend has suggested a system of tradeable tokens, whereby a developer who built a home on a previously developed site—a brown-field site—would be awarded a token and, as well as obtaining planning consent, those wishing to build on green-field sites would be required to produce two such tokens before they could do so. That would easily, and with minimal administration and costs, deliver the two-thirds target to which Conservative Members currently aspire.

Conservative Members are working hard—that is an example—to protect our environment and to come up with practical, constructive solutions to the problems that any Government will undoubtedly face in this regard. I can promise that we shall continue to drag the Under-Secretary and his hon. Friends to the House until they finally develop a proper and workable policy of their own, to replace the incoherent shambles that lies before us now.

12.14 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Mr. Nick Raynsford): I congratulate the hon. Member for Totnes (Mr. Steen) on securing the debate, and on his persistence; he has raised this issue before. As the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) observed, his was a remarkable speech, in which he made a number of valid points with which I wholeheartedly agree. He produced a passionate defence of the case for building in cities and regenerating them for the urban renaissance, and for the use of brown-field sites. I entirely agree with him, and hope to say more shortly about what the Government are doing in that regard.

However, the hon. Gentleman showed a certain Jekyll and Hyde tendency, which was most obvious when he delivered what was probably the most emphatic endorsement of NIMBYism that I have ever heard in the House. I do not think that I have previously heard anyone describe "not in my back yard" as a good principle. I believe that I have quoted the hon. Gentleman correctly. He also slightly glossed over his own career pattern, which rather contradicts the course that he has urged on us. He wants us to ensure that there is no move towards green-field building, and to concentrate on brown-field sites. He forgets, however, that, as a former MP for a brown-field constituency in Liverpool, he has gone in exactly the opposite direction—to the green fields of Devon.

Mr. Steen: Regrettably, the boundary commissioners completely destroyed my constituency of Liverpool, Wavertree. Every one of my five wards went into a new constituency, which is now run by the Labour party. I would have stayed in Liverpool had I had that chance.

Mr. Raynsford: I am tempted to say that I hope the hon. Gentleman will have an encounter with the boundary commission in the near future that will enable him to renew his acquaintance with brown-field constituents.

[Mr. Raynsford]

I am afraid that, in a number of respects, the hon. Gentleman did not fully recognise the extent of the changed agenda that the Government are already introducing, which is making a significant difference. I shall give the figures, but, for the moment, suffice it to say that Devon is a very good example of the flexibility of our new system—which, by the way, is "plan, monitor and manage": the word "monitor" got left out. It is working far better than the old predict-and-provide approach that characterised the last Government.

The hon. Gentleman said that there was no scope for local authorities to trade housing targets or housing levels. There is, and the new system provides a very good framework. The hon. Gentleman has a particular problem with the household projections. He also has a problem with how the housing situation in Devon could be better managed. I shall take each point in turn. As he knows, we have changed our approach to establishing housing numbers. Our new draft PPG11—which was entirely misunderstood by the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Brake)—sets out our proposals for improving the preparation and content of regional planning guidance. It represents an important step in the modernisation of the planning system, and reflects our commitment to decentralised decision making and integrated policy making to achieve sustainable solutions.

The new arrangements give more responsibility to local authorities, through regional planning conferences, in the preparation of regional planning strategies. They should lead to increased regional ownership of the policies, and increased commitment to their delivery. Instead of the Government, the regional planning body will be responsible for preparation of the draft regional strategy, which will include proposing the amount of additional housing that will be needed in the plan period.

The new arrangements provide a more open and inclusive process for the determination of planning issues at regional level. The new strategies, including the new housing figures, will be tested at a public examination before an independent panel, whose report will be made public. The procedure has been piloted in East Anglia, where a public examination of the draft planning strategy for the area was completed last month. The regional planning guidance for the south-west is still at the pre-draft stage. One of the key tasks of the new-style regional planning guidance will be to advise on the overall level of housing and its distribution within the region, with the aim of making full use of previously developed land.

In assessing the housing provision required for the 15 to 20-year period covered by the strategy, we expect the regional planning body to work with other regional stakeholders to establish the level of housing required to meet the region's housing needs. In the making of that assessment, the Government's latest published household projections should be taken into account—that is perfectly logical and reasonable—but we are not insisting that they are targets, as the hon. Gentleman seemed to think. They are projections, and should be treated as such.

Mr. Nicholls: The Minister has spoken of a policy shift towards planning, monitoring and managing. Is not the logic of that change in policy such that it should be applied to the present situation in Devon? If things go ahead as planned, Devon will be transformed; it will be wrecked and ruined out of all recognition. The Minister has made a policy change on which I compliment him—now let him follow through the logic.

Mr. Raynsford: Clearly, with any change of policy there needs to be an orderly progression from the existing procedure to the new one. That is what we are doing. If the hon. Gentleman will bear with me when I come to Devon, he will see that the operation of the principles that underpin the Government's new approach is having a positive impact in Devon. I hope that he will recognise that.

As well as looking at the Government's figures as guidance, not as a target, we expect regional planning conferences to undertake urban capacity studies to explore the implications of changing policies and standards, which would reduce the land take of new development while securing attractive residential environments.

Against that background of need and capacity, the regional planning body should be able to take a realistic and responsible approach to future housing provision. It must be prepared to justify its views fully in public at the examination—that is fairly obvious. The structure plan and unitary plan authorities will, of course, be party to that process, so there is plenty of scope for them to negotiate and to discuss the apportionment between them.

Mr. Steen: The problem is that the west country is run by the Liberal Democrats. They control the county council, the district council and the unitary authority, so it is the Liberal Democrats talking to each other.

Mr. Raynsford: The hon. Gentleman displays a curious degree of ignorance of local politics. Is he not aware that the distinguished city of Plymouth is a Labour-controlled authority? He appears to have a complaint about the process of democracy. We are all here courtesy of that process and we should respect the verdict of the electorate.

The presumption is that, once the housing requirement has been established and confirmed by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State following the public examination, structure plans and unitary district plans should focus on the broad distribution and location of growth. The essence of the plan, monitor and manage approach is that both the assessment of housing requirements and distribution within the region should be kept under review. If there are signs of either under or over-provision, we expect both RPG and development plans to be reviewed accordingly. We need to work together in ensuring that the new approach is developed in as constructive a context as possible.

I want to deal with the points that were made by the hon. Member for Totnes about the Devon structure plan and the county's proposed new settlements adjoining Exeter and Plymouth. As I have mentioned, household growth is a fact and it is for local authorities in each area to find the best possible solutions for managing the growth sustainably. We cannot turn our back on the need to house people, and I do not think that any hon. Member would suggest that.

The Devon structure plan was not imposed by the Government; it was proposed and adopted by the local authorities on 26 February. That outcome shows that the

plan, manage and monitor approach is flexible, while maintaining our commitment to ensuring that everyone has the opportunity of a decent home. That approach is based on a thorough analysis of the available evidence.

The structure plan has raised two main issues: the overall figures for new housing and proposals for two new communities, one near Exeter and the other near Plymouth. Obviously, I shall concentrate on the one near Plymouth. First, I shall look at the overall housing provision. Regional planning guidance figures were agreed by the authorities in 1994 under the previous Government. They indicated 83,000 extra houses in Devon between 1995 and 2011, based on 1989 household projections. The independent panel that examined the plan in public in 1997 tested it against more recent 1992-based projections. Unusually, those projections were lower than the 1989-based set, and the panel therefore recommended 79,000 extra houses, a reduction of some 4,000 on the previous figure.

The five structure plan authorities published modifications in October 1998—at that stage, under the present Government. They proposed a lower figure still of 75,800 houses, 3,200 less than the figure that was recommended following the examination in public. There were two reasons for that. First, actual house building during the 1990s was well below the rates that were projected both in regional planning guidance and by the panel: during 1995-97, a period for which figures were not available to the panel, 2,100 fewer homes than the projected number were built. Secondly, it was felt that the achievement of Government objectives to reduce vacancies in the housing stock would absorb more of the extra households—an estimated 1,100 more.

After careful consideration of those proposals in the light of our new policy, spelt out in "Planning for the Communities of the Future", the Secretary of State accepted that the county's proposal for 75,800 houses did not need to be raised. We accepted its case that lower than expected house building during the mid-1990s did indicate a lower requirement for the period to 2011. That should not be taken as a precedent for other counties because circumstances vary from county to county.

Mr. Sanders: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Raynsford: I will in a moment.

House building rates can be affected by a variety of factors—for example, land availability or other supply-side problems. The circumstances in Devon do not suggest supply-side limits to house building. In addition, the county level, 1996-based population projections that were published by the Office for National Statistics in December 1998 show a further small reduction in projected population growth for 1996–2006, which weakens the case for raising provision.

Mr. Sanders: I want to clarify that point and get it on the record. Is the Minister saying that the amount of housing that has been accepted by the Government is less than was originally predicted under the previous Government and, therefore, that the comments of the hon. Member for Totnes (Mr. Steen) were less than accurate?

Mr. Raynsford: Yes, I can confirm that, but I am surprised that the hon. Gentleman could not have drawn that conclusion from what I said. I thought that I had made it clear that that was the case.

We do not regard new communities as free-standing new settlements, as described in "Planning for the Communities of the Future." As proposed, they are distinct, compact new neighbourhoods close to, and with good links with the two cities concerned.

Mrs. Browning: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Raynsford: I am afraid that I cannot give way to the hon. Lady. I know that she is greatly concerned about the matter, but I have only three minutes left and I have important matters to cover. I am sorry.

On the plan for Plymouth, no precise location has yet been proposed and no name has yet been given to the new settlement, but it is proposed that the development might be between half a mile and three miles from the urban edge of Plymouth.

The independent panel endorsed the new community proposals as potentially the best way in which to secure balanced and sustainable communities with the proper level of services and facilities. The Exeter community is related to large-scale employment development and a rail freight terminal proposal. The Plymouth one is being developed to meet the need for accommodation for people from Plymouth, which was graphically described by my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Sutton (Mrs. Gilroy).

The whole aim is, of course, to ensure that we concentrate development in areas where it is appropriate and sustainable, rather than allow indiscriminate development across a wide area of rural Devon, which clearly is the concern of the hon. Member for South–West Devon (Mr. Streeter), whose comments on the proposals, from what I have seen, have been entirely responsible and appropriate. The alternative to new settlements would be indiscriminate and unsustainable housing development. I do not think that anyone would welcome that.

The way forward lies in building on the positive options for meeting housing requirements and for protecting the countryside. There is far more common ground than is sometimes acknowledged. Everyone wants to see as much land recycling as possible and more sustainable patterns of development, to protect the countryside, to regenerate urban areas and to ensure that people are properly housed. The Government are developing that agenda as proactively as possible. There is much more work to be done to help authorities to develop that agenda.

We have a full programme of revising the relevant PPG notes. We will shortly publish the draft PPG3, which will detail policies to underpin our recycling target. We expect authorities throughout the country, including authorities in the south-west, to do their bit to maximise land recycling. We are also working on other planning guidance notes, such as those on transport, and have published draft guidance on regional planning and development plans.

The Government are acting positively, seriously and responsibly in dealing with an important agenda. That contrasts with the previous Government—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord): Order. We must now turn to the next debate.

Hornchurch Fire Station

12.30 pm

Mr. John Cryer (Hornchurch): I thank Madam Speaker for choosing this debate, which is a very important one for the people in the area represented by me and my hon. Friends the Members for Upminster (Mr. Darvill) and for Romford (Mrs. Gordon). I also thank the Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Knowsley, North and Sefton, East (Mr. Howarth), who will reply to the debate.

I have been involved in the campaign to keep Hornchurch's second fire pump from even before the cut was announced—as there had been some indication that there would be such a cut. In the past three or four months, there has been a magnificent campaign—particularly by the Hornchurch fire fighters, who led the campaign, and by the people of Hornchurch—against the cut. A few weeks ago, we had a public meeting outside the fire station that attracted about 1,000 people, who were primarily from Hornchurch but also from Romford and Upminster. Previously, we had a public meeting that attracted about 200 people.

I have received about 1,000 letters on the issue, including one recently from officials and representatives of the Royal College of Nursing, who object to losing the engine both on health grounds and because of the area's many nursing homes—particularly in the more far flung and vulnerable parts of the ground—and other health facilities, such as our two hospitals and many doctors' surgeries. Two particularly far-flung nursing homes are in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Upminster.

Recently, Hornchurch fire fighters and I handed in to No. 10 Downing street a petition containing the names of 40,000 people who want to keep the second pump at Hornchurch. We also handed in to the London fire and civil defence authority, on Albert embankment, approximately 12,000 consultation leaflets that had been completed by local people, all of whom were against the cut and said that they were willing to pay more, in council tax and perhaps in other charges, to keep the fire pump in Hornchurch.

All of those representations have been ignored by the London fire and civil defence authority, which has treated the people of Hornchurch contemptuously. Tony Ritchie, the authority leader, and other authority members have simply brushed aside the opinions of the people of Hornchurch and those living in other parts of the ground, saying, "We're going to get rid of the pump anyway." They have been absolutely contemptuous.

Hon. Members should remember that since 1986, 63 pumps have been cut from Greater London fire stations, 14 of which have gone since the Docklands bomb—on a night when the London fire authority was pulling in pumps from as far away as Essex and Surrey. The cuts make us wonder whether we could cope in London if there was another, similar massive disaster. In addition to previous cuts, the LFCDA is planning to cut another five pumps across London. Today, however, I am dealing specifically with the Hornchurch pump.

The London fire authority has a £5 million reserve in the bank and, in the current financial year, an underspend of £6.5 million. Very likely, there will be an underspend also in the next financial year. I therefore cannot understand why the authority insists on cutting the Hornchurch pump or the other four pumps. I shall certainly watch the future career of Tony Ritchie with great interest.

My ground of Hornchurch is one of the biggest—the second biggest—in Greater London. We have had two appliances since 1936, when Hornchurch was still a village. Many older people in the area still refer to Hornchurch as a village. In 1936, both Rainham, in the south, and Upminster were also tiny villages. Since 1936, there has been an enormous expansion not only in the population, which has increased many fold, but in roads. We now have the M25 and the A127, on which the Hornchurch pumps spend a great deal of time. Hornchurch's pumps spend a lot of time covering the A13 and the A12 also, although they are not in our ground. All of those roads are hugely busy, particularly at rush hour, taking people in and out of London.

There has also been enormous industrial development in the ground. The Fairview estate, for example—which is in the south of my constituency—often has to be covered by the Hornchurch pumps. Ferry lane, which also is in my constituency, frequently has fires and problems that must be attended by our fire brigade. All those developments—including increased industrialisation—have occurred in the past 50 years.

Traffic jams on the big roads—particularly the A13, A127 and M25—often entail enormous tailbacks. People leave the main roads, go on to back roads that they do not know very well, drive too fast and have accidents. Therefore, there are major problems on the back roads that also have to be attended by the Hornchurch pumps.

In the past few years, risk categorisation in the borough of Havering has been greatly reduced. At one time, parts of Romford were A risk, and Hornchurch was generally B risk. Now, the ground has nothing but C and D risk areas. That is unfair. Even on the basis of current risk assessment, there is no reason why Hornchurch and Romford should not be categorised as B risk. Arguably, parts of Romford should be classified as A risk.

Currently, the Home Office is conducting a fire cover review. I argue today—as I did in a previous debate on the subject—that, until the review is completed, there should be a moratorium on cuts in front-line fire cover in Greater London. I hope that the review will recommend using risk-based assessment. However, until the review is finished, we shall not know the future basis of fire cover. I believe that the use of risk-based assessment will ensure that there will be at least two pumps at Hornchurch for ever and a day.

In the past two years, the number of two-pump call-outs at Hornchurch has increased from 396—in 1997—to about 430 last year. There is not yet a definitive figure for 1998, but it will be at least 430. Nevertheless, there has been an increase in the number of two-pump calls, which is the crucial factor when considering cutting the second pump at Hornchurch fire station. Last year, the total number of calls was 1,410—not 960, as the fire authority claimed—which includes calls to fires in other grounds.

I put those figures to the authority leader, Tony Ritchie, but he failed to respond to them. At a meeting well before Christmas, I told him the figures; he failed to respond. Shortly before the meeting at which the authority decided to proceed with the cut of five pumps, I again gave him

the figures; again, he failed to respond. If he is prepared to treat a Member of Parliament like that, I wonder how he treats members of the public who approach him saying that they do not want any more cuts in the fire service. It makes the mind boggle.

In the past two years, the number of fire deaths in London have increased by one third. I cannot believe that that crucial fact—the huge increase in the number of fire deaths—is completely unconnected to the fact that there have been so many cuts in the London fire service. If we continue cutting, we shall have more loss of life and more serious injury.

Only last night, I discovered that—according to Hornchurch fire fighters—on Saturday, 30 January, Hornchurch was without fire cover for three hours: the station was empty, the pumps were out and no cover was provided by other stations. If Hornchurch is already going without fire cover for three hours on a Saturday—which is surely one of the station's busiest times—I should think that even the idea of cutting Hornchurch's second pump is simply dicing with death.

I have a strong personal view on the matter. My family lives in one of the more vulnerable parts of the ground, in Upminster. I do not want to see our home going up in smoke—and cutting the second pump would put families like mine at risk. I cannot see how we can continue to cut fire pumps from across Greater London and expect that there will not be an increase in deaths and injuries. The slogan of the Fire Brigades Union for many years has been "Cuts cost lives". That encapsulates what I am saying today. We cannot afford any more cuts and we certainly cannot afford to lose the fire pump at Hornchurch. I look forward to my hon. Friend the Minister's response.

12.40 pm

Mr. Keith Darvill (Upminster): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Hornchurch (Mr. Cryer) on securing this debate and I endorse and support what he has said. Hornchurch fire station serves part of my constituency, as my hon. Friend said, and in particular Emerson Park, Cranham, Upminster and part of Harold Wood. That is a large area. In terms of area covered, my constituency is one of the largest in Greater London. It is no coincidence that Hornchurch fire station serves such a large area.

My constituents are very concerned at the chief fire officer's recommendation, which has now been endorsed by the London fire and civil defence authority. I share their concern. Like my hon. Friend, I live in the ground covered by Hornchurch fire station. I have been inundated by representations and messages of support for the campaign against the decision. My postbag is full of complaints from constituents; I am lobbied every time I walk down the high street and my friends and neighbours constantly raise the issue with me. It is a big issue in the area.

I had the opportunity to speak in an Adjournment debate a few weeks ago on the London fire services obtained by the hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable). I raised a number of points to which my hon. Friend the Minister helpfully said that he would respond in writing. I look forward to his response. I shall not repeat those points today, as I know that time is short, but I take this opportunity to request an early meeting with my hon. Friend the Minister to make further representations to him on behalf of my constituents, who are very worried. In the mean time, I urge him to consider the enormous number of representations that I know are being sent to him and to my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary.

There is a strong case for a postponement of the decision. I know that the risk-based assessment for fire cover is being reviewed. Changes in the London emergency services will come about as a result of the Greater London Authority Bill. I know that the finances of the LFCDA could tide us over until those changes happen.

Hornchurch does not merely provide direct fire cover. As my hon. Friend the Member for Hornchurch said, the area is surrounded by the M25, the A13 and the A127. They are busy roads and there are numerous accidents on them. The firefighters tell me that they are constantly called out to road traffic accidents on those roads. They are frequently able to save lives because advances have been made in ambulance services and improved treatment can be given to accident victims. My concern is that a reduction in the number of fire appliances will not only reduce the fire cover but reduce the number of incidents that the fire service can get to quickly to save lives.

The chief fire officer's recommendations are based on minimum cover. I believe that we should strive not merely to achieve minimum cover, but to obtain better cover for the area. A reduction in the number of fire appliances in Hornchurch will affect not only the ground but other parts of the area, including Romford, Dagenham and Wennington, which are covered by Hornchurch when local services are called out to emergencies. Our constituents' genuine concern is important. As the Members of Parliament representing the area, we need to emphasise that to Ministers. With all that in mind, I look forward to my hon. Friend the Minister's reply.

12.44 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. George Howarth): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Hornchurch (Mr. Cryer) on securing this debate on Hornchurch fire station and my hon. Friend the Member for Upminster (Mr. Darvill) on his speech. I think that my hon. Friend the Member for Upminster is aware that this Minister is always willing to meet right hon. and hon. Members if they have a problem, as they perceive it, in their constituency. He may not be aware that my hon. Friend the Member for Hornchurch has already written to me asking for a meeting, and in a letter of 8 March I responded saying that I would be willing to meet him. If the arrangements have not been completed, they are certainly under way.

As hon. Members will know, there was a serious, tragic and horrific fire in Chingford last week. Our sympathies go out to all the friends and relatives of those who died in that fire. The cause is very suspicious and arson is strongly suspected. Regrettably, arson has increased considerably. In the past decade, 1.7 million fires have been started deliberately, causing 22,000 injuries and 1,100 deaths. We shall be publishing shortly the outcome of a Home Office review, which has examined the current arrangements for combating arson and will recommend a range of new measures arising out of that.

Hornchurch appliances were not called to the Chingford fire so I can now turn to the subject of today's debate. I fully understand the concern that my hon. Friends have

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expressed today and during last month's debate on the London fire service, about the proposal by the London fire and civil defence authority to remove a fire appliance from Hornchurch fire station.

As I said last month, we have good reason to be proud of the fire service in this country. It achieves consistently high standards of performance, often in difficult and hazardous circumstances. The fire service's high level of performance in responding to fire calls has been confirmed year after year by the Audit Commission. So it is with good reason that the fire service is highly regarded by the public, both in Hornchurch and elsewhere in the country. The key point to stress is that the statutory responsibility for the provision of an efficient fire service rests with the fire authority, and, in the case of Hornchurch, with the London fire and civil defence authority.

It is for the authority to keep its fire cover provision under review and to set a budget that will allow it to meet its statutory and other obligations and, in particular, to provide a service that meets the national standards of fire cover. However, under section 19 (4) of the Fire Services Act 1947, the fire authority cannot reduce the number of fire stations, fire appliances or fire-fighting posts without the express permission and consent of my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary.

My right hon. Friend has a specific role in considering section 19 applications. He will grant approval only if he is satisfied on three counts. The first is that the proposals have been sufficiently widely publicised, in sufficient detail and with adequate time to enable any interested party to make representations. The second is that the representations have been considered by the fire authority. The third is that Her Majesty's inspectorate of fire services advises that the national standards of fire cover will be maintained if any of the proposals were implemented.

There is no statutory requirement on the fire authority to consult, but my right hon. Friend and I consider it important that proper consultations are undertaken. Once a section 19 application has been made, we will also take into account representations made to us direct. We will consider and reflect carefully on the points made by my hon. Friends today. Our primary concern is the maintenance of the national fire cover standards. Successive Secretaries of State have interpreted the duty to provide an efficient fire service against those standards.

At the beginning of this month, we received the authority's application to remove the second pumping appliance from Hornchurch and from four other fire stations around the capital. We are seeking advice from Her Majesty's inspectorate of fire services on the authority's proposals. We shall ask the inspectorate to look carefully at the representations of my hon. Friend the Member for Hornchurch and any that other hon. Members, organisations or individuals may make. I assure my hon. Friend that we shall not approve any proposal unless we are entirely satisfied that national fire cover standards will be maintained.

The authority's latest proposals result from a review of its fire cover. All fire authorities are obliged to review the fire risks in their area regularly against the national standards to ensure that the brigade's deployment of resources is updated in the light of changing circumstances. That is not contentious. Most people agree that it is sensible to do so.

It may be helpful if I explain the national standards in a little more detail, because they were an important part of my hon. Friend's speech. The standards are not just nationally recommended; they are nationally agreed in the Central Fire Brigades Advisory Councils for England and Wales and for Scotland, which are constituted under the Fire Services Act 1947 to represent fire service interests in advising the Secretary of State. The standards lay down terms for the number of appliances and also the speed of response in the initial attendance to a fire. They rest on four main standards of service, which depend on the risk category of the area, and assume for each category that a predetermined number of fire-fighting appliances should attend within a specified time. The area served by Hornchurch fire station has been assessed as 55 per cent. C risk and 45 per cent. D risk. My hon. Friend has suggested that Hornchurch should be reclassified as B risk.

Under the national standards, a brigade should aim in normal circumstances to meet the following response times: in a B risk area, one pumping appliance to arrive in five minutes and one within eight minutes; in a C risk area, one pumping appliance to respond to the incident within 10 minutes; and in a D risk area, one pumping appliance to respond within 20 minutes.

In considering the section 19 application, my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary will want to be assured by Her Majesty's inspectorate that the area has been correctly categorised for fire risk and that, if a pumping appliance was removed from Hornchurch, the brigade would continue to meet the above standards.

In 1995, the Audit Commission recommended that there should be another review of the standards of fire cover. The commission recognised that no fundamental change should be considered without careful research. That recommendation was taken forward by a further joint committee of the advisory councils. Its report "Out of the Line of Fire: Modernising the Standards of Fire Cover" was published in July 1998.

The advisory councils have endorsed the report's conclusions in favour of risk assessment as a more flexible approach to planning fire cover that explicitly addresses the risk to life. Pilot trials are in hand with a number of brigades, including London, to confirm the practicality of that approach and, if successful, what the arrangements for implementation should be. However, that is a longer-term project. In the mean time, the existing standards of cover continue to apply.

When the authority set its budget for 1999–2000 on 18 February, it had to take into account the local government finance settlement and the implications for its reserves and assess what savings it should seek to make. The local government settlement provides a £143.6 million overall increase in the fire service element of total standard spending in England—an average annual increase of 3.5 per cent. over the next three years. That includes £47.1 million—3.6 per cent.—for 1999–2000. London's share is an above-average increase of £9.9 million—

3.8 per cent. That follows an increase of 5 per cent. in 1998-99. The settlement, which I am proud of, acknowledged future funding pressures, notably on

pensions and training, which were identified by fire service interests. It should help fire authorities to plan ahead on a more stable funding basis. The settlement has also set the fire service a challenging efficiency target of 2 per cent. a year. The best value initiative should play a key role in assisting fire authorities achieve that target.

I shall reflect carefully on the points that have been raised in the debate. There are matters of significance and concern that we have to take into account.

It might be worth spending a few minutes on our approach to community fire safety. We want progress to be measured against our commitment to community fire safety. To that end, we have publicly set a target of reducing the average number of house fire deaths by 20 per cent. over the next five years. That move towards prevention is a step change for Government policy and for the work of brigades. Prevention work should be regarded as the first line of defence against fire. The vast majority of fatal fires are accidental and therefore preventable. However, the speed with which fire spreads and smoke kills often means that no matter how quickly the brigade arrives, it can be too late.

In this financial year, we have provided an extra £12 million to the fire service in England to undertake community fire safety work, thus implementing a key recommendation of the Audit Commission report on funding fire prevention. We have also recently established a national community fire safety centre, which will take forward the objective of reducing fires and casualties and act as a resource for fire brigades in England and Wales. I announced last December that we would be providing the new centre with £14 million of funding over the next three financial years to run high-profile safety campaigns in conjunction with every brigade. We have also conducted a major national smoke alarm television campaign for fire brigades, including London, to make sure that every householder has a smoke alarm and maintains it properly.

It is disappointing that house fires and fatalities in London have increased, particularly when other metropolitan brigades have been able to achieve significant reductions in recent years. However, the brigade is not alone in seeing such increases and the national trend has been upwards since 1994.

We recognise that without intervention the projected trend for house fires is set to increase. We are not prepared to let that situation arise and have therefore put in place a wide range of measures to reduce the number of house fire deaths. We are working closely with London and other brigades to ensure effective community fire safety arrangements. Whatever the outcome of the Hornchurch proposals, I know that my hon. Friends the Members for Hornchurch and for Upminster will support us in our endeavour.

As I have said, we shall reflect carefully on the points that have been made in this debate and seek advice from Her Majesty's inspectorate of fire services on the section 19 application and all the representations that have been made. We shall not approve any application unless we are entirely satisfied that the national fire cover standards will be maintained and the safety of the public in Hornchurch and elsewhere is assured.

DNA Sampling

12.59 pm

Mr. Steve Webb (Northavon): I am grateful for the opportunity to raise my concerns about the use by the police of DNA samples collected during their investigations for the purposes of subsequent investigations, and others taking place at the same time.

My concern about the issue arises from a tragic situation in my constituency—the story of Louise Smith. On Christmas eve 1995, Louise left home with her friends to go to a local nightclub, and did not return home. On Christmas day, Louise's family reported to the police that she had not returned home, and thus began a difficult and protracted investigation.

About three weeks later, a search was conducted for Louise's body, and more than 10,000 local people took part. The fact that so many people turned out showed the strength of feeling in the community, the solidarity with Robert and Gill Smith—Louise's parents—the sense that any parent would dread to be in the same situation and the desire simply to do something to help. I understand that my predecessor as the Member of Parliament for Northavon took part in the search—not with high profile or fanfare, but as a member of the public. That is a tribute to his decency.

Sadly, no body was found, and the agony and uncertainty went on until the middle of February 1996, when two boys playing in a local quarry discovered Louise's body, which had been carefully hidden. The police inferred from that, and from other circumstances, that the murderer was a local man, or certainly a man with strong local connections. Thus began a murder hunt which was to last for many months.

As the body had been found—and despite the circumstances—it was possible to obtain a DNA sample, although it was some eight weeks after Louise had died. I gather that such a gap was almost unprecedented. As a result, Avon and Somerset police felt that they were able to use DNA methods to try to track down the killer.

One of the first things to happen was that a number of people recognised a photofit of the suspect that was issued, and a DNA test was undertaken on that person. The DNA test proved innocence. In other words, someone who, under other circumstances, might have been pursued by the police, was eliminated from their inquiries early on. By April 1996, 400 DNA tests had been carried out on local men. By November 1996, that figure had reached 2,000, and, by Easter 1997, more than 4,500 DNA samples had been taken from local men who had volunteered, if only to be eliminated from inquiries.

In March 1997, a man named David Frost was swabbed for a DNA sample—not locally, but in South Africa. He was a local man, but was in South Africa. The DNA samples matched. He came back to the United Kingdom, was arrested at Heathrow airport in April 1997 and was charged with murder. In the way of these things, it was not until February 1998 that the case came to court. At the last minute, he changed his plea to guilty, and he was sentenced to 14 years on a tariff.

The process, sentencing and so on raised wide issues that are beyond the scope of this debate, but the point made to me by the family—which I fully accept—was that the majority of those tested were not suspects in the

[Mr. Steve Webb]

inquiry. Even David Frost, the killer, was not a suspect when originally asked to give a DNA sample. On the other hand, serious suspects were arrested and swabbed during the inquiry, but were quickly eliminated because of DNA testing.

The key issue is the use of those DNA samples, and what happens to them after the inquiry. My understanding of the law and the practice is that the only DNA sample that may be retained is that of the killer. By law, all the other samples that were offered must be destroyed. I understand that another inquiry was going on at the same time elsewhere in the south-west, and that the police were prohibited from using the samples collected in one inquiry for use in the other.

Superintendent John Newman, in addressing the Police Superintendents Association conference in September of last year, said that the inquiry was one of the largest that Avon and Somerset had undertaken. With regard to the DNA samples, he said:

"The murder inquiry quickly became one of the largest ever inquiries conducted in Avon and Somerset"

and said that the inquiry as a whole cost well over £1 million. He added:

"It also involved the largest ever intelligence led mass screen".

I understood that to mean that not all the men in the local area were swabbed, but that the police used their intelligence and what they could work out about the killer to screen and select a smaller number of men. None the less, more than 4,500 swabs were taken.

Each individual swab costs £37.50 to analyse. Added to that are the costs of cool boxes, polaroid film, fingerprint examinations and cameras, and the cost comes to about £41 per item. When that is multiplied by more than 4,500 swabs, the cost comes to between £200,000 and £250,000.

The Minister will understand why the family were dismayed to learn that all that police time, money and effort—although it helped to identify the killer—resulted in the swabs and the information being destroyed. They could not be used by the police in other inquiries at the same time, or in subsequent inquiries.

Clearly, the police's view was that they had spent a large amount of money on the inquiry, and they did not regret a penny of it because of the outcome. On the other hand, money must be best used and should not be wasted. One might ask whether this situation will arise again, and God forbid that it should. However, another young girl was murdered recently in a neighbouring area, and another police inquiry was launched. It is not stretching credibility too far to imagine that we might have to go through the whole process again. This would put a burden not only on the police and their resources, but on the good will of the local population. As I have said, there is tremendous good will towards the family.

Many people would sensibly say that, if they willingly came forward and offered a sample, and if they were offered the positive choice—with no pressure—of giving their consent to the sample being retained for future use by the police, their wish in that respect should be honoured. When they realised that the samples had to be destroyed, the family wanted to do something about it.

With the backing of a local newspaper, they launched a petition, which I presented to the House last night. The petition points out the waste of police and public time and money if samples are destroyed. The petition calls upon the House of Commons to seek amendment of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984—our initial guess at how we might achieve success. I hope that the Minister will advise me whether that is the case, or whether a change in police practice or paperwork—or some other means—could achieve the outcome.

Indicative of local support for the family and the campaign is the fact that more than 9,000 local residents—principally from the Yate-Chipping Sodbury area, but also from around the country—signed the petition. It is easy to get signatures for a petition about the closure of a local hospital because the issue is simple and easily expressed. This, as will be apparent, is a complex and sensitive issue, and the family have spent days in shopping centres, gathering petitions. They have gone over the matter again and again because they feel passionately that something is wrong.

I pay tribute to Robert and Gill Smith—Louise's parents—and to the family for the way in which, through dreadful circumstances, they have tried to seek the good and the positive. They have behaved with dignity throughout. Since Louise's death, the family have tried to support and help the police in dealing with the victims of crime. Their experience was that the police were supportive and helpful but that they were inexperienced and did not necessarily know how to handle people who had suffered the death of someone close to them. I pay tribute to what the family have done in trying to turn things to the good and to their efforts in getting up the petition.

I am grateful to the Minister both for responding to this debate and for his generosity in being willing to see the family briefly later today. I ask him to respond to a heartfelt plea from the family and from me. One small change, whether in practice or in legislation, could mean that police time is not wasted and that maximum use is made of the efforts of volunteers and the general public. It is a matter of common sense that action should be taken.

1.11 pm

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. Paul Boateng): I want to take this opportunity to extend my sympathy to the parents of Louise Smith, the victim in this tragic case. The facts of the case make a powerful argument for the use of DNA testing, which led to the conviction of the perpetrator of that dreadful crime. The officers responsible for the arrest and the investigation are to be congratulated.

The way in which the whole community—about 10,000 people, as the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) said—came together to assist in the initial search is a prime example of the commendable solidarity and community spirit that one would like to be spread more widely, as a sign that each and every one of us takes responsibility for the welfare of others.

DNA technology is a vital intelligence tool that we want the police to have at their disposal. It is changing the face of criminal investigation in much the same way as fingerprinting did at the turn of the century. The opportunities that it creates for advancing the battle against crime are to be embraced.

The Forensic Science Service has been operating a national DNA database on behalf of the police since 1995. It currently holds about 490,000 profiles of suspects and

offenders and 49,000 profiles from crime scene stains. Advances in technology have increased the number of investigations in which DNA plays a part. It can help to reduce the time taken to identify suspects and plays an increasingly important role in subsequent trials.

The Forensic Science Service has performed a real public service in advancing DNA techniques, making the tests increasingly sensitive to smaller amounts of material. The hon. Gentleman drew attention to the fact that, despite the seven or eight weeks that had passed since the body was hidden, it was still possible to take samples that were to prove so helpful in bringing to book the perpetrator of this awful crime. We can now identify an individual's DNA profile from a fleck of dandruff or part of a hair root. We are keen for this investigative tool to be developed and used further.

The circumstances under which DNA can be taken and the arrangements for the destruction of samples are broadly the same as for fingerprints and are dealt with in the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984, which was amended by the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994. The database is also registered with the Data Protection Commissioner.

DNA profiles are retained in a searchable form on the national database only if the suspect is convicted or cautioned for a recordable offence or if action against an individual is on-going. If an individual has been eliminated from an inquiry, the law as it stands requires that a DNA sample must be destroyed; and if the same individual is subsequently involved in another inquiry, samples have to be retaken and another entry made on the national DNA database.

Mass screening is used only in the most serious unsolved cases. It involves the taking of voluntary samples—skin cells from inside the mouth, or head hair—from a targeted section of the population. The profiles are then compared against a sample from the crime scene to see whether there is any match. If a match occurs, the police are advised, and the donor is asked to provide a blood sample, which is then tested against the crime scene sample, and if that confirms the result of the mass screening sample, the police can pursue their inquiries with a probable suspect.

There have been 110 mass screenings to date. The mass screening following the murder of Louise Smith was the largest ever undertaken, involving the analysis of more than 4,500 samples, and it resulted in a successful conviction. Mass screenings can result in the identification of a suspect when all other investigative techniques have failed. The advantage is that only a targeted section of the population need be screened—for example, local men in a specific age range—and the innocent can be quickly eliminated, as was the case in the murder of Louise Smith. The samples are put not on the national DNA database but on a dedicated mini-database, established solely for the given inquiry. If the profiles show no match, the samples are destroyed.

In some circumstances, either because of geographic location or because certain individuals fit the profile of possible suspects in more than one investigation, individuals may be approached a number of times to act as donor volunteers in mass screenings. That is one effect of the safeguards afforded by the current legislation.

One can well understand why the family of Louise Smith should feel as they do, as the hon. Gentleman said, about the time and expense that could be saved by retaining DNA profiles. It is an important issue that is certainly worth exploring, and I welcome the opportunity to do so, but the advantages of retention have to be balanced against proper legal safeguards and wide-ranging concerns, and fundamental civil liberties issues are involved.

It is important to ensure that any changes do not discourage volunteers from participating in mass screenings. The hon. Gentleman will appreciate the importance of that because, if Louise Smith's killer had refused to participate in the screening, the matching of the sample could not have led to his conviction. A dangerous and wicked man was taken out of circulation for a very long time. The Home Office must have the balance very much in mind when considering those issues.

The voluntary retention of DNA profiles on a separate database is already under consideration in a wider review of the legislation in the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 relating to fingerprints and samples to ensure that it reflects recent technological advances. That is something on which I can give the hon. Gentleman some assurance—I think that he was about to raise that matter. We are considering the voluntary retention of DNA profiles, on a separate database, in the context of a wider review of the legislation as it relates to fingerprints and samples.

The current database is expanding rapidly and was designed to hold up to 5 million profiles. Although PACE enables samples to be taken from anyone suspected, charged or convicted of a recordable offence, the police currently restrict themselves to taking samples only in cases of burglary, sexual or violent offences. That represents the best use of resources by focusing on cases where DNA evidence is most likely to be of value.

Mr. Webb: The Minister raised an option that I had not thought of—the retention of the samples on a separate database. Can he give some idea of the time scale in which the review of PACE might be concluded?

Mr. Boateng: The review is under way. We are balancing the issues that I described and, in due course, we shall arrive at conclusions. Our concern is to make available the best and most robust basis for the successful detection and prevention of crime, so we are proceeding with all due expedition—of that, the hon. Gentleman can be sure.

The establishment of a truly national DNA database for the population as whole raises fundamental questions. There is a strong analogy with fingerprints, which uniquely identify individuals, but we do not require every individual to have their fingerprints on record. One could argue that that would be useful, but we do not do it for reasons that the hon. Gentleman will understand.

Therefore, before we take any step towards establishing a national database, we need to consider carefully the balance of the rights of the individual and its desirability and practicality. Although developments in the technologies required and the ability to search large databases mean that such a database is becoming technically feasible, the concept still raises fundamental questions, such as the balance of individual rights and the cost, which need to be addressed.

However, the Forensic Science Service is working closely with the police service, to develop a joint strategy with the Association of Chief Police Officers, to realise

[Mr. Boateng]

fully the potential of forensic science to support criminal investigation and the detection and reduction of crime. Increasingly sensitive techniques are being developed to allow DNA profiles to be extracted from small crime stains, enhancing the ability of the police to bring criminals to justice. We are committed to taking all steps necessary and making the best use of new technologies to that end.

This has been a useful debate. It has given the House the opportunity to express its determination to ensure that we develop new technologies in a way that will benefit the police and the detection and reduction of crime. The care and concern that the family of Louise Smith have taken subsequent to her tragic death to be supportive of the police and mindful of the importance of gathering public support behind the steps that need to be taken to develop to the maximum the new technologies are to be commended. They have performed a great service by raising the profile of the issue with the public, not least in collecting the 9,000 signatures to which the hon. Gentleman referred.

Ultimately, if there is to be a change in legislation, it will need to be supported by the public. It will also need to be seen to be supportable in terms of the balance of civil liberties and the rights and interests of all concerned and of a sufficiently large number of people volunteering to allow samples to be retained to make it meaningful—as the hon. Gentleman will appreciate, were the number to fall below a certain critical mass, the value of the exercise would be destroyed.

Therefore, it has been enormously valuable that the family of Louise Smith have raised the issue as they have. The hon. Gentleman has also done the House a service in bringing the matter before us. I look forward to meeting the family to express in person my appreciation of what they have done. The case in question highlights the benefits of DNA evidence. It also highlights the importance of using the best and most readily available technologies to that end and the importance of intelligence expertise in the analysis of crime in the hands of our dedicated police service as a way to identify where and how such techniques might be used. The fact that Louise Smith's murderer was brought to justice stands as a tribute to the police and the public.

We began with Louise's case and it is right that we should end with it. We should all express a determination to ensure that her tragic death and the loss that her family suffered is something from which we can draw lessons to prevent the loss of other lives, with all that that would entail for other families. The House will wish to join me again in expressing my deepest condolences to Louise's family.

Heathrow

1.27 pm

Mr. Tony Colman (Putney): I start by thanking Madam Speaker—through you, Mr. Deputy Speaker—for allowing this Adjournment debate on night flights into Heathrow, which is a subject that is near to the hearts of all those in the Thames valley and perhaps also now to Madam Speaker.

Two thirds of a million people suffer directly under the flight path from night flights into Heathrow, but I shall choose just one constituent, whose letter reads:

"I have been living in Putney for the last two years and it is only recently that my husband and I seem to have been woken up at early hours in the morning with the noise of planes. They have become extremely infuriating and indeed very stressful. Over the recent Bank Holiday weekend I was woken up early at 4.20 am by a plane and they seemed to be coming in by the minute. In my sleepy state I made notes of the times they came in. The first was 4.20 am and then a succession at 4.21 am, 4.22 am, 4.30 am, 4.34 am and 4.35 am. I have been woken up many times with these early morning flights in the last two months. Isn't this the time when a person is in their deepest sleep? Perhaps because it has been so hot we have had the windows open wider whereas before it may have been possible we did not hear them as clearly because we had the windows closed. What are we expected to do—not breathe? What I would like to know is where in the world are planes allowed to fly over residential areas from 4.00 am onwards? I would greatly appreciate an answer to this question.

I am rather ignorant at this stage as to who the Chairman of the BAA actually is or the parties involved. I wonder if you could provide their names and addresses. I would like to go and park my car outside their homes at 4.00 am every morning, and blow my horn. I wonder how they might feel?"

I am not suggesting that my constituents should do that, but it shows the strength of feeling of law-abiding citizens.

The second stage of the Government consultation has just closed and the timing of this debate is to ensure that the Minister has a chance to hear what is being said unanimously by the people and their Members of Parliament who live in the afflicted area: "No more night flights."

The first stages of the consultation clearly emphasised that view. Only the airline industry wants the status quo—or worse. As a representative of the people of the Thames valley, I must ask the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions to represent the people, not the industry. The curfew requested by HACAN of 11.30 pm to 6 am seems eminently sensible, and I proposed it in my Adjournment debate of 28 October 1997.

The second stage consultation document of November 1998 asked for ways to deal specifically with noise from Heathrow night flights. Regrettably, its proposals would merely share the noise around the area. However, for my constituents' sake, I must back the idea of moving towards an easterly preference for landing. That would mean landing from over Windsor and to the south of Windsor wherever possible. I propose that runway alternation should be used to share the noise damage further.

The hon. Member for Windsor (Mr. Trend) established in his Adjournment debate on 24 July 1998 that the Cranford agreement does not exist, and that the northern runway can be used as well as the southern one. I understand that BAA has no problem with the easterly preference or with runway alternation. A decision on that rests, of course, with my hon. Friend the Minister for Transport in London.

I suggest that alternation should cease between 6 am and 7 am to allow both runways to be used to take flights arriving after the curfew from 11.30 am to 6 am that I have also suggested. The hon. Member for Windsor argued in his Adjournment debate for retention of the status quo, which would protect his constituents and the people of east Berkshire. The hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May), who cannot be here today, has asked me to make it clear that she, too, supports the status quo.

I must point out, however, that 580,000 people suffer from the westerly preference because they live directly under the approach path, and much larger numbers are also affected. Some 64,000 suffer from the easterly preference. Those figures come from the House of Commons Library. Clearly, my suggested changes would share the damage more equitably.

However, part one of the consultation document and its appendices contain the crucial argument for why night flights must continue. It is the economic argument that if flights were banned, they would go elsewhere in Europe. The pre-eminence of Heathrow—the busiest airport in Europe—would be undermined, and there could be job losses.

My hon. Friend the Minister made that case in her responses both to me in 1997 and to the hon. Member for Windsor in 1998. The airlines do not want to change their schedules. However, another Putney resident wrote to me:

"British Airways has four flights from the Far East landing between 04.55 and 05.35. I know from my own experience that these overnight flights are very convenient and that later landings would require take-offs well after midnight in the Far East. This should not be a problem with the new Hong Kong airport or Australasian flights refuelling there. These early morning landings should only be allowed into Stansted, thus stimulating connecting flights from there."

Mr. Philip Hammond (Runnymede and Weybridge): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that one argument advanced by the airlines for early morning arrivals is the lack of terminal space a little later in the morning, which makes it difficult to unload large aircraft that arrive after 6 am? Does he agree that if terminal 5 went ahead, one of the major arguments offered by the airlines to support continuing early morning arrivals would disappear?

Mr. Colman: I am interested in that point, which I have not heard before. When I returned recently from the United States on an early morning flight, I was put on an isolated stand and bussed back to the terminal, so I do not believe that that is a problem. More isolated stands could be used after 6 am.

My constituent's letter continues:

"British Airways also has five flights from the eastern USA landing between 05.35 and 07.00. Flights from New York are scheduled at 7 hours. From my experience"—

and from my own—

"of flying this route, the jetstream can reduce this to as little as 5 hours, making the landing times even earlier. Later evening flights out of the East Coast"—

from, say, 9 pm onwards—

"would be advantageous to passengers in avoiding rush hour traffic, take-off congestion and a more natural time to go to sleep."

Clearly there are answers to the problem of re-scheduling night flights, if the airlines wish to apply them.

Appendix E of the consultation document notes the night restrictions at foreign airports, and that seems to be the nub of the economic argument. If Heathrow closes at night, and if there is no ban on night flights into Paris Charles de Gaulle, Amsterdam Schipol or Frankfurt-am-Main—as at present—Heathrow will lose out. The argument is, therefore, that Heathrow must have its night flights.

May I ask the Government to take up the matter with our European Union partners at the next intergovernmental meeting, and to seek a ban on night flights across Europe? I cannot believe that that is impossible to achieve. We are truly in a zero-sum game: if no European airport will accept flights during the night, no single airport will suffer. I note from appendix E that Tokyo Narita airport and Sydney airport close to all traffic through the night from 11 pm to 6 am. It can be done.

I pray in aid two further points. First, as long ago as 1995, the European Parliament in resolution A4-0012/95, section 5b, called for

"harmonisation and strengthening of legislation governing aircraft noise in areas adjacent to airports, including legislation on night flights."

Secondly, the draft manifesto for the European elections of the Party of European Socialists was agreed in Milan last week, and commitment 11—"Ensuring a Health Environment"—states that

"pollution does not respect national boundaries. We can only deliver a sound environment if we work together to raise common standards."

I appreciate that change will take time, so I have various suggestions for action while we await a pan-European ban as the outcome of the second consultation. First, I suggest an immediate ban on night flights from 11.30 pm to 4 am to reflect current unspoken practice, and to establish a principle in favour of a ban using the powers of my hon. Friend the Minister under section 78(3)(b) of the Civil Aviation Act 1982.

Secondly, I suggest a change in the time period for all other restrictions, to run from October 1999 to October 2000—not October 2004—to enable time for a European night flight ban to be agreed by the new European Parliament and the Council of Ministers. Thirdly, I suggest that the night-time ban could come into effect across Europe—including Heathrow—in October 2000. It would be a fitting symbol of the millennium, putting people ahead of a spurious zero-sum game of economic interests.

I commend my proposals to the Minister. I do not expect an immediate reply, but I hope that they may provide a basis for the decision that the Government will take on the future of night flights into Heathrow.

1.39 pm

The Minister for Transport in London (Ms Glenda Jackson): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Putney (Mr. Colman) on securing this debate on an important issue that has occupied this House on two recent occasions—on 24 July last year in a debate initiated by the hon. Member for Windsor (Mr. Trend), who is in his place, and before that on 28 October 1997, in a debate initiated by my hon. Friend the Member for Putney when we considered day-time and night-time noise.

The main issue at night is of course interference with sleep and the distress and annoyance that can cause, which is a problem not only for the constituents of my

[Ms Glenda Jackson]

hon. Friend the Member for Putney, but for thousands of people who live around Heathrow and under its principal flight paths. Heathrow, of course, is not unique in that respect. My hon. Friend referred to the Government's two-stage consultation on future night restrictions at Heathrow, Gatwick and Stansted airports. Our aim has been to make consultation as open and accessible as possible, and for that reason we decided to proceed in two stages.

The preliminary consultation paper issued in February last year sought views on all aspects of the present regime introduced in 1993, including the underlying principles. After careful consideration of all the responses, on 10 September last year I decided that the movement limits and noise quotas for the three airports for summer 1999 should be the same as they were for summer 1998. In November we issued a second consultation paper inviting comments on the Government's proposals for future restrictions at Heathrow, Gatwick and Stansted, to run from 31 October 1999 for five years until the end of the summer season in 2004.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Putney said, the second consultation paper also considers a range of options for changes to the preferential use of Heathrow's runways at night, which follows up on the trials of night-time runway alternation. The Government have not reached any view on the many options outlined in the second consultation paper, but we believe it right that those issues should be examined thoroughly before any decision is made.

The closing date for the second consultation paper was 12 February 1999, and the process of logging the many responses and studying them is under way. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for Putney and the House will understand that I cannot comment today on the responses we have received or on the decisions we may reach in the light of them.

Night flights have never been banned at Heathrow. Restrictions were introduced in 1962 in recognition of the disturbance caused to local people by the first generation of jet aircraft. Those very noisy aircraft have long since been banned from United Kingdom and other European airports and the process of phasing out the second generation of jets certificated to ICAO Chapter 2 standards is well under way and will be complete by the end of March 2002. In setting restrictions on night flights, successive Governments have sought to strike a balance between the impact such flights can have on people living around airports and the need for airlines to operate services at night, taking account of the user and the economic benefits they bring.

Mr. Hammond: I recognise the Minister's arguments about the economic benefits of night flights, but may I suggest a way in which we might reduce the problem a little without any serious economic impact? The hon. Member for Putney (Mr. Colman) mentioned the earlier than scheduled arrival of flights, especially from the USA, as one of the problems that contributes to early morning disturbance. I understand that flights arriving early are required by Civil Aviation Authority regulations to land immediately. The airline does not have the option of holding that flight away from the airport so that it lands at the scheduled time which is, after all, the time that the passengers expect to arrive. It does them no good to be dumped on the ground up to two hours early.

Will the Minister consult the CAA to see whether it is possible to change the guidance so that early arriving aircraft could be held, perhaps over the Bay of Biscay or somewhere convenient, so that they arrive after the curfew deadline and do not contribute to the noise nuisance?

Ms Jackson: The hon. Gentleman makes an interesting proposal. As a nervous flier, the idea of going round and round the Bay of Biscay for two hours before my aeroplane was allowed to land at Heathrow, after a long international flight, fills me with horror. I will consider the hon. Gentleman's request, but his proposal could lead to gross unfairness. Many aircraft arrive early due to conditions over which no one has any control—not least the winds—and that could cause difficulties.

Mr. Colman: The concept of planes circling over the Bay of Biscay also fills me with horror, but my hon. Friend the Minister might wish to consider a slightly different proposal. When flight plans are logged at, for example, Kennedy airport in New York, and they show that the flight will take five hours, not seven hours, the plane could be held on the ground for two hours to ensure that it makes the time at which it is due to arrive. That could perhaps be achieved through co-operation.

Ms Jackson: As I am sure my hon. Friend is aware, I have no jurisdiction over the flight plans at Kennedy airport. The USA is an independent, sovereign state. I can examine the issue, but I have no jurisdiction in the area.

The present restrictions specify a night period, 11 pm to 7 am, during which time the noisiest aircraft may not be scheduled to land or take off. In addition, from 11.30 pm to 6 am, the night quota period, aircraft movements are restricted by a movements limit and a noise quota. The noise quota is a supplementary measure designed to encourage the use of quieter aircraft. Aircraft count against the noise quota according to their quota count—or QC—classification, with the noisier the aircraft, the higher its QC. The movements limits and noise quotas are set for the season as a whole: they are not sub-divided across the hours of the night or between types of services, and airlines may operate services as they wish within the limits and quota available.

The Government's main objectives in carrying out the current review of the night restrictions are, first, to strike a balance between the need to protect local communities from excessive aircraft noise levels at night and to provide for air services to operate at night where they benefit the local, regional and national economy.

We recognise that local environmental expectations may be changing, as may the commercial interests of the airlines. Our second objective is to take account of the competitive factors affecting UK airports and airlines. Our third objective is to take account of the research into the relationship between aircraft noise and interference with sleep, including any health effects, and the fourth is to safeguard improvements in the noise climate in the night quota period since 1993, which we are proposing to do by reducing the noise quotas to nearer the level of current usage. The fifth objective is to encourage the use of quieter aircraft at night, and the sixth is to put in place at

Heathrow and Gatwick arrangements which will bring about further improvements in the night noise climate around the airports over time.

In pursuing the last two objectives, it has not been possible in the Government's proposals for Heathrow to make as much progress as we would have wished. Most aircraft using Heathrow are already modern types with many years of service ahead of them and, of course, there are tight constraints on runway and terminal capacity at the south-east airports.

It is not possible in the time available to cover all aspects of the Government's many and detailed proposals contained in the second stage consultation paper. However, among the main ones relating to Heathrow are proposals to maintain the QC system and seasonal movement limits supplemented by noise quotas; to reduce the seasonal noise quotas for Heathrow to nearer the level of current usage in order to safeguard the improvements in the noise climate in the night quota period since 1993; subject to the proposed review of the QC system, to ban aircraft classified QC4 from being scheduled to land or take off during the night quota period from the start of the 2002 summer season; to extend the restrictions on very noisy aircraft classified as QC8 to match those already in place for the noisiest types classified as QC16; and to reduce end-of-season flexibility by half. However, it is not proposed to introduce a complete ban on night flights as that would fail in our objective of striking a balance.

Aircraft noise at night and during the day remains a contentious subject. We freely acknowledge that. Unfortunately, despite the great improvements made over the past 30 years, it is likely to remain so. I announced on 27 February last year that we are commissioning a research trial into the impact of aircraft noise at night. We are particularly interested in the scope for research into sleep prevention: that is, delay in getting to sleep at night and the difficulties of not being able to get back to sleep after being awakened in the early morning—a problem mentioned by my hon. Friend as being the experience of his constituents. However, we should not underestimate the complexities of such research, or the length of time it may take.

The difficulties of scheduling intercontinental services is a significant factor in the present pattern of early morning arrivals at Heathrow. The night curfew at Hong Kong's former airport Kai Tak was often said to contribute to that, but it was far from being the only or the most important reason. We do not expect the pattern of movements to change radically now that Hong Kong's new airport at Chek Lap Kok has opened. Such services and similar ones cross many time zones, which limits their scheduling window for making suitable connections with other services. In addition, many services are now able to complete their journey non-stop owing to technological improvements and shorter routings, which means that they arrive earlier. There are now few departures from Heathrow during the night quota period, but some that take off just before our restrictions begin land at sensitive times at other international airports as a result.

In his own inimitable way, my hon. Friend referred to the fact that other comparable European airports have tougher night restrictions, but that is usually not the case at European countries' principal international airports—indeed, most have less severe restrictions and few have any restrictions at all on the number of chapter 3 aircraft that may operate at night, as we have at Heathrow, Gatwick and Stansted. In addition, most European cities are one hour ahead of London—an advantage that might go some way to explain why there is little interest in Europe in establishing common standards for night restrictions. In respect of my hon. Friend's interesting suggestion regarding the European Parliament, it is unlikely that an agreement of that sort could be achieved in less than 12 months.

My hon. Friend focused on aircraft landing at Heathrow in the early morning, from 4 am onwards and sometimes earlier. That is understandable, given that such flights now constitute the substantial majority of night flights at Heathrow. They fly over Putney and neighbouring areas when the wind is from the west, and over Windsor and adjoining areas when the wind is from the east. Internationally agreed standards and safe operating practice require that landing aircraft follow a stable straight-in descent aligned with the runway, which precludes dispersal of noise once aircraft are established on the airport's instrument landing system, normally at a distance of between 8 and 16 nautical miles and between 10 and 20 nautical miles at night.

My hon. Friend is aware of and referred to the trial of runway alternation at night for landing aircraft carried out by BAA for the Heathrow airport consultative committee. The results were summarised in our second consultation paper. The survey of local opinion organised by HACC indicated that there was a balance of opinion in favour of the procedure's introduction on a continuous basis. The Government have invited further views from the wider area likely to be affected, and opinions on some of the practical difficulties of applying it during the hour from 6 am to 7 am.

We have also asked for views on the operation of the 5-knot westerly preference at night, which has caused concern for people living to the west of Heathrow. Westerly preference is a noise amelioration procedure introduced in the 1960s to reduce the number of aircraft taking off over the more densely populated areas to the east of the airport. It is generally recognised to be an effective noise amelioration measure during the day, but because the pattern of night flights has changed since the 1960s and there are seldom take-offs between 11.30 pm and 6 am, but more landings between 4 am and 6 am, maintaining the procedure at night might now be having the opposite effect of increasing overflight of the most densely populated areas east of the airport.

The Government consider it necessary to review the use of that procedure at night, as well as the related issue of night-time runway alternation. However, the Government have not formed any view on the matter; at this stage, we do not favour any one option over another, including the status quo. All responses will be taken into account, including views on which options would provide the greatest benefits overall, which would provide the greatest improvements over the current arrangements, and what would be fair and equitable, taking account of operations during the day as well as at night.

Mr. Michael Trend (Windsor): The Minister speaks of possible improvements. I listened with great respect to the hon. Member for Putney (Mr. Colman), who spoke well on behalf of his constituents. Governments have the power to inflict misery on or bring benefits to the people of this country, but this is not a simple numbers game, or a question of west London versus east Berkshire.

[Mr. Michael Trend]

Benefits might accrue from any change in the night flight regime, but they would be far outweighed in the balance by the certain misery that would be visited on the people of east Berkshire. The Minister will not be surprised to learn that I remain implacably opposed to any change whatsoever. Because the people of east Berkshire have always had the worst of the take-offs, now that the balance has changed it would be wrong to change the balance of misery and benefit between the two communities. The effect on us would be so much worse and far outweigh any possible benefit that might be achieved in west London.

Ms Jackson: The hon. Gentleman makes the argument on behalf of his constituents—a duty which he has fulfilled with persistence and dedication. I congratulate him on that, but I am sure that he accepts that it would be totally improper for any Government to enter into a wide-ranging consultation process on the issues before us, but to fail to take into consideration the responses to that consultation document. We shall fairly and intensively scrutinise all the responses we received.

My hon. Friend the Member for Putney referred to the commercial aspects of the area we are debating. It is undoubtedly true that Heathrow airport is a major national asset. It occupies a position of central importance in international trade and communications in Europe and in the UK economy. It is the busiest airport in Europe and the busiest international airport in the world: in 1998, it handled 60 million passengers, 35 per cent. of whom used the airport as an interchange point. It is currently used by more than 90 airlines serving 200 destinations world wide; and it is the UK's largest port in terms of value of trade handled. It provides 57,000 jobs directly and a further 25,000 indirectly in support services; those jobs benefit all those who live around the airport and contribute to the prosperity of the country as a whole.

People living near Heathrow, Gatwick and Stansted want to enjoy reasonably quiet nights. Successive Governments have consistently recognised the need to ensure that people living near those airports are not exposed to excessive numbers of aircraft at night. The current Government also recognise that need, believing it both right and necessary to set restrictions on night flights at those airports and, in so doing, preserve a balance between environmental, aviation and economic interests while taking account of changes in public expectations and in the commercial needs of airlines.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Putney and all those who have participated in the debate for giving the House the opportunity this afternoon to consider the issues and, in conjunction with all the responses we have received to the consultation, helping the Government to reach decisions on those difficult and complex issues.

It being before Two o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

Sitting suspended, pursuant to Standing Order No. 10 (Wednesday sittings), till half-past Two o'clock.

Oral Answers to Questions

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The Secretary of State was asked—

Education Projects

1. **Mr. Peter L. Pike** (Burnley): What percentage of resources her Department targeted on educational projects in the last year for which figures are available. [73829]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Development (Mr. George Foulkes): One of the key international poverty eradication targets is to secure primary education for all children in the world by 2015. Education is therefore of crucial importance in the work of our Department. In 1997, we spent 11 per cent. of our bilateral programme on education. Our contributions to the European Community and other multilateral organisations also supported their education programmes. We will publish an education policy paper later this year.

Mr. Pike: My hon. Friend will recognise that basic education plays a crucial role in ending the cycle of poverty. He will also recall that a world conference in Thailand nine years ago set a target of achieving basic education for all the children of the world within 10 years. Yet 125 million children of primary school age do not currently receive any education. Does my hon. Friend think that other Governments share our belief that we should do much more to try to end the cycle of poverty and get children educated?

Mr. Foulkes: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. He is right to say that the targets were agreed internationally at United Nations conferences, and some Governments, such as ours, have signed up to them. As we set out in our White Paper, the Government have adopted those targets within our programme and we are encouraging not just other Governments but international organisations to sign up to them in an attempt to achieve universal primary education by 2015.

Dr. Jenny Tonge (Richmond Park): Are the Minister and the Secretary of State aware that this week's Comic Relief campaign supports education projects in Uganda and Kenya that are delivering primary education to girls—in particular, in Uganda and to the nomadic peoples of Kenya? Will they consider joining hon. Members on College green at 3.45 pm this afternoon for the Comic Relief parliamentary red nose day photo call?

Mr. Foulkes: Some people have suggested to me that I do not need an artificial red nose. I had the pleasure of chairing a meeting this morning at which Tony Robinson was a participant. We strongly support the work of Comic Relief. The Secretary of State and the Chancellor of the Exchequer have met organisers on several occasions, and we are grateful for the way in which they highlight the kind of work in which we are involved. Uganda is one of our biggest programmes: we have committed £67 million to education in that country. We therefore agree with everything that the hon. Lady has said.

Debt Relief

2. **Mr. Win Griffiths** (Bridgend): If she will make a statement about the development of anti-poverty programmes in poor countries arising from the availability of resources from international debt relief. [73830]

The Secretary of State for International Development (Clare Short): Debt relief provided under the heavily indebted poor countries initiative has substantially reduced the debt owed by poor countries. However, because only a small proportion of the debt was being serviced previously, there has been comparatively little effect on Government budgets—particularly on the ability to spend on anti-poverty programmes.

Faster and deeper debt relief is required to tackle poverty effectively. The Chancellor of the Exchequer and I have proposed increasing the level of debt cancellation to $50 billion by 2000 and ensuring that the money released from debt service payments is used for poverty reduction purposes. We will seek support for those proposals at the International Monetary Fund-World bank meeting in April and at the G8 summit in June.

Mr. Griffiths: I thank my right hon. Friend for that very positive reply. In that connection, will it be possible to take on programmes such as the Uganda poverty action programme and give further concessions to heavily indebted countries that can show that 85 per cent. or more of their debt relief will be used for poverty reduction programmes? That would allow other targets, such as reducing absolute poverty by half and infant mortality by two-thirds, to be accomplished by 2015.

Clare Short: I absolutely share my hon. Friend's objective. Uganda was the first country to receive debt relief under the HIPC initiative and had a considerable write-down of debt, but because the formula is based on the ratio of export earnings to debt and because coffee prices fell, the country is no better off. Although the debt relief helps Uganda's commercial reputation, it has not helped the Government to spend on poverty. The review that we agreed with the IMF and the World bank will try to sharpen the connection to poverty programmes and provide deeper debt relief if there will be a benefit to those programmes, which is what my hon. Friend is asking.

Sir Sydney Chapman (Chipping Barnet): I very much commend and support the Government's initiatives, which follow those of the previous Government, in trying to tackle debt in the poorest countries. Will the right hon. Lady confirm that one problem is that much of the debt is serviced by financial institutions which, in turn, have creditors, and that that must be sorted out? Even if that problem is solved, it would, to a certain degree, dissuade creditors from supporting anti-poverty programmes in future.

Clare Short: There are some 40 countries in the HIPC initiative for the very poorest countries. Their present debt is not commercial: if they ever had commercial debt, it has been written off because banks do not want to carry non-performing debt for a long time. Their debt includes debt to export credit agencies of Governments, and in countries other than our own, aid debt—we have already

written off all ours—and debt to the World bank and the IMF. In the past, the World bank and the IMF never wrote off debt; this is the first time, which is why they are determined—and we agree—that it should be done responsibly so that Governments do not take on new wasteful contracts and get into a mess again.

The Paris Club deals with the export credit debt, and has in the past agreed to write off up to 67 per cent. of that, often for commercial reasons so that new contracts can be made. Under HIPC, that write-off increases to 80 per cent. The hon. Gentleman's point is important because sometimes the aim of debt relief is to get new contracts. That will not help the poor. We want to manage debt relief so that it is conditional on Governments spending the proceeds on better programmes for the poor.

3. **Mr. Denis MacShane** (Rotherham): If she will take steps to require that debt relief for developing countries is conditional on *(a)* respect for human rights, *(b)* promotion of democracy and *(c)* a reduction of expenditure on weapons. [73831]

The Secretary of State for International Development (Clare Short): Debt relief under the heavily indebted poor countries initiative is conditional on the countries adhering to a reform programme agreed with the International Monetary Fund. We have been working since May 1997 to ensure that IMF programmes in developing countries focus more clearly on poverty reduction and defence expenditure at an appropriate scale. The current review of HIPC, which we got agreed at the previous World bank and IMF meeting, encourages more respect for the human rights of the poor. Democratic and accountable government is essential for the promotion of development.

Mr. MacShane: I am grateful to the Secretary of State. She answered my question to my complete satisfaction, so with your permission, Madam Speaker, I shall sit down.

Mr. Gary Streeter (South-West Devon): Sadly, I cannot do the same, but I support the Secretary of State's recent comments on debt relief and congratulate her on those. Does she agree that Nigeria, which is home to one fifth of all black Africans, has a crippling debt burden of roughly $30 billion and has taken huge strides towards democracy in the past six months, is now a high priority for urgent and substantial debt relief by the donor community?

Clare Short: I agree with the hon. Gentleman that the changes in Nigeria are fantastically good news and will allow it to re-enter the democratic community. It faces very great problems. The growth of poverty means that Nigeria—which should, with all its oil wealth, be a wealthy country—probably has a GDP of only $200 a head, so it is a very poor country. It is massively indebted and does not even know at present how much its debt is. We are providing support to help Nigeria to work out how much debt it has. The whole international community will then have to try to help Nigeria to have good-quality Government and to squeeze corruption, which is terribly bad, out of the system. I agree with the hon. Gentleman that we have to help Nigeria, but we cannot provide unconditional debt relief. That must be part of the reform process that helps the poor and deals with corruption.

Mr. Streeter: I agree with much of what the Secretary of State said, but may I urge her to go further? If President-elect Obasanjo does commit himself to anti-corruption measures and good governance, does the Secretary of State agree that because of our historic links with Nigeria, we have a vital role to play in pressing the case for multilateral debt relief in the international community? Will she undertake to play a leadership role, so that when the new Government take over in May, 120 million Nigerians can be given a fresh start and a new chance?

Clare Short: I said that I agreed with the hon. Gentleman that we must help Nigeria, but it would not help the people of Nigeria if debt relief were given too easily, without the proper reforms and without dealing with corruption. The problem of corruption in Nigeria is very bad. It is entrenched throughout the system. We must help the best forces in Nigeria to reform the country so that it gets efficient governance. Debt relief will be part of that, but it must be conditional on progress in dealing with corruption.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Has my right hon. Friend considered the problem that arose during the period of the Tory Government, when debt relief resulted in the top four clearing banks—NatWest, Lloyds, Barclays and the Midland—getting about £5 billion to set off against so-called irrecoverable debts? We all support the idea of debt relief. Can she do it without lining the pockets of those at the top four clearing banks?

Clare Short: My hon. Friend makes his own point. I know that in the past he has spoken expertly on debt relief in the context of the commercial banks. The World bank and the IMF are public institutions, not private ones. Export credit guarantees are Government insurance for private sector contracts. Sometimes the private sector unwisely pushes contracts on Governments which they cannot afford, and the public sector ends up bailing out. When we deal with debt relief to get countries going again, we should look at what kind of projects are getting export credit guarantees, and make sure that things are done more sensibly.

Mr. Cynog Dafis (Ceredigion): The conditions that have been mentioned are important, but is it not also important that there should not be double standards? For example, is it not the case that the United Kingdom exports significant quantities of arms to Turkey, and that a large part of those arms are used in the terrible repression of the Kurds? Does not Turkey have an appalling record on human rights? Should not the standards that the Secretary of State mentioned apply equally everywhere, in developing as well as in developed countries?

Clare Short: We do not have a development programme in Turkey, so I have no part in objecting to arms licences for Turkey. The hon. Gentleman may be right; he may be wrong. I do not know whether Britain is selling large-scale arms to Turkey. We need to get international agreement to more stringent rules for arms sales, and be much tougher on sales to developing countries that cannot afford large-scale arms purchases. I agree with the hon. Gentleman on that, but I am sorry, I have no detailed knowledge of Turkey.

Zimbabwe

4. **Mr. Robert Syms** (Poole): If she will make a statement on the future of the assistance programme for Zimbabwe. [73832]

The Secretary of State for International Development (Clare Short): We are reviewing all our bilateral programmes in order to implement our White Paper priorities. For the first time, the Government are publishing these programmes, following a period of consultation. Our country strategy paper for Zimbabwe will be published shortly. The strategy will focus on reducing poverty in Zimbabwe which, as the hon. Gentleman probably knows, is increasing desperately. Copies of the Zimbabwe paper, like all our country strategies, will be placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Syms: Does not the Secretary of State consider Robert Mugabe's attempts to take over some of the most productive land and farms in Zimbabwe to be economically damaging and a form of political bullying, and not very new Labour either? Should we not consider shifting our aid to countries in Africa that are pursuing more sensible economic policies?

Clare Short: We have discussed the matter in the House on a number of occasions. I have always made it clear that we are extremely worried by many of the things that are taking place in Zimbabwe and many of the Government's actions. However, we do not consider it right to close down programmes that bring direct benefits to poor people in Zimbabwe because the Government's behaviour is undesirable.

We believe, as does the farmers association in Zimbabwe, that there is a strong case for land redistribution, but it must be done properly and transparently, so that poor farmers get a chance to farm and their children can go to school, and the land should not be redistributed to those who find favour with the Government. We and other donors have joined together and said that we will not support any land redistribution unless it is done properly and transparently, in a way that will bring benefits to the poor.

Mr. Tom Clarke (Coatbridge and Chryston): Does my right hon. Friend agree that, whatever repugnance we may feel about Robert Mugabe's regime, with its unnecessary war, its human rights record and its treatment of its own people, it is none the less right for the international community to recognise humanitarian problems, such as infant mortality, child malnutrition and the need for fresh water? Does she further agree that the people of Zimbabwe should not be punished for the folly of their own leadership?

Clare Short: I agree with my right hon. Friend, who draws attention to a constant dilemma in our development work: we want good Governments to work with, but what do we do when some of the poorest and most oppressed people of the world are living under bad Governments? We cannot turn our back on them. We have to try to find ways of bringing some relief and change in their country so that they get good government. Zimbabwe is a highly educated country with great natural resources and there is no reason why it should not be doing very well economically, so some of the recent failures of governance are a great tragedy. I refer in particular to the fact that one in four adults in Zimbabwe has HIV: the 20-year gain in life expectancy brought by development has been wiped out by the decimation brought by HIV.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): I respect the right hon. Lady's humanitarian motives and I accept the importance of trying to protect that aid which is directly related to the relief of poverty and hardship, but does she accept that it is important to identify a specific mechanism by which that anti-democratic Government can be punished, at a time when it is pursuing an irresponsible and adventurous foreign policy and when people in the capital are rioting against corruption and incompetence? Can she identify a specific mechanism to punish the President, not the people?

Clare Short: That problem arises in Zimbabwe and many other countries. The hon. Gentleman is right that, in the past, too much aid went unconditionally to Governments who were not interested in reform. Such money is simply wasted and does not benefit the poor. Therefore, in all our programmes, we want to back reforming Governments. Where there is no reforming Government we look for ways in which to bring some assistance to the neediest people, but there will be no major development in such a country. We try to use our influence in that way throughout the world. But, wherever possible, we try to encourage Governments to be reformers, not just to put ourselves in a comfortable position, but to try to achieve change that will bring benefits to the people.

EU Enlargement

5. **Mr. Andrew Mackinlay** (Thurrock): What assistance she will provide to the five central European, first-wave, EU applicant states in the period between the reduction of the know-how funding provided to them and their accession to full membership of the EU. [73833]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Development (Mr. George Foulkes): We shall continue to provide substantial support for the states that are seeking membership of the EU, principally through multilateral channels, particularly the European Union. From 2000, EU funds to support accession will total more than £2 billion per year. The British share of that will be approximately £300 million.

Mr. Mackinlay: I welcome what my hon. Friend says, but my question concerned the know-how fund, which is moving eastward. I urge my hon. Friend to reconsider the position because the know-how fund is a gilt-edged investment for the UK in terms of good will. In addition, the UK can make a unique contribution to those countries seeking to achieve the acquis in time for their accession to the EU, but only through the know-how fund.

Mr. Foulkes: I suppose that it would have been a bit optimistic of me to think that my hon. Friend would follow the example of my hon. Friend the Member for Rotherham (Mr. MacShane).

We recognise that we can provide a great deal though the know-how fund, but substantial sums can and should be provided from the EU, through PHARE—Poland and

Hungary Aid for Reconstruction of the Economy—the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development and the European investment bank. From next year, an extra £1 billion will be available through the pre-accession instrument for structural policy and the special accession programme for agricultural and rural development—typical EU titles, I am afraid. Therefore, substantial sums are going. I hope that my hon. Friend will recognise, further to earlier questions, that it is vital to achieve the targets for poverty eradication by 2015, and we must not take our eye off that important target.

Mrs. Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham): The Minister knows that there is no danger of my following the example of the hon. Member for Rotherham (Mr. MacShane).

The Minister will agree that it is becoming apparent that the successful accession of the central European applicant states requires even more assistance than was at first envisaged. The average wage in the United Kingdom is seven to 10 times more than that in the five first-wave countries, so does he agree that there is potential for vast economic migration? Despite his announcement of £2 billion-worth of substantial support, what specific proposals has he to reduce that gap and the poverty levels in the five former communist countries? We must ensure the success of enlargement, which hon. Members in all parts of the House want to achieve.

Mr. Foulkes: The hon. Lady would be the first to recognise that Britain has made an acknowledged contribution to supporting transition. It is remarkable that, partly with our help, five countries that were communist only a decade ago are negotiating to join the European Union. That is a tremendous step forward. Our policy is to support those countries, particularly those experiencing the social effects of transition, which can be very difficult, especially in relation to unemployment. We are moving our support in that direction to ensure that they are ready to become full members of the European Union.

EU Development Aid

6. **Mr. John Wilkinson** (Ruislip-Northwood): When she last met the EU Commissioner for overseas development aid to discuss the priorities of the EU development aid programme. [73834]

9. **Mr. James Gray** (North Wiltshire): What steps she will take to ensure value for money in the EU aid budget. [73837]

11. **Mr. Tom Levitt** (High Peak): What action her Department is taking to ensure that a greater proportion of EU development assistance is allocated to the least developed countries. [73841]

The Secretary of State for International Development (Clare Short): I met Commissioner Pinheiro at a ministerial meeting in Dakar on 8 and 9 February to discuss successor arrangements to the Lomé convention. I had wider discussions on the EU's development efforts—including value for money and redirecting resources to the poorest countries—with Commissioners Pinheiro and Bonino and my EU colleagues at the Development Council in November. I gave them a clear chart showing how distorted current spending is. I expect to see most of them again in Berlin next week. I am doing everything in my power at all such meetings to achieve a commitment to more effective EU development programmes that are focused much more on the poorest countries.

Mr. Wilkinson: Did the right hon. Lady give Commissioner Pinheiro a copy of the first report of the Select Committee on International Development on the future of the EC development budget? The report states quite clearly that

"the Commission has no intention of allowing 'the war against poverty to figure among the top priorities of international relations.'"

Is it not disgraceful that the European Union should be the vehicle for so much of our external assistance when it disburses only 41 per cent. of the external assistance programme to the poorest countries, whereas the United Kingdom disburses no less than 70 per cent? Therefore should we not, for the financial perspective 2000–2006, say to the European Union, "We will do it ourselves and make sure that the poorest countries benefit."?

Clare Short: I agree with the hon. Gentleman almost completely. The Select Committee report was excellent, and I did not have to take it to Commissioner Pinheiro. He knew that it was coming and had already obtained a copy, and was somewhat sensitive to the criticism, which shows that the report is a valuable piece of work. I also agree that the skew of EU programmes against the poorest countries is an absolute scandal and a disgrace. I do not want just to blame the previous Administration, but I think they could have done more, and we are trying to achieve some reform.

I also agree with the hon. Gentleman that we should impose on the next settlement conditions that try to achieve much better programmes. It is worth allowing the EU to have development programmes, because no country can work in every country, but we need a big improvement in performance. The current situation is completely unsatisfactory.

Mr. Gray: For a second or two I was encouraged by the fact that the Secretary of State seemed to agree with my hon. Friend about how important it is that the United Kingdom should decide how the £700 million is spent, but I was rather disappointed by the second half of her answer. Is she not worried about the strength of criticism, from the non-governmental organisations in particular, about the fraud and corruption, the mis-spending and the EU bureaucracy which are bogging down British taxpayers' money? That money is not getting through to the poorest people in the world.

Clare Short: I am not worried by the strength of NGO criticism; I am trying to get the NGOs to voice their criticisms more loudly. I am doing my best to encourage British NGOs to work with NGOs throughout the European Union to achieve a united and stronger voice of critical public opinion across the EU, and to achieve an improvement. I agree with the hon. Gentleman that the

current situation is not good enough. We need much louder demands in all our Parliaments and from our publics for an improvement, which could easily be made if there was enough will to achieve one.

Mr. Levitt: My right hon. Friend has given us a helpful answer in respect of the Council of Ministers. Will she now build on that, and tell us what contact she has had with Members of the European Parliament with the aim of focusing EU aid more effectively on the poorest countries?

Clare Short: My hon. Friend makes an important point. The European Parliament now has a much greater say in the budget. We have been working hard to make allies not only in non-governmental organisations across Europe, but in the Parliament. We want much stronger pressure to be applied to the Parliament for an improvement in programmes.

My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary visited the Parliament a couple of months ago, and I have visited it twice. I have also paid a visit to the Development and Co-operation Committee. We are working hard at finding allies in order to secure improvements.

Mr. Bill O'Brien (Normanton): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on the work that she is doing to aid poorer countries overseas. In the context of the negotiations with the European Commissioner, however, will she have regard to the work of the Council of Churches in the United Kingdom, which is also working hard to help people in those poorer countries, with health and education in particular?

Clare Short: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. We are working a good deal with the Churches, both in the debt campaign and in the attempt to initiate a worldwide Churches campaign demanding that the Governments concerned meet the international poverty eradication targets subscribed to—in theory—by all countries.

I agree with my hon. Friend that the Churches do great work, but there is more that we can do together.

Mr. Bowen Wells (Hertford and Stortford): Does the Secretary of State agree that trade must happen along with aid, so that people in third-world countries can help themselves? Will she join me in trying to persuade the Foreign Secretary and the Prime Minister that President Clinton should in turn be persuaded to call off the war against the small countries of the eastern Caribbean over the banana trade?

Clare Short: I agree: the developing countries must escape from the need for aid through the ability to trade, to build up their economies and to stand on their own two feet. The more chances that we can provide for them to do that, the better.

I also agree with the hon. Gentleman that the conflict over bananas is very serious and worrying. The banana trade, so important to fragile Caribbean economies, is at stake; but so is a rules-based system for international trade. If we lost that system and slid back into protectionism, the whole world would pay a huge price.

Maternal Mortality

7. **Barbara Follett** (Stevenage): What measures her Department is taking to help reduce maternal mortality in the developing world. [73835]

The Secretary of State for International Development (Clare Short): Pregnancy remains a life-threatening condition for millions of women in poor countries. The injury and loss of life is a tragedy for the women concerned, and usually results in desperate poverty for their children. It will be very tough to meet the internationally agreed target of reducing maternal mortality by 75 per cent. by 2015. We are working to reduce maternal death and injury in our programmes in around 20 countries; we are also collaborating with the World Health Organisation, the World bank and other United Nations agencies to strengthen the international effort.

Barbara Follett: Is my right hon. Friend aware that the United States is currently unable to meet its obligations to the United Nations because of internal resistance to UN family planning programmes? The equivalent of four jumbo jet loads of women are dying from pregnancy-related causes in the developing world every day of every year. Will my right hon. Friend do all that she can to break the deadlock?

Clare Short: It is certainly worrying that the greatest power in the world is not paying its dues to the UN system, at a time of globalisation when we need a stronger and more effective United Nations. As my hon. Friend will know, President Clinton has tried to persuade Congress to pay those dues. I feel that we must do all in our power to back him, because we need the UN backed by the United States of America.

Mr. Andrew Rowe (Faversham and Mid-Kent): Does the Secretary of State agree that, in many of the countries that we are discussing, a number of the threats to maternal health stem from religious and cultural taboos? Will she assure me that her Department is working with theologians throughout the world—especially Islamic theologians—to ensure that the Koran, which is actually a very women-friendly gospel, is interpreted as such in many countries where the oppression of women causes a good deal of maternal mortality?

Clare Short: I agree with the hon. Gentleman that nothing in the teaching of Islam says that women should be second-class citizens, or justifies anything like female genital mutilation. There is no question about that; all Islamic scholars will tell us that.

The problems of women throughout the world are the result not only of prejudice under Islam—often, there is simply neglect in basic health services—but I can assure the hon. Gentleman that we are challenging all such prejudice, including that of some of the fundamentalist Churches in the United States, which call themselves Christian. *[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. The House must come to order.

PRIME MINISTER

The Prime Minister was asked—

Engagements

Q1. [73859] **Mr. Laurence Robertson** (Tewkesbury): If he will list his official engagements for Wednesday 10 March.

The Prime Minister (Mr. Tony Blair): This morning, I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall have further such meetings later today.

Mr. Robertson: Given the Prime Minister's motion to the House on 3 February stating that the Government had a commitment to protect the green belt and open countryside, and to increase the number of houses that were built on brown-field land, does he still support that policy? If so, given that my constituency of Tewkesbury has few brown-field sites, can he tell me why his own inspector proposes in his report that a disproportionate number of houses be built in Tewkesbury, and that thousands of houses be built on the green belt, on green fields and in the open countryside? Is that not yet another example of the Government saying one thing and doing another, just as in yesterday's Budget?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman did not decide to raise the Budget, did he? I am surprised that he did not welcome the fact that, thanks to—

Mr. Robertson: Answer.

The Prime Minister: I will come to the question in a moment, but thanks to—*[Interruption.]* Conservative Members do not want to talk about the Budget at all. Eleven thousand families in the hon. Gentleman's constituency are better off as a result of yesterday. As for the green-field and brown-field sites, Labour is the party that, in government, has raised the amount of building that there has to be on brown-field sites. We have changed the policy that was left to us by the earlier Government.

Mr. Jonathan Shaw (Chatham and Aylesford): May I say how welcome was the boost for businesses and jobs in yesterday's Budget? But my right hon. Friend will be aware that, if duty free is scrapped, some 5,000 jobs in Kent and Medway will be at risk. Can he give an assurance to the House and to the people of Kent and Medway that the retention of duty free will be at the top of his agenda when he meets European Union Ministers later this month?

The Prime Minister: It has been at the top of our agenda. We have made a certain amount of progress in order to get an extension of the regime, because the successor regime simply is not good enough for our country and, indeed, other countries in the European Union. My hon. Friend will know that the problem we have is that the previous Government agreed to the abolition of that scheme. None the less, like many other problems that were left to us by the previous Government, we are sorting it out.

Mr. William Hague (Richmond, Yorks): Now that we have the figures behind the propaganda, will the Prime Minister explain why the Chancellor of the Exchequer failed to make it clear in his Budget speech yesterday that his changes to national insurance contributions mean a tax rise for self-employed people of £240 million?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman is wrong: we announced all the changes yesterday. As a result of our changes, there is a net tax cut for everyone—direct taxes of £9 billion.

Mr. Hague: The Chancellor made no reference in his speech to the tax rise of £240 million. Does the Prime Minister recognise that, when we look at the figures, and I do not know whether he has looked at the Government's own figures—normally he does not look at them—we see that all the tax reductions for companies, first-year capital allowances and so on are more than cancelled out by that one single measure, the cost of which the Chancellor did not refer to in his speech? Does that not illustrate not only that the presentation of the Budget was inaccurate and misleading, but that, for every trumpeted tax reduction, there was a corresponding stealth tax increase?

The Prime Minister: No. The right hon. Gentleman was wrong when he said that yesterday, and he is wrong when he says it today. Today, he should have read the Budget figures more carefully. *[Interruption.]* I have them here—at page 14—and they show a net tax cut of £4.5 billion. It is there in the Red Book, right in front of his nose.

Mr. Hague: I do not know whether it is more worrying that the Prime Minister does not know the truth, or that he is not prepared to admit it. So—given that he has been looking at some of the figures—let him answer this central question: what is the total tax increase for the coming year, in pounds, as a result of the Government's Budgets to date?

The Prime Minister: There is a net tax cut of £4.5 billion. That is what the right hon. Gentleman seems unable to handle. He seems unable to handle the fact that we are cutting taxes. Furthermore, he and his spokesmen have been touring the television studios, relying on the Institute for Fiscal Studies, to say that a whole series of people are worse off because of the Budget. He may like to know that, this lunchtime, the IFS has reissued its figures, which show that every tenth of the population—the top 10 per cent. as well as the bottom 10 per cent., and every 10 per cent. in between—is better off because of the Budget.

Mr. Hague: Oh, now, let us cut the waffle and the propaganda, and let us have the answer to the question that I asked—this is Prime Minister's Question Time. What is the total tax increase for the coming year as a result of the Government's Budgets to date?

The Prime Minister: There is not a tax increase—*[Interruption.]* No, I am afraid that I have to tell the right hon. Gentleman that there is not a tax increase. Tax is falling by £4.5 billion net. The average family is £740 a

year better off. The average pensioner is £240 a year better off. In total, 20 million families are better off. They are better off under Labour.

Mr. Hague: What is the total tax increase for the coming year, in pounds, as a result of the Government's Budgets to date?

The Prime Minister: I wish that the right hon. Gentleman would simply listen to what is being said to him. We are cutting net taxes. The 10p rate is a tax cut. The national insurance rate is a tax cut. The basic rate is a tax cut. We are putting up child benefit. We are putting up people's children's credit. Pensioners are getting an increase. Labour is the party bringing down taxes for every single family that has had them put up by the Tories.

Mr. Hague: So the right hon. Gentleman does not want to answer the question. The actual answer—easily arrived at with the Treasury's own figures and a calculator, and easily arrived at by the House Library in the figures that it produced last night—is that the total tax increase in the coming year as a result of the Government's Budgets to date is £7,100 million. In the following year, the increase is £10,500 million. The right hon. Gentleman does not want to admit that because, when they said no tax increases at all at the general election, they lied to the people of this country. With his pick-pocket Chancellor and his stealth taxes, taxes have gone up, are going up, and are going to carry on going up.

The Prime Minister: Not merely is the right hon. Gentleman wrong—as the table on page 154 of the Red Book shows, the tax burden is falling next year, not rising—but, comparing current tax tables with the Conservatives' planned taxation, as outlined in their last Budget, taxes will be lower at the end of this Parliament than they would have been as planned by the Tory party. He is going to have to get used to one or two very simple facts. This is the Government who sorted out the huge debt left us by the Conservatives. This is the Government who have curbed inflation, which was rising under the Tories. This is the Government who have given us the lowest interest rates and mortgage rates for more than 30 years. This is the Government who have given the best deals for pensioners year upon year. This is the Government who have got tax for ordinary families down below 20 per cent. This is a new Labour Government delivering economic competence and social justice together. What a contrast and what an improvement on the old Tory years.

Mr. Malcolm Savidge (Aberdeen, North): Given not only the assistance to the over-50s seeking employment, but all the other measures in the Budget, does my right hon. Friend feel that more members of the shadow Cabinet may feel encouraged to follow the example of the shadow Foreign Secretary and spend more time with their finances?

The Prime Minister: I do not know quite how many members of the Opposition Front-Bench team will benefit from our proposals, since they seem to have many different sources of income, but if I could simply say—*[Interruption.]*—not that I am suggesting that there is anything wrong with that at all. Our proposals for helping the over-50s back into work will deal with the fact that one third of the over-50s below retirement age are not in work. I believe that many of them would like to work if they were given the chance to do so. The new package will help them.

Mr. Paddy Ashdown (Yeovil): Of course I am delighted that yesterday's Budget contained so many Liberal Democrat measures, but why did the Chancellor leave out the most important one? Is it not clear that, by deciding to cut income tax by a penny next year, the Government have revealed that their real priority is undercutting and wrong-footing the Tories, when it ought to be education?

The Prime Minister: First, I thank the right hon. Gentleman for what I take to be a compliment on the question of Liberal Democrat policies. Perhaps that is a good reason for people to vote Labour rather than Liberal Democrat in the forthcoming election.

On the point that the right hon. Gentleman makes about 1p, it is important to recognise that we have delivered not just the basic rate cut, but the largest single increase in public service spending over three years that this country has seen in our schools and hospitals. We understand that it is important to give incentives to people to work and to target help on hard-working families, as well as putting a substantial investment into our public services.

Mr. Ashdown: The Prime Minister is simply wrong in that. There was not a single penny extra for public services in yesterday's Budget. There was recycled money from previous decisions. The Prime Minister had a clear choice: it was education or politics, and he chose politics. May I bring the Prime Minister's attention to the situation in Scotland? This Labour Government have cut in real terms the amount of money put into education in 29 of the 32 Scottish councils. Even after the Budget and even after the end of this Parliament, the Labour Government will have put less money into education in those councils than the Tory Government did three years ago.

I have a very simple question for the Prime Minister: on the eve of the establishment of the Scottish Parliament, is he saying not only that the Scottish people will not be able to raise their taxes to spend the money on better schools, but that now they must follow him in cutting them?

The Prime Minister: When the right hon. Gentleman put to me the 29 out of 32 authorities, I went back and looked at the figures. He is comparing budgeted figures with outturn figures, and is doing so wrongly. I can give him the true figures. Education spending in Scotland is increasing by 15 per cent. It is not being cut as he says.

As for the right hon. Gentleman's strictures on lowering the basic rate of tax, we believe that targeting tax measures on those families that need them and making sure that people get to keep more of their money and have the incentive to work, at the same time, as putting money into public services, is the right way to guarantee both prosperity and better public services.

To go back to the election campaign, the amount that we are putting into schools and hospitals is 10 or 11 times what the right hon. Gentleman's party asked us to put in. The truth is that, no matter what the tax rate is, he always wants to put it up.

Mr. Phil Woolas (Oldham, East and Saddleworth): Whatever the figures show in Scotland—I listened to my right hon. Friend's comments with great interest—in the borough of Oldham, education expenditure will increase next year by almost £5 million and three new schools will be built in my constituency alone. I look forward to visiting those primary schools to announce the £2,000. Would my right hon. Friend like to come to Oldham with me to congratulate the head teachers on the successful hard work that Opposition Members oppose?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is right to say that there is £2,000 for each school in every constituency; there is additional money to deal with class sizes and for school buildings and nursery education. Yes, the capital money announced yesterday comes out of the capital modernisation fund, but it has now been allocated by us to schools, hospitals, transport and crime—precisely the priorities of the people of this country.

Q2. [73860] **Mr. Christopher Gill** (Ludlow): Perhaps I could ask the Prime Minister a less sycophantic question. He will appreciate that the Ludlow constituency is a large and sparsely populated rural area, where there is almost no alternative to road transport. What timely words of advice does he have for my constituents who find themselves, as a result of his Budget yesterday, paying no less than 85p tax for every pound that they spend on petrol? While he is thinking of the answer to that question, will he also consider what he will say to the road hauliers who find that the duty on diesel has been increased by an astronomical 11.6 per cent?

The Prime Minister: In relation to the hon. Gentleman's constituents and their cars, we announced the first cut in the licence fee for 50 years. It is also correct to say that we have put a large additional sum into rural transport—something that the Conservative Government never did. As for the fuel escalator on petrol, Conservative Members should remember that they introduced it; they not merely introduced it, they introduced it for road hauliers as well.

More than 10,000 families in the hon. Gentleman's constituency are better off as a result of the Budget. Furthermore, almost 16,000 pensioners are better off as a result of the Budget.

Q3. [73861] **Mr. Gareth Thomas** (Clwyd, West): While welcoming the environmental measures in the Budget, may I draw my right hon. Friend's attention to a serious oil spill that occurred off the coast of north Wales last weekend? It involved the offshore operator BHP, and was the second such incident in nine months. Given the growing concern all over the United Kingdom about marine oil pollution, does my right hon. Friend acknowledge that big oil companies will cut corners unless there is effective and independent regulation? Will he ensure that the courts pass tough sentences for such offences, so that this message is sent, "the polluter must pay"?

The Prime Minister: I know that this is not the first time that there has been a spill from BHP petroleum's facility in the Liverpool bay development. I understand that, as my hon. Friend indicates, the Department of Trade and Industry is prosecuting BHP for an earlier incident. The latest incident is being fully investigated by a DTI inspector. The Department has also taken steps to ensure that independent assessors conduct a review of the incident. In general terms, I agree with what my hon. Friend says. Of course, penalties are a matter for the courts.

Q4. [73862] **Mr. Steve Webb** (Northavon): Is the Prime Minister aware that people in my constituency are receiving letters from Frenchay hospital telling them that they will have to wait 104 weeks to see an orthopaedic consultant, perhaps to be put on a waiting list? Will he promise my constituents not to cut the standard rate of income tax until those waiting times have been slashed?

The Prime Minister: We are getting waiting times down, and have done so consistently—they are down by more than 100,000 in the last six months. The additional £21 billion that we are putting into the health service from 1 April onwards is precisely in order to make the necessary improvements. Those improvements are not just in accident and emergency departments, but in technology in the health service and primary care facilities. It will take time to sort out the problems in the health service, but we will sort them out with the new investment.

Q5. [73863] **Mr. Jim Murphy** (Eastwood): My right hon. Friend will be aware how warmly welcomed the Budget was in Scotland—particularly the new investment in schools, families and pensioners. Does the Prime Minister share my view that Scotland's future is one of efficient taxation and making work pay? Does he share my concern that the future well-being and standard of living of Scottish people will be threatened by any plans to divorce Scotland from the rest of the United Kingdom?

The Prime Minister: Divorce from the United Kingdom would cost Scotland very dear in jobs, industry and the future of the country. My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to the fact that there is £165 million of additional capital investment going into Scotland over the next three years, on top of the £3 billion for schools and hospitals that we announced earlier. As a result of the Budget, substantial numbers of Scottish families will not just be better off, but get the public services that Scotland deserves.

Mr. Michael Colvin (Romsey): Does the Prime Minister agree that the Chancellor's introductory remarks to yesterday's Budget—

Mr. Brian Jenkins (Tamworth): Were brilliant.

Mr. Colvin: In this respect, they were. Did not those remarks give a further indication—if that were required—that the Government inherited a very sound economy from the previous Conservative Administration? While he is checking that, will the Prime Minister recall that the nation was promised stability? With economic growth in the last quarter of 1998 at 0.2 per cent., are not he and the Chancellor trying to achieve stability by stopping the

economy? Are not the Chancellor's estimates of economic growth for the next two years—on which the whole Budget is based—wildly optimistic?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman need not take my word for it. The International Monetary Fund report into the handling of the UK economy, published the other day, is one of the best reports that any country has received from the IMF for many years. The report said:

"Executive Directors commended the authorities for the United Kingdom's impressive economic performance",

and went on to talk about the consolidation

"needed to help redress the policy mix imbalance that had developed in the early 1990s and to reverse the effects of a series of deficits."

The truth is that we did not inherit an economy in great shape; we inherited an economy with national debt doubled and inflation back in the system. It is thanks to this Government that both those problems are now solved, and we can look forward to the recovery of economic growth, as we have intended.

Q6. [73864] **Mrs. Helen Brinton** (Peterborough): Following the publication of the Macpherson report and the Home Secretary's acknowledgement of the need to stamp out racism, not only in the police force but in all public services, does the Prime Minister agree that it is most vital that the mental health sector is included in those investigations and considerations, and that consideration is given to the use and application of control and restraint techniques—particularly following the death of my constituent, David Bennett?

The Prime Minister: Our sympathies go to Mr. Bennett's family, and I know that my hon. Friend has been very concerned about the case. The NHS trust has begun a review into the circumstances surrounding his death. We are committed to stamping out racism in all public services, including the whole NHS. In addition, she will know of the measures that were announced recently to improve control and restraint techniques within the mental health service. There will be zero tolerance of racial harassment or racial discrimination of any kind in the national health service, or any other part of our public services.

Q7. [73865] **Mr. Howard Flight** (Arundel and South Downs): I am sure that the Prime Minister will be aware of the fact that the tax changes abolishing the recoverability of advance corporation tax will result in a loss of revenue to charities of about £500 million a year, on a phased basis. I can find nothing in the Government's review of charity taxation to offer compensation for that. What do the Government intend to do about it? I am sure that someone as professedly caring as the Prime Minister would not want to preside over a Government imposing the biggest increase in taxation on charities in memory.

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman is wrong. When we announced the plans for charities, we said that they would be implemented over seven years. We are in consultation with the charities. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor listed a whole series of measures that we are taking to help people to give money to charities. New reliefs have been introduced that will have precisely the opposite impact to the one that the hon. Gentleman described. All the measures taken together give a very good deal indeed to the charitable sector.

Q8. [73866] **Mr. Jeff Ennis** (Barnsley, East and Mexborough): Is my right hon. Friend aware that one in 18 workers in my constituency is currently paid £2.49 or less an hour? Does he agree that the implementation of a national minimum wage will reduce further the current inequalities in our society?

The Prime Minister: The minimum wage will help 2 million low-paid workers in the United Kingdom. The working families tax credit, and the increases in it, will give 1.5 million families at the lower end of the income scale an increase of up to £20 a week. We now know that the Conservative party is committed to abolishing both the minimum wage and the working families tax credit. Every one of those low-income families should know that, if they vote Conservative, they put at risk not only the floor beneath their wages in the form of the minimum wage, but a £1.5 billion family tax cut which will benefit some of the poorest families in the country.

Q9. [73867] **Mrs. Angela Browning** (Tiverton and Honiton): Is the Prime Minister aware that 80.4 per cent. of households in my rural Devon constituency own a car, for very obvious reasons? We do not want to know about 1100 cc cars in Devon: we would never get them up the hills. When the Prime Minister replied to my hon. Friend the Member for Ludlow (Mr. Gill), he seemed to suggest that the gains for rural areas in the Budget could somehow sop up the amount that would have to be paid for petrol. What is his message to an area where cars are essential, but where the wages are lower than the national average? Is this not yet more discrimination against people living and working in rural areas?

The Prime Minister: The opportunism and hypocrisy of the Tory party know absolutely no bounds. The hon. Lady was a Minister in the previous Government at the very time they introduced the fuel escalator. As a result of the Budget, 21,000 pensioners and 12,500 families are better off in her constituency. If she is concerned about low pay, she should support the minimum wage and the working families tax credit, instead of which she is committed to abolishing them.

Al Shifa

Q10. [73868] **Mr. Tam Dalyell** (Linlithgow): If he will apologise to the Government and people of Sudan for his endorsement of the bombing of the Al Shifa factory; and if he will hold discussions with President Clinton about giving all possible assistance for the rebuilding of the Al Shifa factory.

The Prime Minister: Last August, I gave my support to the United States action. It was action against international terrorists. The US told us at the time of the strike on Al Shifa that it had compelling evidence that the plant was being used for the production of chemical weapons materials.

Mr. Dalyell: Have the Government any hard evidence that Al Shifa manufactured VX precursors or any other chemical weapons-related compounds, or have they not?

The Prime Minister: Yes. The US was quite clear: it had compelling evidence that Al Shifa was involved

in chemical weapons production. Terrorist organisations operating out of those places caused the death of more than 100 totally innocent people by acts of terrorism in Africa. The assault on Al Shifa was retaliation for that; no one was killed in it, but we gave a very clear signal—and I think the right one—to those who engage in international terrorism that we are prepared if necessary to take action in retaliation.

Engagements

Q11. [73869] **Jackie Ballard** (Taunton): Does the Prime Minister agree with the Chancellor who last November predicted that there would be no recession in British manufacturing, or the Chancellor who yesterday admitted that there would be a fall in output of between 1 and 1.5 per cent. this year? Does he agree that last November's prediction was the worst forecast since Michael Fish said that there would be no hurricane?

The Prime Minister: That latter part is wrong, since the worst time for manufacturing industry was in the early 1990s, when output fell by 7 per cent. and 1 million manufacturing jobs were lost. The single most important thing for manufacturing industry is stability for the long term. That is best guaranteed, first, by policies that are disciplined on public finances, which is a lesson that the Liberal Democrats would do well to learn—if I may attack them for a moment—and, secondly, by lower interest rates. As a result of the action that this Government have taken and the independence of the Bank of England, we have managed to get the lowest interest rates for 30 years.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): Boom and bust.

Mr. Bob Russell (Colchester): Boom and bust.

The Prime Minister: Quite right. The other thing that we must avoid is any return to Tory boom and bust.

Madam Speaker: On that note, we should now move on.

Enterprise and Competition

3.32 pm

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Mr. Stephen Byers): With permission, Madam Speaker, I wish to make a statement on enterprise and competition. Yesterday, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer delivered a Budget for Britain to succeed in the new knowledge-driven economy and to promote prosperity and fairness. Today, I wish to announce a number of complementary measures, which will boost enterprise and competition.

First, I am publishing a detailed implementation plan for our White Paper, "Our Competitive Future: Building the Knowledge Driven Economy". For each commitment, we have set out a series of targets, a timetable and the contact details of the officials in my Department who are responsible for delivering those commitments. That unprecedented step demonstrates our belief in open government, our desire to work closely in partnership with business and our determination to deliver on our commitments.

I am also publishing today a strategic framework for the Department of Trade and Industry, setting out the objectives for my Department and the work that we will undertake in pursuit of those objectives. Copies of both documents have been put in the Library and the Vote Office.

The policies in the White Paper that we published before Christmas apply to all sectors: traditional and high-tech, manufacturing and services. Work is well under way on many of the proposals contained in the White Paper. I have established a review of bankruptcy and insolvency law, to examine whether we can encourage responsible risk-taking while coming down hard on those who set out to defraud creditors. It will report to me next month. Separately, I am reviewing arrangements for business rescues to find out whether the law should be changed to give businesses in difficulties more chance and more time to turn things round. I shall announce our conclusions in the summer.

This afternoon, I want to announce four new funds to support business. First, we will be providing £20 million to achieve our target of high quality support for 10,000 business start-ups by 2001. The programme will be launched this summer.

Secondly, a new enterprise fund will stimulate the availability of finance for the small and medium enterprise sector. I have increased the fund to £160 million. It will lever in an additional £350 million from the private sector to ensure that more than £500 million is available to support loan guarantees for small firms and for support for regional venture capital funds aimed at the provision of small-scale equity and a national scheme to support high-tech businesses.

Thirdly, following the Chancellor's announcement yesterday of a further £20 million for high-tech venture capital investment, we will create a new fund operating across the United Kingdom, focusing on young high-tech firms that need small amounts of equity.

Fourthly, I can announce that we have decided to expand the successful SMART—small firms merit award for research and technology—scheme. From April, a wider range of individuals and businesses, particularly those in the manufacturing sector, will be able to receive help to research or acquire technologies needed to turn good ideas into commercial reality. We shall increase annual spending by more than a third and provide almost £100 million over the next three years.

Science and the commercial exploitation of scientific research have a key role to play in improving Britain's competitive position. That is why we will develop a strategy to improve knowledge transfer, stimulate the flow of scientists and engineers into industry, and encourage knowledge-based industries. We shall publish proposals in that key area by the end of the year.

Today, following yesterday's Budget statement, we are publishing four documents on tax changes to stimulate innovation and enterprise, especially in smaller companies. The introduction of a tax credit for research and development will be a major step on the road to raising the UK's performance, giving real help to thousands of smaller firms that are working to introduce new products and processes. It will underwrite almost a third of research and development costs for small business, giving the sector a boost of £150 million a year.

Enterprise management incentives will allow smaller companies to give tax-advantaged equity remuneration. We shall also publish proposals on corporate venturing and tax reform for intellectual property. Together, these papers demonstrate our commitment to a framework in which small business can thrive.

Small and medium-sized firms need further help too. I intend to establish a new body—the Small Business Service—which will be specifically designed to meet the needs of smaller businesses. I can announce that it will have more than £100 million of new money to support its important work. The body, which will report to me, will be headed by a high profile chief executive. It will have two key responsibilities: to act as a strong voice for small business at the heart of Government; and to improve the quality and coherence of delivery of Government support programmes for small business and ensure that they address their needs.

The areas in which I expect the service to be involved include: the provision of a new automated payroll service for all new small and medium-sized enterprises; supporting the Revenue in providing business support to discuss problems within 48 hours; giving advice with Customs and Excise for exporters and importers; and, working with the Revenue on internet filing of tax returns. Consideration will need to be given to the relationship between the service and the newly established regional development agencies.

A modern, effective competition regime is necessary to reward innovation and enterprise, and to bring real benefits to consumers. The Director General of Fair Trading is already looking at a number of areas—including cars, supermarkets and private medical insurance—and he has referred over-the-counter medicines to the restrictive practices court for examination.

More needs to be done. I shall therefore exercise my powers under section 12 of the Fair Trading Act 1973 to give the director general directions indicating issues that he should take into account in determining his priorities. I shall also exercise my power under section 13 of the Competition Act 1980 to ask the director general to investigate particular prices.

[Mr. Stephen Byers]

In relation to prices, there is widespread concern that those paid in the UK for goods are higher than prices in other countries. I have begun today a study on international price comparisons, which will help competition authorities to identify markets that require their attention. It will be made public, so that consumers and others can comment. I will then decide which prices I will ask the director general to investigate.

We are also taking action to provide a modern framework for utility regulation. Electricity standing charges are a matter of pressing concern; they account for around 13 per cent. of a typical household bill and can rise to 20 per cent. for low volume users. Figures which I am publishing today show a wide variation in standing charges by region and by method of payment. I have today written to the energy regulator asking him to look at standing charges to ensure that pensioners and the poor, in particular, are not disadvantaged.

I also believe that the time is right to introduce a modernised merger regime. Businesses need stability and confidence that decisions in those important areas are not taken for short-term political considerations. I believe that the system could be improved if merger decisions were normally taken by independent competition authorities against a competition-based test. A small minority of cases will raise important and wider public interest issues, such as those involving the defence industries, and Ministers would continue to have a role in such proposals. I intend to publish a consultation document to begin a full debate on that important issue.

To secure real competition we need knowledgeable and well-informed consumers. To that end, we shall publish a consumer strategy White Paper before the summer. However, there is one area of particular concern. A mortgage is the largest and most complex financial commitment that most people will ever enter into. I have today announced proposals to improve the information available to customers in relation to the marketing of mortgages and other credit. Our proposals will give them access to clear information about the interest rates on offer.

The measures that I have announced today show our determination as a Government to support enterprise and to succeed in the knowledge-driven economy of the future. They complement the radical proposals set out yesterday by the Chancellor and I commend the statement to the House.

Mr. John Redwood (Wokingham): I thank the Secretary of State for his statement, although I was perturbed to read all its main points, before I came into the Chamber, on a Press Association tape and to learn from journalists that every major item had been briefed to the press by the Secretary of State and his officials before he made the statement. It is not right that Members of Parliament should hear about his proposals from the media before they do so in this House.

I hope that when the Secretary of State draws up his list of sinners who need referral for high pricing, he will include the Chancellor of the Exchequer. He is the main offender on petrol and diesel prices and on costs for the haulage industry. I hope that he will take responsibility for the problems that the motorist is now experiencing.

It has taken the Government nearly two years to decide that Britain needs lower prices and more competition. They have abandoned the case-by-case approach of the previous Government. Conservatives broke monopolies and introduced competition on an industry-by-industry basis. This Government have spent two years talking about competition but done nothing significant to further it. All they have done is to put up business costs and business taxes. My right hon. and hon. Friends and I are all for lower prices and more competition. That is why we broke the monopolies in telephones, electricity and gas and that is why I have urged the Government to break the monopoly in water. Will the Secretary of State now pledge to introduce water competition for retail householders as well as for businesses? Do the Government want to break the present car distribution system and introduce car supermarkets? Simply telling us that car prices are too dear does not tackle the problem. Do the Government intend to outlaw recommended prices for newspapers, or does the Secretary of State value the present newspaper distribution arrangements? Does the right hon. Gentleman want to change the tied house arrangements in the brewing industry, or not? Will he remove the advantages local pharmacies currently enjoy?

The Minister for Energy and Industry (Mr. John Battle): What a cheek.

Mr. Redwood: The Minister may say that, but those are the policy issues, and if the Government want to introduce more competition and lower prices, those are the issues that they should tackle. The previous Conservative Governments were tackling them case by case; we had a fine record of breaking many monopolies, but there are still more to be broken—will the Labour Government do it, or not?

It is a cop out to say that the Government will run a poor man's *Which?* magazine to tell us how much we are suffering, but that they will take no policy action where they could do so to tackle the problem at source. There is absolutely no evidence that the Government are the customer's friend; they talk about being so and spin that they are, but they funk the decisions necessary to bring prices down.

We are told for the 16th time that the Secretary of State wants to reserve to himself competition issues relating to defence and some other cases, despite his belief in independence; so will he rule out now all Secretary of State involvement in media cases? If his argument is that his views as a Minister could be in conflict with making a fair judgment in certain cases, surely that must apply most of all to cases involving the media, given the Government's predisposition to trying to influence the media in their direction.

Will the Secretary of State assure us that he will have nothing to do with the BSkyB bid for Manchester United and that he will rule out interest in all media bids in the future, contrary to the generosity displayed by him and his colleagues in all their press briefings up to today's briefing on this statement? Does he not understand that to achieve a judgment in the BSkyB-Manchester United case that is fair to the two balanced teams that are fighting that bitter battle, he should set out in advance, working from general principles, whether or not the Government think that media interests should be able to buy sports clubs.

His failure to set out a general policy leaves him wide open to the charge of being unfair to one or the other of the parties when the judgment is finally made.

The Secretary of State has announced an enterprise fund; it has been announced countless times before. It shows how much Labour believes in policy recycling if in no other sort of recycling that we have to hear such announcements time and again. This time, £10 million has been added to the fund to give the excuse for re-announcing it, but, in Labour's old language, it is not new money. The fund is small recompense for the massive tax hike that business is experiencing. Why do the Secretary of State and the Prime Minister not realise that hiking national insurance contributions for the self-employed and hitting business motorists takes away far more money than is being put back through that small enterprise fund? If the Secretary of State left business more of its own money, he would need to propose fewer handouts.

The right hon. Gentleman proposes a Small Business Service at considerable cost. I can tell him what small businesses want: less regulation, lower taxes, no increase in national insurance for the self-employed, no increase in motoring taxes, no increase in haulage taxes, no increase in stamp duty, and no increase in VAT levies—all things that are in the Chancellor's Budget, but which he does not understand are bad for business. Businesses face a massive tax hike as a result of the Chancellor's third Budget, just as surely as the huge tax hikes that resulted from his first two Budgets.

If the Government want to earn the name of friend of business, they must sweep aside the regulations that they are putting in place and genuinely cut business taxes. Instead of gimmicks, they must offer real support to the business community.

Mr. Byers: It is most noticeable that the right hon. Gentleman has clearly not discussed with business its response to yesterday's Budget and to the measures that I have announced today. Were he to do so, he would learn that the targeted support that we intend to give has been warmly welcomed by industry, which recognises the assistance and support the Government can give in particular areas. I would point out to the right hon. Gentleman, in a friendly way, that he should begin a dialogue with business if he wants to speak as shadow Secretary of State for Trade and Industry. Clearly, he is failing to do that. In addition to that, he appears to be suffering from memory loss: judging by his remarks just now, the policies that he supported as a member of the Cabinet—for example, in voting for the petrol duty escalator—have been suddenly forgotten.

The right hon. Gentleman is right to talk about breaking down utilities and removing them from the public sector, but the Conservative Government effectively created private single monopolies in those areas. It has been left to the Government to break down monopolies and create a market that will deliver benefits to consumers. I can confirm that, as the Chancellor announced yesterday, there will be a review of the water industry as well.

On the new, modernised merger regime, we will operate under the existing provisions for as long as they are in place. I will discharge my responsibilities as Secretary of State, but we will consult because we believe that there is a better procedure that could be adopted. I hope to be able to bring the results of that consultation to the House in due course. There is no question that we shall discharge our current statutory duties in a quasi-judicial manner that is fair to all parties, and we will be guided by the report from the Monopolies and Mergers Commission. I expect to receive its report regarding BSkyB and Manchester United on Friday of this week.

I was disappointed by the right hon. Gentleman's response—I know that that should come as no surprise, but I live in hope. It is remarkable that he did not mention Brussels once in his contribution—which must be a first for him. However, he still missed the point. The statement that I have delivered this afternoon and the range of measures that we intend to introduce will support business. They are about innovation and enterprise and will at last give a new deal to consumers—an area that was totally ignored in the 19 years of the previous Administration.

Mr. Redwood: Eighteen years.

Mr. Byers: It seemed like 19 years. I believe that our measures will be welcomed warmly.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Order. We have a lot of business before us today and I am having to restrict Back-Bench speeches to 10 minutes in the major debate. I hope that there will be brisk questions and brisk answers from the Dispatch Box so that I will be able to call as many hon. Members as possible.

Mr. Martin O'Neill (Ochil): Is it recognised that, in recent years, the Office of Fair Trading has lacked focus and resources because of the number of jobs that it has undertaken? Those of us who have had dealings with the OFT have been disappointed with the speed at which it has moved and the urgency with which it has often dealt with matters. I hope that those difficulties will be remedied by the extra resources and extra powers that my right hon. Friend is choosing to commit.

Mr. Byers: My hon. Friend makes an important point. There is no doubt that the Office of Fair Trading was under-resourced as a result of the decisions taken by the previous Government. During my time as Chief Secretary to the Treasury, I was pleased to be able to agree some extra funding—a 20 per cent. increase—for the OFT. I think that will help enormously in ensuring that the office can work to a programme that is far more extensive than any of its programmes to date.

Most importantly, the OFT must approach issues more proactively. It must play an active role and guarantee that consumer interests are at the forefront of the work of the Director General of Fair Trading. If that happens, I am sure that the Government and the independent OFT can work together and deliver a far better deal to consumers in the future than they have received in recent years.

Mr. David Chidgey (Eastleigh): I should like to ask the Secretary of State three specific questions in the interests of clarity and speed. Can he tell me precisely what targets his Department has set for improving

[Mr. David Chidgey]

competitiveness and productivity and closing the skills gap? How will he measure progress towards those targets? What account has the Secretary of State taken of the forecast by the Institute for Fiscal Studies that 20 per cent. tax credit rates for small and medium-sized enterprises would increase the ratio of research and development expenditure compared with gross domestic product by less than one tenth of 1 per cent? Although I welcome the Secretary of State's proposed investigation into price competitiveness and the wide range of prices that consumers are charged, does he agree that his task would be easier if he were able to compare like with like—perhaps in just one currency: the euro?

Mr. Byers: I shall not go down that road this afternoon. [HON. MEMBERS: "Go on."] Well, they say that Labour Secretaries of State count their time in office in days rather than in months and years, and I want to try to get a few months under my belt.

On the important points that the hon. Gentleman raised, I have seen the IFS figures for its projections of the consequence of the tax credit for research and development, and I think that it is mistaken. The tax credit will make a big difference for SMEs. They have been asking for that measure and I am pleased that we were able to respond to their request in this Budget.

On productivity and improving skills, much joint work will need to be done across Government to deliver that agenda. I am already discussing in detail with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment the joint work that we can do to fulfil the need for skills to be developed and improved. I hope that we will be able to introduce many initiatives in the months and years ahead. On productivity, we need to continue working with the Treasury to identify ways in which we can make progress. The implementation plan for the White Paper that was published before Christmas reveals the timetable in which we shall achieve those objectives. When the hon. Gentleman has had the chance to read the implementation plan, he will recognise that we are serious about delivering on the commitments in that widely acclaimed document.

Mr. Peter Mandelson (Hartlepool): I congratulate the Secretary of State on his excellent statement and wish him not only many months in his office but many years, which he will thoroughly deserve. I want to ask him about two aspects of the Government's agenda to which he has not referred. First, on the important subject of electronic commerce, when will the e-envoy—the digital ambassador—start work? Secondly, on competition and enterprise, when will the Government's proposals for the Post Office be implemented? It was envisaged that those would be introduced in the first quarter of this year. What or who is holding them up?

Mr. Byers: I am delighted that my right hon. Friend is here for my statement. Much of the implementation plan that we are publishing today builds on the excellent work over which he presided in the Department. I am pleased that we are able to implement many of the ideas that he advocated.

My right hon. Friend raises two important points. I interviewed two exceptionally good candidates for the post of digital envoy only 10 days ago, and I hope that we will be able to announce an appointment in the next few days. When my right hon. Friend finds out who is likely to be appointed, he will think that we have made a very good selection for that important post.

On the Post Office, a good deal of work is going on to make sure that we have a White Paper that will command broad support across the House and out in the wider community. It will be a comprehensive document, which will demonstrate that we want a forward-looking Post Office for the next century. That will take some time, but it will be worth it to get the proposals right. I expect to be able to publish that White Paper within the next two months.

Mr. Ian Taylor (Esher and Walton): It would be churlish of me to criticise the Secretary of State too much because we started some of those measures when we were in government. I congratulate him on persuading his Chancellor in a way that I did not persuade mine about the proposals that he has announced this afternoon.

Will the Secretary of State take great care to ensure that the enterprise fund and the Small Business Service are staffed by people at least as entrepreneurial as those to whom they will be giving advice? I speak from some experience and I know that the service will break down, however much money one puts in, if the two sides of the equation are not properly matched. He will find that very difficult to achieve.

Secondly, the Secretary of State knows as well as I do that the devil will be in the detail of the application of the research and development grant and its success will depend on how the Inland Revenue interprets it. Will he please keep his eye on that and not pass it across to the Revenue?

Finally, why did the Secretary of State not persuade the Chancellor to cut capital gains tax to 20 per cent. or at least to introduce a 20 per cent. rate? That is his one big failing in the Budget, and I hope that he keeps working at it.

Mr. Byers: I shall pass on those comments to my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer. The hon. Gentleman's important point about the people who might staff and give advice in the Small Business Service is absolutely right. We need people with good, up-to-date, relevant experience who are able to mentor and to pass on that experience to the individuals who will come to the service for advice and assistance. We must see to that. One of the tasks that we will set ourselves will be to recruit the best possible people. With the additional new funding—it is new funding—coming into the service, and the recognition that there will be a voice for small business at the heart of Government but at arm's length from the Government, people will see that we are serious about providing a focus for the needs and aspirations of the small business sector.

I hear what the hon. Gentleman says about getting right the detail of the tax credit for research and development, and I will take a personal interest in achieving that objective.

Mr. Richard Burden (Birmingham, Northfield): I welcome the statement. May I raise two points with my right hon. Friend? First, does he agree that a particularly important part of the SME sector that will need to be

targeted through these and other measures is second-tier suppliers in the automotive industry? The Accelerate programme in the west midlands suggests that more than 2,000 second-tier suppliers could face major challenges in the coming year. Can my right hon. Friend comment on the relevance of the statement to them?

Secondly, in relation to the small business fund—I suppose I am taking up a point made by the hon. Member for Esher and Walton (Mr. Taylor)—can my right hon. Friend assure me that the good ideas in that scheme will be properly linked to the RDAs and the regional agenda, so that the service to be established is not monolithic, but sensitive to regional and local needs and differences?

Mr. Byers: My hon. Friend makes an important point about developing the work closely with the RDAs to make sure that the small business service works with local agencies to give the best possible service to the small businesses in the locality.

With reference to the car industry generally, it is important that we give assistance to the supply chain, especially where there is a major producer in a particular region. My hon. Friend will be aware that we have established an industry forum to help the supply chain in exactly that situation, so that productivity can be improved and the quality of the product raised. By developing best practice, we can offer new opportunities to companies and businesses.

Mr. Alasdair Morgan (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale): With regard to mortgage interest rates, does the Minister agree that the best guarantee of competition in that sector is the existence of a thriving mutual building society sector? Will he therefore undertake to have a word with his right hon. Friend the Chancellor to see whether something can be done to stop so many building societies having to spend such an inordinate amount of management time fighting off the attentions of a tiny bunch of predator carpetbagger members, who have no interest in lowering interest rates, but are simply out to make a fast buck?

Mr. Byers: I know that that sector is always being actively considered within the Treasury, to make sure that the interests of the wider community are served.

Mr. Dale Campbell-Savours (Workington): As one who was formerly an entrepreneur, may I tell my right hon. Friend that I believe that the package for enterprise is excellent? It addresses many of the issues that small business men bring to me in my constituency. Can my right hon. Friend give me an assurance that when an examination is made of the bankruptcy laws—I understand that he may have to make a statement on them in the next month—that will not lead to an increase in the number of phoenix company operations being set up, such as the Tanning Shop or Cabouchon jewellery, or all the others that we know about? I seek that assurance because many of us know of phoenix operations in our constituencies.

Mr. Byers: My hon. Friend raises an important point. There are two categories of people that we are trying to identify legally, so that we can separate them. One type of person is the responsible risk-taker, who has an idea, puts up his own money, tries hard but fails. The other category is the one to which my hon. Friend referred—people who have nothing but contempt for their creditors and will exploit limited liability to its full extent. We must bear down as hard as we can on those people, while recognising that responsible risk-takers need some degree of protection so that they will not have to live with the stigma of failure for the rest of their lives.

The review that I have set in train will consider whether we can make that distinction. However, I assure my hon. Friend that we would not bring forward proposals which would allow rogue directors who have contempt for their creditors to escape the full force of the law. That law needs to be applied and we should give a clear message that that will continue to be the case.

Mr. Tony Baldry (Banbury): There is a lot of detail in the Secretary of State's statement. I think that he used the word "unprecedented" with regard to a document that he was publishing containing the names and, I presume, the telephone numbers, of officials, so that members of the general public can speak directly to them. Presumably, the right hon. Gentleman will have no objection if hon. Members who take a particular interest in trade and industry matters, such as members of the Select Committee on Trade and Industry, also avail themselves of the chance to talk directly to those officials on the policy issues raised in the document.

Mr. Byers: I have no problem with that. Those officials also have an e-mail address, so if the hon. Gentleman has that facility that is another way in which he can communicate with them.

Mr. Michael Clapham (Barnsley, West and Penistone): I welcome my right hon. Friend's statement. Yesterday, together with other colleagues, I met representatives of the Sheffield branch of the Engineering Employers Federation to discuss the problems that they faced. They told me that they need assistance in establishing a conduit with the local universities in order to transfer technology. Will my right hon. Friend consider what measures he can introduce or assist with to establish a network throughout the UK to transfer technology from universities to industry?

Mr. Byers: In due course, we shall be announcing funding allocations through our innovation budget, and I assure my hon. Friend that one area which will have our considerable attention will be the way in which ideas that are developed in universities can be exploited in the private sector to develop businesses as successfully as possible. If the group to which my hon. Friend referred would like to contact the Department, I am sure that we could give advice on how to facilitate such a dialogue with the local university sector. Over the years, Britain has been weak in that area, and we need to change our whole culture in terms of accessing ideas and innovation in the university sector for the benefit of all our people and for business generally.

Mr. Andrew Lansley (South Cambridgeshire): Will the Secretary of State explain why, in his references to competition policy, he did not mention the implementation of the Competition Act 1998, given the importance which his predecessors attach to that? Is it because the Director General of Fair Trading and his office are having the difficulty which my right hon. Friend

[Mr. Andrew Lansley]

the Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) and others predicted about the implementation of those measures in practice?

With regard to mergers policy, will the Secretary of State simply admit that he has had to propose an independent scrutiny of mergers decisions simply because, since May 1997, he and his predecessors have let mergers policy, which was governed by the Tebbit doctrine on a predictable basis, turn into a policy that has become unpredictable, causing difficulty to the City and to business?

Mr. Byers: The reality is that every merger application must be dealt with on its merits. Since I have been in post, no decision that I have taken on such matters will have come as any surprise to any informed commentator. If the hon. Gentleman has examples, I should be grateful if he would give them to me.

The director general has not drawn any particular problems to my attention. I met him only a couple of weeks ago and he felt that he had the resources to ensure that the Competition Act was implemented fairly and effectively.

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his statement, particularly its emphasis on the knowledge-driven economy. All who are interested in the area know that that economy has no respect for the divisions of Departments of State. Is he aware that one of the most refreshing things about the statement is that it has started vigorously to break down those barriers that we had to put up with for 18 years, where the Department of Trade and Industry would not talk to the Treasury and the Treasury and the DTI would not talk to the Department for Education and Employment? It is refreshing that the Government are breaking down those barriers, resulting in a co-operative effort across all Departments of State to get the knowledge-driven economy really moving.

Mr. Byers: I am delighted to confirm that. The Chancellor's Budget statement yesterday revealed clearly the extent to which we have co-operated across the Government to ensure that the Budget meets the needs of a range of different people. Today's statement and subsequent statements will do the same.

It would be a mistake not to record the valuable role that my hon. Friend has played over the years in breaking down barriers, particularly between higher education and the business sector, to develop innovation and enterprise, especially in his own region, but also throughout the country. Many of the ideas that we have introduced today are built on ideas that he has advanced in the past few years.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): Given the Secretary of State's statement that the creation of wealth is now more important than its distribution, can he explain why, in their first 22 months, his Government have introduced no fewer than 2,400 additional regulations, which adversely impact on business, and removed only 20? Why has he made no proposals today that would reverse that tide of nanny state interference in the affairs of British business?

Mr. Byers: I would warn the hon. Gentleman to be very careful about his reference to regulations. In their last year in power, the Government whom he would have supported introduced 3,500 regulations compared with the 2,300 to which he referred. I am afraid that we are way behind, but that is not a target that we want to achieve.

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton and Wanstead): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his statement and I welcome the arrangements that he has announced on mortgages. Will he extend them slightly so that endowment policies associated with mortgages are looked at so customers using those financial services obtain clarity?

Mr. Byers: I am pleased to be able to clarify my comments and reassure my hon. Friend that today's announcement covers mortgages and other credit arrangements, including endowment policies. People will obtain clarity and know exactly what they are entering into when they make one of the largest investment decisions of their lives.

Mrs. Louise Ellman (Liverpool, Riverside): I welcome the Secretary of State's practical commitment to enterprise and his promise to tackle one aspect of fuel poverty. Will he explain in more detail how funds from his Department will be made available to RDAs so that venture capital funds or other funds can meet opportunities that have been identified in the regions? Can he give us any further information on how he intends to tackle fuel poverty in a direct and meaningful manner?

Mr. Byers: The relationship between the RDAs and the new Small Business Service is one of the issues to which we will have to give careful attention. We do not want duplication, but we want bodies to work together and the activities in which they are both involved to complement each other.

We can do many things about fuel poverty and we will be asking the energy regulator to draw up in his response a social action plan that considers how energy regulation will work. We are also enabling the regulator to extend his consideration to include people on low incomes. Today's announcement about standing charges could make a real difference to many people on low incomes because the proportion of their household expenditure spent on fuel is three and a half times that of people on average incomes. Fuel poverty is a real problem that needs to be tackled; we are not walking away from it and the steps that we have announced today will begin to make a real difference.

Mr. Brian White (Milton Keynes, North-East): Today's statement and the consultation paper on e-commerce published last week will be widely welcomed, but my right hon. Friend will know that the skills shortage in respect of information technology staff and the need for the infrastructure on which the knowledge-based economy must be built have been

forgotten in the past. It is important that both those aspects are addressed, so will he elaborate on how they will be covered?

Mr. Byers: It would be a mistake to deny that there is a growing shortage of skills, which must be tackled. I am working closely with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment to establish—with the help of the skills task force set up by my right hon. Friend—how we can drive through the skills agenda.

This is one of the issues that have been neglected over the years, and we are now paying the price for that neglect. In the days following the Budget, however, announcements will be made showing that we are serious about tackling the problems.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): What concrete measures are available to stimulate the flow of scientists and engineers into industry? That was a reference to my right hon. Friend's statement.

Mr. Byers: I know that my hon. Friend takes a close interest in these matters. He will be pleased to learn that we are developing what we call the teaching company scheme, which provides for a genuine partnership between scientists in industry and higher education. We are also considering ways of encouraging children, during their school lives, to see science and the development of science as more exciting than it is traditionally presented as being.

We believe that a number of proposals in the Department—some have yet to be announced—will reflect the importance of science to our country, and to the scientific community. That is why, before the end of this year, we shall present a strategy showing clearly how we intend to use the science skills that we have here, in the United Kingdom, to the best effect. Science is a talent—a resource—that has been under-utilised, and we want to do all that we can to remedy that.

Mr. Geraint Davies (Croydon, Central): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the most powerful weapon that we can use to combat uncompetitive pricing in various markets is probably the euro? Given his enthusiasm for electronic commerce, which I share—and, indeed, his enthusiasm for consumer empowerment—will my right hon. Friend encourage the publication of relative pricing across Europe in the electronic and other media, in order to empower consumers, bring about competitive markets and create more prosperity?

Hon. Members: The answer is yes.

Mr. Byers: Thank you.

Consumers do have an option in relation to mortgages, which are now being offered in the single currency. We announced today, in our paper on mortgages, that information will be available to those who are thinking of taking out a mortgage in the single currency, showing clearly how such an arrangement would operate in comparison with mortgage in sterling. Consumers will have a genuine choice. We are moving in that direction—certainly on mortgages.

Points of Order

4.18 pm

Mr. Anthony Steen (Totnes): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I have given your office notice of it.

I seek your advice, Madam Speaker, about an irregularity that occurred in the European Scrutiny Committee on 10 February. I do not know whether this is a matter for you or for the Select Committee on Standards and Privileges, or whether we should just shrug our shoulders and say, "Well, ministerial standards have declined, and we must just accept that."

As hon. Members know, when Ministers give evidence to Select Committees, officials provide members of those Committees with briefs containing a list of questions that the Committee concerned may think it appropriate for them to ask. On 10 February Lord Donoughue, the Minister responsible for farming and food, was giving evidence to the Committee in public. At one point, he hinted that he was aware of the questions that were to follow. When I challenged him, he implied that it was impertinent of me to suggest that there had been any impropriety.

Subsequently, the Chairman of the Committee, the hon. Member for Clydesdale (Mr. Hood)—whom I have given notice of my point of order—instigated an inquiry that resulted in the discovery that there had been collusion between Committee officials and officials of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. In short, a question had been leaked.

I want to make it plain that I am making no criticism of the hon. Member for Clydesdale, who conducted himself with his usual propriety; nor do I criticise the officials, who, if I may say so, made an error of judgment. The Minister, however, was involved in a cover-up that requires further investigation. I should be grateful, Madam Speaker, if you could advise me on how we can best proceed.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Speaker: I am delighted to do so. A question has been put to me by the hon. Member for Totnes (Mr. Steen), but two other hon. Members seem to want to raise points of order. I am a very tolerant Speaker and I shall listen to them, provided that they are not long and I am able to deal with them

Mr. Michael Trend (Windsor): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. I was at the Committee to which my hon. Friend the Member for Totnes (Mr. Steen) referred. Indeed, I was sitting behind the Minister and able to observe over his shoulder that he had not only the questions, but the answers.

I have served with great pleasure on the Select Committee and enjoyed the interchange between Members of Parliament and Ministers, but if Ministers come to Select Committees with not just the questions, but the answers, it makes a mockery of the whole Select Committee procedure. All Members of Parliament might

[Mr. Michael Trend]

as well engage just in correspondence with the relevant departmental officials, for all the good that having Ministers before us would do.

Mr. Dale Campbell-Savours (Workington): On a point of order, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: No. I have a point of order already. I am very capable of dealing with the matter. I just want to listen to what is being said.

Mr. William Cash (Stone): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. I have been on that European Select Committee, now the European Scrutiny Committee, for about 14 years. I have never seen such an event. What concerns me is that, on yesterday's "Today" programme, one of the ex-Clerks of the Committee—I think that his name is Philip Hensher—suggested that it was by no means an unusual event.

If it were true that, in other Select Committees, Clerks of the Committee, for whatever reason, were supplying Ministers in advance with the questions that were being asked, it would undermine the democratic accountability of those Committees. If it were prevalent, that would not only put the democratic accountability of the Committees at risk, but could cause grave doubts as to whether the claims that we make for them should be so great.

Mr. Martin O'Neill (Ochil): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. I make two points as the Chairman of a Select Committee. First, I have never found it possible to ensure that any questions are asked, or not asked, by members of the Committee.

Secondly, to ensure that well-briefed Ministers come before us, it is not unreasonable for Committees to identify the areas of concern that might arise. That is totally different from providing crib sheets for Ministers, and I do not think that that has happened, even in the case of the European Scrutiny Committee.

Mr. Jimmy Hood (Clydesdale): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Cash: Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Order. We are not having a debate on the matter. I am ready to respond to the point of order and have been since it was first raised, but I see that the hon. Member for Clydesdale (Mr. Hood), who is Chairman of the Committee, is seeking to raise a point of order and I shall listen to him.

Mr. Hood: Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. That matter came before our Committee. It has considered it and made a decision on it. It was acceptable to the hon. Member for Totnes (Mr. Steen), who has raised the point of order. I cannot for the life of me understand why he has raised it with you today.

Mr. Cash: Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: How many more points of order will the hon. Gentleman try to make? He is like a yo-yo.

Mr. Cash: I raise the following point because of the remarks by the Chairman of the Select Committee on Trade and Industry, the hon. Member for Ochil (Mr. O'Neill), for whom I have the greatest respect. It would be a matter of grave concern if the House accepted that Ministers should have advance warning of questions that were to be asked. If one thinks about it, it gives them an opportunity to arrange the answers to questions, which, in relation to the procedures in those Committees, gives them an unfair advantage.

I ask you, Madam Speaker—it is the main burden of my further point of order—to institute an inquiry within the Clerks Department to ensure that those things are done properly, in line with the spirit, as well as the actual terms, of the Standing Orders setting them up.

Madam Speaker: The hon. Member for Totnes (Mr. Steen), who raised the original point of order with me, asked which Committee was responsible for these matters. I think that he knows full well that it is the European Scrutiny Committee because Committees in the House regulate their own affairs.

In the case of the European Scrutiny Committee, I understand that an explanation had already been given to the Committee, of which the hon. Member for Totnes is himself a member, and that the Committee unanimously accepted the explanation. Moreover, there is a written question on the Order Paper on the issue, which has been tabled by the hon. Member for Windsor (Mr. Trend).

The hon. Member for Totnes, knowing full well, as a long-standing Member of the House, how we deal with such a matter, which has already been to the Committee, should not have brought it up on the Floor of the House.

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Worthing, West): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. May I ask that you, as Speaker, consult with the Solicitor-General to determine whether his statements in open court this week—in the case involving Mr. Al Fayed, Neil Hamilton and *The Guardian*—might be placed in the Library? I am not trying to raise the issues of the case, but it might be useful if a statement that has been made that is relevant to Parliament is available to hon. Members.

Madam Speaker: At this stage, the House might well wish to know that I have requested the Law Officers to intervene in the case on behalf of the House, to assert the House's right that its proceedings should not—to quote the Bill of Rights—be

"impeached or questioned in any court or place out of Parliament".

In response to the hon. Gentleman's point of order, I shall be happy to do what I can to place the arguments advanced on behalf of the House in the Library just as soon as it is proper to do so.

Mr. Christopher Leslie (Shipley): On a point of order, Madam Speaker; I seek your guidance. This morning, the Select Committee on Standards and Privileges published its report into a complaint that I made about the right hon. Member for Horsham (Mr. Maude), and concluded that he breached several rules of the House. Madam Speaker, I wonder if you have had notice from the right hon. Gentleman, who is in the Chamber, that he will today make a personal statement of apology?

Madam Speaker: I have not yet seen the Committee's report and cannot respond to the hon. Member.

ROYAL ASSENT

Madam Speaker: I have to notify the House, in accordance with the Royal Assent Act 1967, that the Queen has signified Her Royal Assent to the following Act:

Road Traffic (NHS Charges) Act 1999.

Lifelong Learning (Participation and Entitlement)

4.26 pm

Mr. David Chaytor (Bury, North): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to establish an entitlement to paid educational leave for people in employment; to secure comparable treatment for full and part-time students in institutions of further and higher education; and for connected purposes.

It is particularly appropriate that I should be promoting my Bill today after both today's statement by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, which dealt with the knowledge-based economy, and the various measures on lifelong learning announced in yesterday's Budget. The Bill is concerned with the means by which the Government's vision of an inclusive lifelong society might be implemented.

The Government should be proud that, in less than two years, they have done more to move lifelong learning up the educational and political agenda than the previous Government did in almost 20 years. Publication of the major reports by Baroness Kennedy and Professor Fryer, publication of "The learning Age" Green Paper, launch of individual learning accounts and the university for industry, the significant increase in funding to colleges, universities and local authorities after the comprehensive spending review, and yesterday's announcement on development of new learning centres across the country all show that the Government are serious about attaining their objectives.

The danger of any such expansion in education is that newly allocated resources will be used primarily to reproduce more of what we already had, and that those who traditionally have benefited from investment in education beyond age 18 will continue to receive the lion's share of new investment. That is the legacy of the highly selective and highly elitist education system that we inherited.

My Bill therefore focuses on the educational entitlement that all young people and adults should have if we are to achieve the widening of participation in lifelong learning that is at the heart of the Government's strategy.

The chronic educational under-achievement of our people is well documented. We compare badly with our major competitors: fewer children in pre-school education; poorer attainment in literacy, maths and science; fewer young people staying on after 16; fewer students in university; and fewer workers with higher-level vocational qualifications. The cycle of underachievement has been endemic for over a century, but I am delighted that my Government are now getting to grips with the root causes of the problems—in their drive to improve pre-school education, to force up standards in our primary and secondary schools, and to increase the number of places in our colleges and universities.

The vast majority of new learners benefiting from the Government's new initiatives will be studying part time. However, the financing of education—both in allocations to institutions and in the nature and level of student support—is based on the assumption that the normal mode of study is full time. My Bill calls for an end to this discrimination and an equalisation of treatment for part-time students.

[Mr. David Chaytor]

There are many different kinds of part-time student. A woman bringing up young children by herself studies at home to complete the GCSEs that she did not complete at school. An older man working 50 or 60 hours a week knows that he faces redundancy if he does not learn to use the computers that are now transforming his industry. Thousands of adults trapped in dead-end jobs know that improving their qualifications is the key to a better life for themselves and their children.

Those part-time students are learning in circumstances that are, by definition, more difficult than they would be if they were able to study full time. They are working, sometimes in two or more part-time jobs, or caring for children or elderly relatives, or coping with their own or a relative's disability. They have never had a maintenance grant, as full-time undergraduates have. They have never had a statutory right to free tuition fees, as full time undergraduates have. They are not usually eligible for discretionary awards from local authorities or for access funds from colleges and universities.

If the Government are to complete the revolution in student finance that started last year, they must now move to end those anomalies. That is why the first part of my Bill calls for equality of treatment for part-time students. That means equality in the way in which institutions are funded. We still find that colleges where a majority of students are part time are funded less generously than school sixth forms and universities, where a majority of students study full time, even where the colleges deliver comparable courses. It also means equality in levels of student support, as most part-time students are still not eligible for student loans. Amendment of the Student Support Regulations 1998 to grant eligibility for student loans to part-time students in colleges is one of the most effective means of widening participation that the Government could adopt.

The second part of the Bill is more specifically concerned with vocational training. For the best part of 20 years, Britain's policy on vocational training has been a shambles. We abolished the old apprenticeships system and now find that we have had to reinvent it under the name of modern apprenticeships. We abolished the industrial training levy and found that employers were not prepared to train workers and lose them to other companies. We created Investors in People and then found that the people who received the investment were in many cases the same people who had always received investment.

Until recently, British companies still invested little more than one tenth of the average amount invested in training by companies in France, Germany and Japan. Is it any surprise that we have so few workers with NVQ level 3 qualifications? Is it any surprise that we have a productivity gap? Is it any surprise that, not to put too fine a point on it, it is BMW considering the future of Longbridge and not Rover considering the future of car plants in Germany?

So the second part of my Bill calls for a national scheme of paid educational leave for employees. Many companies large and small already invest heavily in training and there is growing understanding of the importance of that investment. However, the greatest part of that investment is targeted at those in the boardroom, those who are upwardly mobile, and those who are already highly skilled in professional jobs. Such professionals have always had paid educational leave. The 1997 labour force survey, for example, suggests that graduates receive five times as much continuing training as non-graduates. No one would wish to deny them those opportunities, and my Bill would simply extend the opportunities that are taken for granted by professionals to workers who left school with few, if any, qualifications; to workers in whose family there is no tradition of education or training beyond school age; to workers who cannot help their children succeed in school because they do not have the basic skills or the necessary confidence.

For many millions of people, it is a question not simply of being the first in a thousand generations to go to university but of being the first in a thousand generations to get a few days training a year. Let us be under no illusions about the scale of the problem that we have inherited. There are 13 million people in jobs with no access to training. More than a quarter of adult workers have literacy skills that are so poor that they cannot read basic instructions. Almost one third of the work force have no recognised vocational qualification.

Finding the means whereby unskilled workers with little job security and no prospect of upward mobility can be enabled to develop transferable vocational skills is the biggest challenge for our lifelong learning strategy. That is the key to their economic survival in the knowledge-based economy and the means by which they can raise the educational aspirations of their children. The Teaching and Higher Education Act 1998 introduced that entitlement for young workers. The next step should be to extend the entitlement to all workers.

Belgium, Norway, Italy, France and Sweden already have national schemes of paid educational leave. Italy guarantees 150 hours per year. Belgium guarantees 240 hours per year. In Britain, the workers with the greatest need have always had the least access to training.

The United Kingdom supported the principle of paid educational leave 25 years ago by signing the 1974 convention of the International Labour Organisation. Last year, we reiterated our support for the principle by signing the European social chapter, article 15 of which calls for national schemes of paid educational leave.

The Government are to be congratulated on signing the social chapter so speedily after coming to power and on ensuring that many of its provisions are enshrined in domestic law, but if we are serious about widening participation in education and training, we must urgently consider the implications of article 15 and incorporate its principles into our lifelong learning strategy.

The inequalities that disfigure our society have been created mainly by a divisive system of education which has been more concerned with reproducing a narrow social elite than developing the skills of all our people. In the 21st century, no nation will be able to afford to neglect—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael J. Martin): Order.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. David Chaytor, Mr. Dennis Turner, Mr. Allan Rogers, Mr. Harry Barnes, Mr. Michael J. Foster, Ms Jenny Jones, Mr. Kelvin Hopkins, Mr. Gareth R. Thomas, Mr. Derek Twigg and Mr. Phil Willis.

LIFELONG LEARNING (PARTICIPATION AND ENTITLEMENT)

Mr. David Chaytor accordingly presented a Bill to establish an entitlement to paid educational leave for people in employment; to secure comparable treatment for full and part-time students in institutions of further and higher education; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 23 April, and to be printed [Bill 59].

EUROPEAN COMMUNITY DOCUMENTS

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 119(9) (European Standing Committees),

TREATMENT OF END OF LIFE VEHICLES

That this House endorses the Government's view that the draft Directive on end of life vehicles, European Union Document No. 11034/97, rightly seeks to achieve important environmental improvements; and supports the Government's intention to agree a Common Position on this draft Directive at the next Environment Council on 11th March.—*[Mr. Betts.]*

The House divided: Ayes 266, Noes 107.

Division No. 95] **[4.38 pm**

AYES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Ballard, Jackie
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blair, Rt Hon Tony
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, Paul
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brake, Tom
Brand, Dr Peter
Breed, Colin
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Rt Hon Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burden, Richard
Burnett, John
Burstow, Paul
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Campbell, Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell–Savours, Dale
Cann, Jamie
Cawsey, Ian
Chaytor, David
Chidgey, David
Church, Ms Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Cohen, Harry
Cooper, Yvette
Corston, Ms Jean
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Crausby, David
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Curtis–Thomas, Mrs Claire
Dalyell, Tam
Darvill, Keith
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Denham, John
Dobbin, Jim
Donaldson, Jeffrey
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Fearn, Ronnie
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Lorna
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Forsythe, Clifford
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Foulkes, George
Fyfe, Maria
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
George, Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Gorrie, Donald
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Harris, Dr Evan
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Hepburn, Stephen
Hill, Keith
Hood, Jimmy
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Ms Jenny *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keetch, Paul
Kelly, Ms Ruth
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kingham, Ms Tess
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Linton, Martin
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Lock, David
Love, Andrew
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McCartney, Ian *(Makerfield)*
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonnell, John
McGrady, Eddie
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Merron, Gillian
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'ld Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miller, Andrew
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Rhodri *(Cardiff W)*
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Öpik, Lembit
Organ, Mrs Diana
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Ms Linda
Pike, Peter L
Pollard, Kerry
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Quin, Rt Hon Ms Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Rt Hon Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Rendel, David
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Sanders, Adrian
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Soley, Clive
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stoate, Dr Howard
Stringer, Graham
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Swinney, John
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Temple–Morris, Peter
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*

Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Vis, Dr Rudi
Wallace, James
Ward, Ms Claire
Watts, David
Webb, Steve
Welsh, Andrew
White, Brian
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Willis, Phil
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Dr Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. David Hanson and
Mr. Greg Pope.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baldry, Tony
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Campbell, Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Cash, William
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rayleigh)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cran, James
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Day, Stephen
Duncan Smith, Iain
Evans, Nigel
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Flight, Howard
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam
Fraser, Christopher
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gray, James
Grieve, Dominic
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson Smith, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Maples, John
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
May, Mrs Theresa
Nicholls, Patrick
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Prior, David
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robathan, Andrew
Rowe, Andrew *(Faversham)*
Ruffley, David
St Aubyn, Nick
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Spring, Richard
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Townend, John
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Tyrie, Andrew
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Willetts, David
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Woodward, Shaun
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Sir David Madel and
Mrs. Caroline Spelman.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Orders of the Day

WAYS AND MEANS

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Question [9 March].

AMENDMENT OF THE LAW

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That it is expedient to amend the law with respect to the National Debt and the public revenue and to make further provision in connection with finance; but this Resolution does not extend to the making of any amendment with respect to value added tax so as to provide—

(a) for zero-rating or exempting a supply, acquisition or importation;

(b) for refunding an amount of tax;

(c) for varying any rate at which that tax is at any time chargeable; or

(d) for any relief, other than a relief which—

(i) so far as it is applicable to goods, applies to goods of every description, and

(ii) so far as it is applicable to services, applies to services of every description.—*[Mr. Gordon Brown.]*

Question again proposed.

Budget Resolutions and Economic Situation

[Relevant documents: The Second Report from the Treasury Committee, Session 1998-99, on the World Economy and the Pre-Budget Report (HC 91-I), and the Fourth Report from the Environmental Audit Committee, Session 1998–99, on the Pre-Budget Report (HC 93).]

4.51 pm

Mr. John Redwood (Wokingham): I rise to oppose this Budget—a Budget of smoke and mirrors, a Budget with many a sting in the small print and a Budget which announced a little good news and left out a lot of bad news, which came in the press releases that followed. This is the third Budget of this Chancellor and this Government: third time unlucky for many. It is third time unlucky for motorists, for small business people, for industry and for most of the people who make the wealth and generate the jobs in our country.

The Government came to power promising education, education, education as their three priorities. Three Budgets later, we know their true priority: it is tax, tax, tax. There are stealth taxes and wealth taxes, income taxes and spending taxes, business taxes and jobs taxes. After the Government have put taxes up, they dare to say that they have cut them—which is misleading the House on a great scale. Meanwhile, the hospitals are short of nurses and doctors, and schools find it difficult to recruit and retain good teachers.

This is a Government of tax and waste, not tax and spend. They take more money from us so that Ministers can fly Concorde more often; they raise taxes so that we can employ more politicians throughout the country and have more quangos; and they spend massive sums on a welfare-to-work programme that simply does not work, as my right hon. and hon. Friends will demonstrate in future debates.

This is a Government who hire more spin doctors to tell us why they cannot afford more medical doctors. This Government are the nation's pickpocket, creeping up at the dead of Budget to rifle your wallet or purse. Saving for a pension? Not without a tax from this Chancellor. Making profits in your company? Not without paying a lot more corporation tax and then being asked to thank the Government for cutting the rate. Driving your car? Not without being clobbered by the Chancellor every time you go out of the garage, and often when you do not.

This Budget continues the great Labour tradition of tax and waste. For business, there is extra vehicle excise duty *[Interruption.]* I see Ministers roaring their heads off. They obviously do not know what measures were in their three Budgets. They do not know how much damage is being done to industry. They have no idea of all the tax increases that the Chancellor has squirrelled away in the paperwork. It is a pity that they do not read the stuff, but we do because we need to represent the case to British business.

Vehicle excise duty, a £25 million increase; capital gains on company sales, a £40 million increase—

Mr. Tony Baldry (Banbury): Is not laughter from Treasury Ministers particularly perverse at a time when the newspapers are announcing even more job losses in the manufacturing sector?

Mr. Redwood: My hon. Friend anticipates my argument only too well. If only the Government could anticipate it, heed it and change their policy.

This Budget contains changes to the value added tax rules—a £70 million increase; changes in VAT group treatment—a £5 million increase; and an end to VAT exemption on financing—a £95 million increase. I see that the Chancellor is trying to find those figures, so he obviously does not know about them either. For taxation of reverse premiums, there is a £20 million increase. Stamp duty is increasing; I wonder whether that is the Chancellor's revenge on the right hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson). He reads that the right hon. Gentleman is about to buy a flat for a little over half a million pounds, and up goes the stamp duty. Perhaps we should call it Peter's pence from now on.

There are increased car taxes and fuel duties. The Chancellor says in his "Budget for business" that some taxes will go down next year, and he is right—I have found two of them: a £10 million reduction in value added tax on "certain supplies", although they are not specified; and £5 million in tax relief for employer-loaned computers. Whoopee! That will make a real difference to business when it is set against the £25,000 million in extra taxes from the Chancellor's first two Budgets and the substantial increases in this year's. I assume that the borrowed computers are needed to help people to work out all the stealth taxes that they and their businesses must pay in the financial year 1999-2000.

The overall impact next year on British business will be the raising of the tax burden by a substantial amount according to the Chancellor's own figures, as set out in "Budget 99", his own document. There are no overall tax reductions for business next year. There are massive increases from three Budgets—the largest of them from Budgets one and two and smaller further increases in Budget three.

[Mr. Redwood]

What do the Prime Minister and the Chancellor say about the Budget? The Prime Minister says that it is another Budget to bring an end to boom and bust. That is his favourite soundbite. Out of his limited repertoire of tired and misleading phrases, "bringing an end to boom and bust" is the most overused and misleading.

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Mr. Stephen Byers): To Tory boom and bust.

Mr. Redwood: The Secretary of State is right to say that that is the way in which the Prime Minister chooses to construct his phrase. The Prime Minister repeats it like a music hall line or a comedian's catch phrase. To those in the front line of British industry, it does not seem very funny, however. Industry has been suffering for a year. At the time of the Chancellor's first Budget, I warned of "a treble whammy on profits, investment and jobs in British manufacturing . . . the higher exchange rate, which throttles the prospects of exporters in continental markets; the higher interest rates which have already occurred—undoubtedly there will be more . . .—and higher taxes".—[*Official Report*, 4 July 1997; Vol. 297, c. 581.]

As we know, there was more. If the Opposition could foresee all that in July 1997, why could not the Government? Why did they blunder and plunder on?

Was the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry persuaded to make today's silly statement, which had no new content, in order to delay the Budget debate beyond the normal time for the early evening news and because he did not wish to hear the truth about the plight of manufacturing? Did he also wish to delay the debate so long that I might have to be torn away to the shadow Cabinet, where my right hon. and hon. Friends are now? Or was the statement simply an unfortunate slip of his memory? Had he forgotten that all that he announced today had been announced many times before?

Why does the Secretary of State not care about the string of factory closures and industrial job losses that are being left in his wake? Why will he not come to the House to make a statement about what he intends to do about that? The real issue facing us is manufacturing collapse and factory closures, not the silly, trivial matters that the right hon. Gentleman chose to mention or policies that he has announced many times before.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): Is my right hon. Friend aware that he and my right hon. Friend the Member for Horsham (Mr. Maude), the shadow Chancellor, have approximately 20 times more experience of the private sector of the British economy than the Chancellor and the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry?

Mr. Redwood: My hon. Friend's calculation is likely to be correct; it would not be difficult to have more industrial and commercial experience than the Chancellor and the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry.

The Minister for Energy and Industry (Mr. John Battle): You obviously learned nothing from it.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael J. Martin): Order. The Minister for Energy and Industry must not shout across the Chamber. He should know better.

Mr. Redwood: I am grateful to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Why has the Budget done nothing to correct problems for manufacturing industry? It gives no answer to high sterling. It offers no relief from high taxes. It contains only more increases in the high costs facing industry.

When the Prime Minister says that he has abolished the cycle of boom and bust, does he realise that manufacturing is in recession? For a long time, the Government said that output had not fallen for two quarters. Now that it has fallen for many industrial companies for longer than that, we are told grudgingly that it is a technical recession. There is nothing technical about it. It means job losses for tens of thousands of industrial workers. It means many closed factories. It means financial ruin for some who have committed their cash and effort to making things in Britain.

Is the Prime Minister unaware of the job losses and factory closures? When he says that he has abolished the boom-bust cycle, does he mean that industry under Labour will simply stay bust? Is the magic new Labour ingredient in economic policy to be no recovery for industry now that it is down? There is certainly no sign in the Budget of any revival or any hope for the future for those who make things in Britain. There is no big reduction in their tax bills and no promise to influence Europe to reverse the continental countries' large devaluation.

The Prime Minister has as much chance of staying on his trade cycle as he has of persuading me that his policy on the euro is right. He is not merely wobbling on his trade cycle: he, and British industry, have long since fallen off. The Prime Minister may believe in new Labour's circus—as long as the spin doctors turn out the lights, no one will notice that British industry is on the floor. Unfortunately for him, people have noticed. The workers at Cadbury noticed when they got their P45s. The workers of Coats Viyella noticed when they got the sack. The workers in the FII shoe factories noticed when the factories were closed down. Even the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry noticed, and he was forced to go to the north-east with soothing words. Still not a single policy has been introduced that could reverse the industrial rout.

Mr. Martin O'Neill (Ochil): A number of workers employed by Coats Viyella in my constituency have lost their jobs because Marks and Spencer has decided to switch its production to third-world countries. Does the right hon. Gentleman think that the answer is a reduction in salaries and pay to third-world levels? If not, he should address the issues and tell the House his alternatives.

Mr. Redwood: I have often led debates for the Opposition on that subject and suggested to the Government how they could avert some of the industrial disaster over which they are presiding. If they had a sensible policy on interest rates, sterling, business taxes and regulatory costs, British business would not have been sandbagged as it has by the Government. They have taken too much money out of the hands of manufacturing industry and that is why jobs are being lost.

Mr. Tom King (Bridgwater): Sadly, I can add to my right hon. Friend's list. Some 20 per cent. of the work force of St. Regis—which, far from being in a cheap labour industry, is capital-intensive—now face the

prospect of redundancy. That plant in my constituency is highly efficient and has received substantial capital investment.

Mr. Redwood: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend and add my sympathies to his for those workers now threatened with the sack. That is what is happening up and down the country, thanks to the Government.

Mr. Geraint Davies (Croydon, Central): Are we meant to understand from the right hon. Gentleman's speech that, given the chance, he would reverse the independence of the Bank of England, alongside his intention never to join the euro? In such a situation, long-term interest rates for British industry would rocket, there would be a huge migration of international capital out of the country and the rate of unemployment would escalate.

Mr. Redwood: What an extraordinary statement. The Opposition opposed the independence of the Bank of England because we did not think it was right in the circumstances. How right we were. Interest rates were driven higher than we recommended or proposed and British industry was put into a vice of high sterling, high interest rates, high taxes and high regulatory costs. That is why we are now seeing a disaster.

Mr. Davies: Would the right hon. Gentleman reverse independence?

Mr. Redwood: The hon. Gentleman knows the answer to that question. The Opposition will set out the right remedy for the British economy in the prevailing circumstances in the run-up to the next general election. We cannot do more than oppose a wrong idea at the moment. We opposed independence for the Bank of England and we explained that we did so because it would do great damage to British manufacturing. Our prediction has come true. The Chancellor should admit that he got it wrong, apologise, recognise the damage that he has done and try to do better next time with a different policy.

One would have thought that Ministers would care more because the problems are occurring in their constituencies. My constituency of Wokingham does not have a big problem, because it is a high-tech town which is still doing well. However, there are real problems in the industrial heartlands, which are usually represented by Labour Members, especially those on the Front Bench. In the past six months, unemployment has risen by 101 in the Prime Minister's constituency. He should visit it and find out. Unemployment has gone up by 275 in Hartlepool, the constituency of the recently departed Secretary of State for Trade and Industry. It has gone up by 405 in the constituency of the current Secretary of State for Trade and Industry—a huge number of people out of work while the right hon. Gentleman is on the beat, allegedly looking after the interests of British business, yet he does nothing about it.

Has the Secretary of State read the forecasts in the Red Book? They are not my forecasts. For many months, I have been predicting industrial recession; now the Government have caught up with the Opposition's prediction. The Chancellor tells us that, in 1999, manufacturing output will fall by between 1 and 1.5 per cent. That is a recession and it is a long one. No one thinks that the Chancellor is being too pessimistic—indeed his forecasts assume that sterling will fall to help manufacturing industry. However, that is not happening at present; the position is becoming worse.

The Budget predicts a further collapse in our trade balance. I remember the present Chancellor fulminating against any increase in the trade deficit under Conservative Governments. However, he does not even mention the matter in his Budget statement; nor is it mentioned by the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry. Exporters find that the going is extremely tough. What does the Chancellor say in the Red Book, although not in his Budget speech?

"The deficit in trade in goods and services is forecast to widen to around £13¼ billion in 1999".

We are told that net exports will be well down on levels recorded last year. There is to be a balance of payments crisis and a collapse of manufacturing exports; the Chancellor foresees a country awash with imports as workers are thrown on to the dole and people buy goods from abroad—exactly what the hon. Member for Ochil (Mr. O'Neill) tells us is happening in his constituency thanks to the purchasing decisions of Marks and Spencer.

How many people might lose their jobs as a result of the actions of this bungling Chancellor? The trade unions are clear—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Lincoln (Gillian Merron) should not laugh when the Chancellor is criticised by the trade unions. She should understand that sometimes the trade unions are right and that sometimes she should listen to them. The trade unions are fairly clear, saying:

"We estimate that in the year to quarter 4 1999 total employment could fall by 200,000 to 300,000 and almost all the lost jobs will be in manufacturing."

That is quite a forecast, but it is lower than the so-called independent forecast included in the Chancellor's Budget figures, where we learn that the increase in unemployment will be 400,000 as a result of this and previous Budgets.

I wish that I could disagree with the trade union forecasts and tell people all over the country in industrial jobs that things will not be that bad. I want our country to do well and our manufacturing industry to thrive and survive. Unfortunately, the Government's whole strategy rests on people in manufacturing losing their jobs on a grand scale.

The Government tell us that British industry is 20 per cent. behind our continental competitors in productivity. If the Government will do nothing to lower other costs and taxes on business, the reduction in costs will have to come from jobs. Do they really want that? I want the Government to cut other costs and taxes, rather than business having to cut jobs. If the whole of that one-fifth gap in productivity has to be narrowed by losing jobs, the Government are recommending the sacking of 1 million people from the manufacturing areas of this country to bring us into line with Germany. They will not give on the exchange rate, regulatory costs or taxes, so they say that the brunt of the burden of adjustment must fall on jobs. Furthermore, they cannot say that the adjustment will come from rising output, which is what Conservatives would want, because the forecasts are that output will fall as a result of their policies.

To be fairer to the Government, let us be more modest in our assumptions. Let us assume that, this year, the Government want British industry to raise its productivity by only 4 per cent., thus making a small contribution to

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bridging the gap that they perceive between us and Germany. We should remember that Germany's productivity will also rise. The 4 per cent. increase in productivity, on top of a 1 per cent. output fall—the lowest end of the Chancellor's range—means that 5 per cent. of jobs in industry must go. That is about 250,000 jobs, just for one year's modest narrowing of the gap that the Government think is all important, and which they think must be narrowed by sacking people rather than by the Government mending their own ways. Our forecast of 250,000 jobs to go in manufacturing is modest compared with the upper level of the trade union forecasts. I fear that it will come true. I wish that the Secretary of State would change his speech, change his policy and prevent it from becoming a reality—for the sake of his constituents, if not for the sake of mine.

What does the Secretary of State bring to the party? He brings a trade war between the European Union and the United States of America. Does he not realise that in a trade war there are absolutely no winners? In this trade war, the loser will once again be British manufacturing—which loses from everything the Government do. The Secretary of State seems to see himself as the samurai of the trade war, but he is instead the kamikaze pilot who mistakes the Scottish borders for New York and ends up destroying great chunks of the cashmere and biscuit industries through his suicidal dive.

Mrs. Angela Browning (Tiverton and Honiton): Does my right hon. Friend recall the debate about the textile industry that we had in this House at the end of January when we implored the Prime Minister to pick up the telephone that day and talk to the President of the United States in an attempt to resolve the problems of the cashmere industry? It seems that our words went unheeded and that the Government paid very little attention to us.

Mr. Redwood: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. Her advice and that of other right hon. and hon Members was good and well meant. We do not want this trade war, and we would dearly love the Prime Minister to have enough clout with the President to secure a change in the American position. We would dearly love the Secretary of State to have enough influence in Brussels to achieve some movement in the European position. *[Interruption.]*

Every time I mention Brussels, Labour Members laugh. It is so childish. Do they not understand that most of the big decisions affecting manufacturing in this country that are taken by the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry either have to be cleared with Brussels or are governed by Brussels regulations or potential court judgments? That is why I have to mention Brussels, and why the Secretary of State would be wise to do the same. He should understand the Brussels limitation on his powers.

In this case, the Secretary of State should spend time in Brussels attempting to get officials to understand that it is not fair for British manufacturers to suffer because of a row between the EU and the US about an entirely different issue: bananas. Instead of being difficult—saying that he rather welcomes this trade war and trying to hype up the language and the rhetoric against the United States—the Secretary of State, and the Prime Minister for that matter, should be trying to bring the sides together. That is what the cashmere industry wants, and it is even what the banana producers of the Caribbean want. They know that there must be negotiations and a deal. If the Secretary of State cares about Scottish cashmere, United Kingdom biscuit manufacturing and Caribbean bananas, will he please start negotiating, calm the tempers and inject some common sense into this very difficult situation?

Why is industry generally suffering so badly, according to the Chancellor's own analysis? It is because the Government are sucking it dry and taking its money away. There have been £25,000 million-worth of extra business taxes this Parliament. That money could otherwise be spent on much-needed new plant and equipment. The Government have imposed £15,000 million in extra costs from regulation. That money could otherwise be spent creating more jobs and new products and ideas. They have let the pound go sky high against the Asian and continental currencies, which has slashed our export earnings and left our industries struggling against a flood of cheap imports.

Let us look at the Government's impact on just one industry: the food industry. It is expected to pay £50 million for the start-up costs of the Food Standards Agency; £250 million in extra food safety costs; £21.5 million in additional Meat Hygiene Service costs; £500,000 in fish inspection costs; £1 million in egg inspection costs; £90 million in business rate increases; £92 million to implement the minimum wage; £4 million to set up the working families tax credit; and £78 million for the working time directive. The packaging waste regulations, staff car park tax and electrical recycling measures are three more costs in the pipeline. In common with other industries, the food industry must pay much more corporation tax, a tax on pensions and much higher motoring taxes. After that lot, how can any Minister say with a straight face that Labour looks after business and is seriously interested in making business more productive and more successful?

This Budget tells industry to go hang. The DTI told industry that loud and clear in its competitiveness White Paper. It stated that Britain will not be able to earn a living by making things. I know that the White Paper was produced by the Secretary of State's predecessor, but I think that he agrees with it. It states:

> "An advanced industrial nation like ours cannot support rising prosperity by producing standard products and services made with pedestrian methods and commonplace technology."

What a breathtaking statement by the DTI, writing off great chunks of our industry and services. It would be laughable if it were not so serious. The Government seem to be implementing this policy in the textile, steel, engineering and shoe industries, among others.

It is not possible for every company in the country to have the latest technology or to be full of scientists or the United Kingdom's best brains. We need other types of businesses and industries. Under a sensible economic policy, it is possible to employ people and make money by using ordinary technology to create commonplace things. There is nothing wrong with that. The Government

have declared war on such businesses. They have been successful in that war and they are doing a lot of damage to our industrial base.

Mr. Geraint Davies: Rubbish.

Mr. Redwood: I hope that the hon. Gentleman is not writing off all those businesses in his constituency that are not at the leading edge of technology. Many of those companies do not claim to be at the leading edge of technology: they simply want to make a decent living by employing people to make things that consumers want to buy using commonplace technology. The Government are making it too difficult and expensive for them to do that.

Mr. John Townend (East Yorkshire): Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is not only the manufacturing industry that is at risk? The London art market, which employs 5,000 people, is in danger because of the imposition of lower value added tax and a proposed tax from the European Union. Ministers will not declare that it is a British national industry and use the veto.

Mr. Redwood: My hon. Friend is quite right, and I have raised that issue in the House. The Government have failed signally to speak up for the London art market. They do not seem to realise how important it is. They have not promised or threatened to use the veto, which is the very least they should do given the serious threat that is posed to the future of that important market, on which many jobs and much income depend.

The Government conjure up an image of a future Britain as a province of Europe fit for spin doctors to practise in. Our vision of reality will be distorted not by smoke from the factory chimney, but by the smoke in our eyes from the lobbyists, public relations professionals and high-tech wizards who surround the new Labour project.

This Budget is proclaimed as a Budget that will provide more work for people. Yet, as we heard this afternoon, one of its important themes is to take a lot of work away from the Secretary of State. We are told that he is to give up the day job—dealing with competition in the United Kingdom market—which is now to be carried out by a new, enlarged and expensive quango situated further away from parliamentary scrutiny. The reason that we have been given is that we cannot trust politicians—I suppose that shows a little self-knowledge on the part of the Government. However, there are many occasions when the Secretary of State should be prepared to make decisions in the public interest. He should decide how much competition will be introduced and promote that cause.

I asked the Secretary of State a series of questions following today's statement, and I received absolutely no answers. When I write to the right hon. Gentleman, I am told that he cannot answer my letters and that I should ask my questions in the House of Commons. When I question him in the House of Commons, I receive no answers. Is that because the Secretary of State does not have any answers, or because he so hates democracy that he is not prepared to make any answers available through Parliament to the press and wider public?

Why can the Secretary of State not tell us whether he wants to introduce competition into the car or brewing industries or any other areas that I asked about today? Why is it such a secret? I do not believe that the Secretary of State is unable to make a judgment on those matters, and I do not believe that he can get away with the excuse that they are not his responsibility. Until he has given his job away, they are very much his responsibility. Business must know where it stands. It is in flux, thanks to the new legislation introduced by the right hon. Gentleman's predecessor, and the Secretary of State owes it to the House this afternoon to provide answers to those important policy questions.

This Government, above all else and to a greater extent than their predecessors, pride themselves on their close day-by-day—even hour-by-hour and minute-by-minute—links to the media. How can we believe that the Government are free to make impartial decisions in the area of media competition when they owe so many favours in that field? When I asked the Secretary of State to make it absolutely clear that the one case in which his argument may have force—the media—would be transferred to his independent authority, he was unable to give me that reassurance and went on to say that he is about to decide on one of the most sensitive and important cases of all—whether BSkyB should take over Manchester United.

It is a great pity that the Secretary of State does not realise the logic of his position. He tells us that there are times when a Minister is compromised by the interests of the Government generally, yet when we have the best example of a case in which that problem could arise, it is the one case in which he will make the decision and leave himself in considerable difficulty. Perhaps he will help to resolve that conundrum when he responds to the debate.

I come from a constituency which, along with others, is leading the software, internet and communications revolution. I agree that all those sectors will be more important in the future and will provide many good jobs in the years to come. However, man does not live by mobile phones and e-mails alone. We still need clothes, food and houses. We still need to make things as well as say things. It would be wrong to write off the one fifth of our economy that is based on manufacturing.

The new industries do not welcome the siren call of the new regulators. The Government threaten them with e-commerce legislation. When I met representatives of the Federation of Electronic Industries the other day, they agreed with me that elements of the new law are more likely to stifle than to stimulate the new technology.

What should the Chancellor have done in the Budget? He should have taken to heart the Prime Minister's words about doing things the American way. He should have apologised for tax increases past and avoided all stealth taxes future. He should have put off the regulations that now threaten much British commercial success. He should have struck out boldly for a freer market. The Budget could have offered a prosperous future for manufacturing. Instead, the Chancellor chose to ignore the pleas of British industry. He will live to regret that.

Yvette Cooper (Pontefract and Castleford): If the right hon. Gentleman's party is so good at encouraging business and innovation in business, why is there a 40 per cent. productivity gap between UK companies and American companies?

Mr. Redwood: The productivity gap is largely the result of the higher taxes, higher exchange rate,

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higher interest rates and higher regulatory costs that this Government have imposed. In 1995, BMW thought that Britain was the best place in Europe, bar none, to make motor cars. Under this Government, it is talking of pulling out, and the Secretary of State will have to offer a lot of money to try to keep the company here. What has changed is not British productivity by British managers and workers, but the Government's policy.

Mr. Richard Burden (Birmingham, Northfield): The right hon. Gentleman referred to BMW and the high rate of sterling. It is true that the company has commented on that. Will he comment on the statement by Mr. Samann, the new BMW-appointed chair of Rover, who said:

"We do need some help from a more realistic level of sterling; a proper interest rate strategy and government fiscal policies can achieve that without inflating the economy. Early entry of the UK into the Euro would benefit all exporters"?

Mr. Redwood: I agree with all of that apart from the last comment about the euro, and if I were handling the negotiations with the BMW chairman, I would explain to him why I think that and try to persuade him that, under a Conservative Government, Britain would again be the best place in which to invest and to make motor cars. When one of my hon. Friends saw the hon. Gentleman leaving the House of Commons the other day, he noticed that he was not driving a Rover car or one made in Longbridge, which seems a great pity. Surely it is best for all hon. Members interested in that industry to buy cars from Longbridge.

Mr. Burden: I do not know what car the right hon. Gentleman saw me driving. I own a Rover 200 and my partner drives a Mini, so perhaps the right hon. Gentleman would like to apologise.

Mr. Redwood: If that is true, of course I apologise. I said that an hon. Friend had observed the hon. Gentleman, and he was apparently driving a Vauxhall out of the House, which seemed a pity for one who is meant to be defending Rover. I assure the hon. Gentleman that my wife and I make sure that we buy British and represent the British motor industry.

The American economy has been growing much more quickly than the European economy. Industrial production has leapt ahead in the USA thanks to interest rates, tax rates and exchanges rates that make sense for business. Industrial production has been sluggish on the continent, and countries are trying to drag themselves out of the mire by devaluing against the UK and the US.

Why do the Government want to converge with slow growth and high unemployment? Do they want a fifth of our work force to be out of work, as in Spain or southern Italy? Do they want our output to crawl ahead as some continental output has done in recent years? Why does the Prime Minister tell us that he wants a single currency as long as Europe follows the American dream? Does he not realise how stupid that sounds? Even he must realise that it will not happen. It is like saying that the Government are determined to have only fine weather and have instructed everybody accordingly on their pagers, so it is bound to work.

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry delights in being the cover-up Minister. He will not answer letters and he does not like answering questions. When Parliament is not in Session, he waits until it resumes and then says that it is not permissible to write letters to him and that questions must be tabled instead.

The other day, I asked what impact a 1 per cent. increase in various costs would have on British industry. The Secretary of State must know the answer. I do not believe that he is so incompetent that he has not done his sums. His temporary lapse on his sums is not representative of his work as a whole. I am sure that he can work out percentages. So what did he say instead of giving me the answer? He replied that this Government were abolishing the boom-bust cycle. I asked nothing about cycles or busts.

The Secretary of State may be less grey than we thought if he has all those busts in his brain, but is it not about time that he lifted the quality of debate and told us what is the impact on companies of higher exchange rates, higher labour costs and higher regulatory costs, and what he is going to do about that? His failure to answer tells us a great deal about his state of mind. Either the Secretary of State is preoccupied or he knows that this is the big issue, but does not know how best to cover it up and so continues his trite mantra about no more boom and bust.

Of course, the Secretary of State and the Chancellor prefer to blame British industry. The Secretary of State tells us that it is not the Government's fault that we have a record trade deficit; that that has nothing to do with having sky-high sterling or higher interest rates than our competitors; that business is not short of cash because the Government are milking it dry; and that it is all industry's own fault for being unproductive. That is another nice irony. At precisely the time when one part of the Government are trying to subsidise people into work, the Trade Secretary and the Chancellor are trying to price people out of industrial jobs and to encourage a massive labour shake-out from traditional sectors. Everything that the Treasury and the DTI have done in the past two years has made it more likely that industrial payrolls will be slimmed down mercilessly.

One job is lost every 10 minutes. The Trade Secretary offers more job losses as his answer, which is dressed up as 75 points from a White Paper, but amounts to just one simple, painful, unfriendly point. It says to British industry, "Sack some of them now, or go bust. Get rid of some of them today, or get rid of them all tomorrow." That is Byers's choice. That is the Government's choice. They make it too dear to employ people and business has the horrible job of telling people that they are out on their ear.

This is a Budget of soundbites and contradiction. It is a family-friendly Budget which reveals just how family-friendly it is by removing the married couples allowance and mortgage interest relief. It is a shareholders' Budget which leaves in place the hated pensions tax, which taxes the main way that people in Britain own shares. It is a Budget for jobs, but its main recommendation to industry is to slim down the payroll and pray for better times.

The combination of trade war, stealth taxes and a big increase in regulation is lethal. Meanwhile, the Government weep crocodile tears over small businesses while tying them up in ever more paperwork and

regulation and imposing higher national insurance on the self-employed. Businesses have to cope with new rules on unfair dismissal, the working families tax credit, the minimum wage, statutory sick pay, EU paternity leave, emergency leave, union recognition, the working time directive and extended maternity leave. We shall soon find that as the small business man comes to the end of his 48 permitted hours, he has worked only for the Government and has had no time to work for his customers and himself. The Government have swamped him with more paper than the Andrex puppy.

Pity the poor haulier facing more vehicle excise duty on top of the DERV and other taxes. What advice does that vanishing British industry get from Ministers? Hauliers are told to go to the continent to fill up. Some are doing more—they are going to Luxembourg to set up and pulling out of Britain altogether.

Labour views this as an election Budget for Wales and Scotland. The farmers will not see it like that because they will remain in slump. Rural dwellers will not see it like that as they seek a mortgage to pay to use their car. People who want better schools and hospitals will not see it like that as they watch the money being wasted on other things.

This is a Budget for manufacturing collapse and industrial unemployment. It may make work for accountants and lawyers, but it will not work for business. It certainly means bust for manufacturing. The only boom that I foresee is a continuing boom for spin doctors seeking to explain away the industrial collapse. I beg to oppose this Budget.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Before I call the Minister, I should inform the House that the Speaker has decided that there will be a time limit of 10 minutes on Back-Bench speeches between 6.30 and 9.30 pm.

5.30 pm

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Mr. Stephen Byers): I am grateful for the 40-odd minutes that the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) took to set out his opposition to the Budget. It was *The Daily Telegraph*, I think, which stated that, each time the right hon. Gentleman gets up and speaks, he loses votes for the Conservative party.

The Budget presented yesterday by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor will have broad and popular appeal for business, for British people, for those who rely on the public services, and for parents who have children in school, because it confirmed that the £19 billion promised by the Chancellor as part of the comprehensive spending review was to be devoted to our schools. For those who need health treatment, the £21 billion for the national health service has been confirmed.

It is possible to marry fiscal prudence with the need to invest in high-quality public services. That is what the Budget will do. It takes forward the agenda outlined by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor. It is a Budget for jobs, enterprise and the family. That is what we should be debating this evening. I regret that the right hon. Gentleman did not use the opportunity to address those issues.

This is a radical Budget, which recognises that our country's future economic success depends on promoting fairness and enterprise. It is a new Labour Budget, based on a fundamental understanding of the role that business and Government can and should play in relation to the economy. Businesses create jobs and wealth. Entrepreneurs take risks in the face of uncertainty, and open up new markets. Governments should not try to second-guess boardroom decisions, yet much of what we heard from the right hon. Gentleman this evening sought to encourage us to do precisely that—massive intervention in the way in which businesses operate.

That is not the way in which the Government intend to go. We believe that the responsibility of Government is to create the climate and the framework in which business can prosper without interference from Government. The right hon. Gentleman said that Labour does not look after business. It is hardly surprising that he should say that, as the principal Opposition spokesman on trade and industry affairs.

It would be far better to listen to the comments of people who do not have a vested interest and do not approach the matter from a party political perspective—or perhaps some of them do. Let us consider the comments of some captains of industry on yesterday's Budget.

Sir Ronnie Hampel, chairman of ICI, welcomed the overall approach of continuing the direction adopted in previous Government statements about laying the foundations for business growth. The chief executive of Asda, no longer the hon. Member for Tunbridge Wells (Mr. Norman), but Sir Alan Leighton, said that he was happy with the Budget. He said that it was a Budget for individuals, families and enterprise and that the benefits that it brought to all three would go through to every sector. Lord Harris, chairman of Carpetright—who, if I remember correctly, has over time been a substantial donor to Conservative party funds and is one of the few business men who still give generously to Conservative party funds—thought that it was a good Budget for his business and that it would get people spending, especially at the bottom end.

Those are overwhelming endorsements from people who, with the possible exception of Lord Harris, do not approach the Budget from a party political position.

Mr. Christopher Gill (Ludlow): There is another exception. If the right hon. Gentleman reads today's press, he will see that Eddie Stobart, the boss of one of Britain's biggest road haulage firms, says that he could save his company £2 million a year by moving his transport fleet overseas and basing it abroad. Is the right hon. Gentleman not aware of the huge damage that is done to the road haulage industry? Does he not recognise its effect on British industry?

Mr. Byers: I have not seen that quote from Mr. Stobart, but I will read it. He should look at the tax regime in the round. He will find that we offer a far more friendly tax regime in the United Kingdom than he would find in France, for example. It is for Mr. Stobart to make those decisions, but, if he looks at the tax regime in the round, he will see that it is supportive of his industry.

I was examining the comments that have been made about the Budget. There were some interesting comments from one person who does come at it from a party

[Mr. Byers]

political perspective, the former chief executive of Asda, now the vice-chairman of the Conservative party, the hon. Member for Tunbridge Wells. On radio yesterday, he said:

"We welcome the help for small business. I think that's good. We welcome the reduction in corporation tax and lower corporation tax for smaller businesses. That's good. As I said, we particularly welcome it in Asda. We are very keen on employee share ownership. I think everybody in the country is dead keen on it and that's good."

He concluded by saying:

"Overall, not a bad business budget."

That is a vice-chairman of the Conservative party, going on the record publicly and endorsing our approach, in conflict with the views of the right hon. Member for Wokingham, who speaks for the Opposition on these matters.

Mr. Bercow: Is the right hon. Gentleman not aware that the president of the Confederation of British Industry, Sir Clive Thompson, has said that the Government are responsible for a creeping paralysis of regulation, and that, unless action is taken to reverse the trend, that regulation will be the principal growth industry in the United Kingdom?

Mr. Byers: The hon. Gentleman should see what Sir Clive said about the Budget. I think that he will find that Sir Clive is not critical. Adair Turner is broadly supportive of the measures in the Budget. I was at a meeting with him this morning, with my hon. Friend the Financial Secretary, at which Mr. Turner clearly said that the tax burden on business was reduced as a result of the Budget introduced by the Chancellor yesterday.

Let us debate the Budget. I urge hon. Members to take the opportunity to debate it. Let us have a debate about the ideas, the initiatives and the promotion of enterprise and fairness.

Mr. Redwood: Will the Secretary of State confirm, as does the Red Book, that business will face a tax increase as a result of this Budget in 1999–2000, the immediate relevant year? We cannot be sure what will happen in two years, because there will be more Budgets. For the year that we can be sure about—the coming year, 1999–2000—the figures show an increase in business taxation, do they not?

Mr. Byers: The overall Budget delivers £4 billion of tax cuts. The right hon. Gentleman should consider carefully the measures that he supported when he was a member of the Cabinet. They would have meant an increased tax burden, compared to the measures that we are discussing. Business would have faced a greater tax burden, had the proposals that he supported continued. We do not agree with imposing such burdens on business. We are reducing the burden, compared to that which would have been imposed by the right hon. Gentleman.

The Chancellor was able to present that Budget yesterday because, early on in office, he took the tough and difficult decisions necessary to ensure that we have economic stability. By ensuring that, he could announce the initiatives proposed yesterday.

It is particularly significant that my right hon. Friend was able to do that, given the situation that we inherited when we took office in May 1997. Conservative Members do not like to be reminded of the economic mess that they left behind, but I shall remind them, and I might even mention not just boom and bust, but Tory boom and bust. I certainly shall not be referring to a golden economic legacy, because it clearly was not.

We inherited an economy in which output was rising at a rate that simply could not be sustained, inflationary pressures were building, with inflation set to rise sharply above its target level, and there was a large deficit in public finances—£28 billion, to be precise. Contrast that with the £4 billion surplus this year. Moreover, for the coming five years, we estimate that there will be a Budget surplus totalling £34 billion.

Look at what happened under the Conservative Government. Their deficit over the last economic cycle was not £50 billion, not £100 billion, but £1 billion short of £150 billion. Even with my poor mathematical skills, I know that that is £149 billion. That is the legacy created by the right hon. Member for Wokingham and his Government.

Mr. David Prior (North Norfolk): Why does the Minister believe that so many foreign companies decided to invest in Britain during that time?

Mr. Byers: There were two reasons. First, they saw the UK as a means of entry into the European market, something which will be put at risk by the policies promoted by the right hon. Member for Wokingham. Secondly, the figures show that last year was one of the best in terms of inward investment decisions. That was 1998, the year of a Labour Government.

Sir Raymond Whitney (Wycombe): On the question of the golden legacy, which the right hon. Gentleman seeks to dispute, what does he think of the view expressed by Mr. Anatole Kaletsky, who says:

"Mr. Brown's apparent generosity has been greatly assisted by the long-term tax increases that were bravely introduced by Tory Chancellors"?

Mr. Byers: The hon. Gentleman makes my point for me. That conflicts with the approach of the right hon. Member for Wokingham. That is one reason why we were not prepared to endorse that raft of tax increases proposed by the Conservative Government, and why the tax burden is reduced as a result of the Budget. I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for drawing that to my attention.

We have economic stability because we took the difficult decision to take politics out of the setting of interest rates. We will not hear the Tory policy on that from the right hon. Gentleman. The Opposition Front-Bench spokesmen have taken a Trappist vow of silence on that. I think that I know the view of the right hon. Member for Wokingham. It is a shame that he cannot discuss it openly. He smiles because he knows that he would not have given independence to the Bank of England. It is a shame that he cannot speak his mind on the issue. Unfortunately, he cannot say what he truly believes.

We took the necessary steps to put public finances back on a sound footing. They were not in that condition when we took office. We have created a new framework for

stability in monetary and fiscal policies. It is because we have taken those steps that, for the past seven months, inflation has been at or around the target level of 2.5 per cent., and short-term interest rates have peaked at half what they were in the early 1990s, and have fallen by 2 per cent. in the past two months alone. As my right hon. Friend the Chancellor said yesterday, that reduction in interest rates will save the typical home owner around £900 a year on his mortgage. Britain now has the lowest mortgage rates in 33 years. Long-term interest rates are now at their lowest level since the mid-1960s.

The right hon. Member for Wokingham talks about jobs being lost. I understand the pain felt by people who have lost their jobs. I know my constituency well, and I share my constituents' pain, frustration and anger when jobs are lost. But my constituency now has more people in work than on 1 May 1997. Throughout the north-east, which has been affected by the global downturn, more people are in work. Nationally, 400,000 more people are in work than in May 1997. Those are the facts. The right hon. Gentleman likes his own prejudices to get in the way of the facts, but on this occasion he should look carefully at the true position.

Mr. Redwood: What does the Secretary of State think will happen to manufacturing jobs, industrial jobs, during the next year? Does he agree with the union forecasts, or is he saying that there will be no overall job losses?

Mr. Byers: I am trying to ensure that factories such as Siemens have a new owner so that people can get back into jobs. I want to see more positive announcements, such as the one this morning from Peugeot in Coventry announcing 900 new jobs. Why does the right hon. Gentleman not applaud that fact? He says not a word about it. He ignores it. I welcome that announcement. It came about as a result of initiatives taken by the Government and by my Department. We shall continue with such work. There are now 400,000 more people in work than when we took office. Unemployment in the right hon. Gentleman's constituency is dropping. In the constituency of the hon. Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell), there is a 22 per cent. reduction in unemployment. The Labour Government are prepared to work even for those constituencies represented by Conservative Members.

Mr. Tom King: The right hon. Gentleman rightly says that he is here answering for the Government on the whole Budget. Obviously, everyone welcomes new jobs in any area; they would be as welcome in my constituency as they would be in his. But the right hon. Gentleman was asked for a judgment on the overall Budget, and that matter gives me concern. The figures appear to show that there will be a substantial increase in unemployment in manufacturing industry. The right hon. Gentleman is party to the Budget and the Budget sums. Is that correct?

Mr. Byers: Once again, it would have been nice had the right hon. Gentleman reflected on the fact that unemployment in his constituency is now down by more than 20 per cent. since the general election. The Budget brings good news for manufacturing. Substantial tax concessions have been introduced, specifically targeted at the manufacturing sector, and manufacturers want economic stability, not a return to the early 1990s and the days of Tory boom and bust. I can remember those days. In north Tyneside, around my constituency, not just tens or hundreds of jobs, but thousands, were lost in basic manufacturing industry because of Tory boom and bust. My constituents do not forget that, and that is why they voted for a Labour candidate.

I am outlining the steps that we are taking to help the manufacturing sector. However, we need to be realistic, and there is no doubt that, as we face a global downturn, some sectors of industry will be affected. To overcome that difficult situation, we need economic stability, and we believe that we have created the framework for that.

Mr. David Chidgey (Eastleigh): The right hon. Gentleman rightly says that tens of thousands of jobs were lost in manufacturing in the 1970s and 1980s, but he will also know that there has been a worldwide decline in manufacturing employment, and those jobs will not come back. The right hon. Gentleman is clearly trying to impress on us the number of jobs that have been created since the Labour party took office, but will he confirm that far too many of those jobs are less skilled than those that were lost—the jobs that do not come back?

Mr. Byers: A mix of employment opportunities is being created. It is a dangerous game to denigrate certain types of employment because they are part time or flexible, because many people now like to have such employment. Many full-time employment opportunities are being created in manufacturing which are well paid and high tech. That is the reality. Today's announcement of 900 high-quality, well-paid manufacturing jobs being created by Peugeot is a good example of that. I would hope that Opposition Members, from whatever party, would welcome that approach.

Mr. Andrew Lansley (South Cambridgeshire) *rose—*

Mr. Byers: I have taken a number of interventions; I will give way in a few minutes, when I have made some progress.

The International Monetary Fund report published on Monday shows the extent to which impartial observers think that the economy is doing well. The IMF gave the economy a glowing bill of health and its report praised the United Kingdom's impressive economic performance in recent years and the Government's skilful management of the economy.

The IMF said that the private sector fundamentals were strong and that any slowdown in the economy would be short-lived. It gave credit to the new monetary policy framework for leading to timely and judicious changes in interest rates and welcomed the Government's basic welfare-to-work thrust as improving the work of the labour market. When the IMF had analysed the Government's approach to the economy, it strongly endorsed the attitudes that we have adopted.

As the Chancellor said yesterday, we understand that there will be difficulties, with a quarter of the world in recession and world growth being cut by half. We have to overcome those short-term difficulties and we believe that the steps that we have taken, which will be carried through by the Budget, will ensure that we can steer a course of stability. Conservative Members know that full well and that the economy is now in a strong position.

[Mr. Byers]

We need to build on that strength. In particular, that means that we must seize the opportunities provided by the knowledge-driven economy of the future. If we fail to do that, we will be left behind as a country and as a people.

Success in tomorrow's fast-moving world depends critically on how well we exploit our most valuable and distinctive assets—the knowledge and the talent of the British people. The first industrial revolution was based on investment in capital and machinery. The revolution that we are going through requires investment in human capital—in skills, in learning and in education. That commitment comes from the Government.

Here is a message for all industry: knowledge is increasingly important not just for new industries; it will affect old, traditional industries just as much. They must embrace the knowledge-driven economy. Some are doing so, but all the traditional sectors need to do so if they are to prosper.

Last December's White Paper on the knowledge-driven economy set out a model for industrial policy for the next century. First, we must invest in British capabilities—in particular, our world-class science and engineering base and our skills. Secondly, we must act as a catalyst to collaboration between businesses and between businesses and our important science base. Finally, we must promote greater competition—principally, by empowering consumers, but through regulation where necessary. That is why I said to the House earlier that we will fully implement the 75 commitments in the White Paper. An implementation plan, which will show clearly how we intend to deliver on those commitments, has been published today.

A more fundamental challenge faces us all and goes beyond government: how can we end the poverty of ambition in Britain, which has held us back for too long? In government, in business, in universities, in schools and throughout society, we must foster a new spirit. We must be prepared to seize opportunities to turn new ideas into successful products and services and be committed to constant innovation and improved performance. Yesterday's Budget was an important step on the road, introducing measures that will encourage the new spirit of enterprise.

Mr. Lansley: A few moments ago, the right hon. Gentleman said that the Budget contained tax measures designed to help manufacturing. I am looking through the table of "Budget 99" measures. He will of course be aware, on behalf of manufacturing, of a further table in the Red Book listing a large number of additional measures, which were announced before "Budget 99"—in 1998 or earlier—and take effect after this Budget. I have found 14 measures that will increase taxes on business, totalling £2.8 billion for the year beginning 1 April 1999. So far, I have found three measures that will reduce tax by a total of £15 million. There is £2.8 billion in extra taxes and a reduction of £15 million, which is a pretty poor show.

Mr. Byers: I would accept that a £15 million reduction is not good enough; we need to do better. If the hon. Gentleman looks through the Red Book and reads the statement made by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor yesterday, he will see that the impact on investment will allow small and medium companies to write off 40 per cent. of all that they invest in plant and machinery in the coming year. That is particularly important for manufacturing companies. I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman did not see that example of what we have done; perhaps he chose not to see it.

Mr. Lansley: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Byers: No, I will not. The hon. Gentleman has had his chance. We have provided £325 million, which can be written off against investment in plant and machinery in the coming year. That is the reality, and it is a shame that he is not aware of it.

Other steps that will be introduced as a result of the Budget will make a real difference. For example, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor confirmed the reduction in the basic rate of corporation tax, ensuring that it will be reduced to 30 per cent. from April this year—down from 33 per cent. when we took office. That is the lowest rate of any major country in Europe and the lowest rate of any major industrialised country, including Japan and the United States.

Mr. Townend: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Byers: No, I will not.

We are also cutting small companies tax to 20p in the pound—down from 23p when we took office—and, to promote even greater enterprise and investment, we announced a new starting rate for small businesses of 10 per cent., which is the lowest ever starting rate. We calculate that 270,000 businesses stand to benefit from that reduction, and 85 per cent. of them employ fewer than 10 employees. That will make a huge difference.

Corporation tax rates of 10, 20 and 30 per cent.—guaranteed to be no higher in the lifetime of this Parliament—show how serious we are about encouraging business and ensuring that the United Kingdom is a good place in which to do business.

Mr. Redwood: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Byers: I want to make some progress; I will give way shortly.

We need to ensure that those opportunities are provided, but other, non-tax, measures will benefit industry. As I said in my statement, we will be setting up the new Small Business Service to improve Government assistance to those vital businesses. It will have a strong voice for small business at the heart of Government, and it will improve Government services to small businesses and ensure that those services address the real needs of the sector.

We have not forgotten the importance of science. The Budget shows our commitment to investing in Britain's capabilities, and our science and engineering base must be world class. Scientific discovery underpins our quality of life and is an invaluable source of wealth creation, economic regeneration and employment. That is why my right hon. Friend the Chancellor yesterday increased the Government's contribution to the university challenge fund, which will make a real difference in respect of the commercialisation of scientific research.

I want more British inventions to be transformed into British products—creating jobs and wealth here in Britain. That is not the case at the moment. Our proposals and the measures announced in the Budget will change that and ensure that we can take advantage of our own ideas and do not see them exploited by other countries.

Mr. Redwood: I think that the right hon. Gentleman inadvertently misled the House when he replied to my hon. Friend the Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley). I have checked the Red Book. It is very clear that the tax breaks for small and medium enterprises and the research and development tax credit do not come into effect in 1999–2000, the year about which my hon. Friend asked. I hope that the record will be corrected. The fact remains that there will be a big increase in tax in 1999–2000, mainly from the first two Labour Budgets, but also from the cumulative impact of this third Budget, which also raises taxes in that year.

Mr. Byers: I think the record will show that I was referring specifically to the £325 million that we are providing for write-offs—in the coming year. When the right hon. Gentleman has time to look at the record, he will doubtless reflect on that. I was talking about the year specified by him—the year ahead.

Mr. Townend: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Byers: I want to make some progress, given the number of hon. Members who wish to speak.

There can be no doubt that the economy of the future will succeed for our people only if it respects the environment. Protecting the environment remains a priority for this Government, and getting the environmental framework right will be good for businesses as they move into the clean technologies of the future. Yesterday's decision to implement the recommendations of Lord Marshall, the former president of the Confederation of British Industry, will make a significant contribution to the improvement of energy efficiency in business, and will also meet the United Kingdom's climate change targets.

Notwithstanding the claims of Conservative Members, the new tax will entail no increase in the burden of tax on business. The revenues will be recycled in full for business, through—among other mechanisms—a cut in national insurance contributions.

We welcome the strides that have already been made by many firms—especially those in more energy-intensive sectors—to improve their energy efficiency. Special consideration will be given to particularly energy-intensive industries. We intend to set significantly lower tax rates for energy-intensive sectors that improve their energy efficiency, and we have asked them directly to submit their proposals. Businesses will also gain from an additional £50 million for schemes to promote energy efficiency and renewable sources of energy.

We need to consider the skills gap. We must ensure that we equip everyone in Britain with the skills that they will need to succeed in the computer-driven world of the future. That is why we will create a national network of 1,000 computer learning centres—one for every community in Britain. That network will have one purpose: to ensure that Britain and our people are equipped for the information age. Inequality in computer learning today will mean inequality in earning power tomorrow. Anyone who is left out of the knowledge revolution will be left behind in the knowledge-driven economy, and that is unacceptable to the present Government.

This Government believe that the best way in which to address inequality and social exclusion is the creation of a more affluent, more successful Britain, providing everyone with opportunities to achieve their full potential—opportunities that accompany the success of British business at home and abroad. Equally, however, the fairer Britain is—the more open it is to the talents of all, whatever their class or background—the more enterprising and prosperous all Britain can be. That is why yesterday's Budget reformed the tax system in favour of work, enterprise and families. It made the tax system fairer by announcing the new 10p rate of income tax, which will be introduced in just a few weeks' time, and a cut in the basic rate of tax from 23 to 22 per cent., which will be introduced in April next year. Those two cuts will increase the rewards of work for all working taxpayers, while targeting the benefits on the low-paid and making work pay.

Our first principle in supporting the family is that the interests of children must be paramount. For the past 30 years, families with children have been the losers in the tax system: their tax burden has risen by nearly 20 per cent. under successive Governments. That is why we are increasing child benefit by 3 per cent. in real terms from April next year. It will be worth £15 a week for the first child, and £10 a week for subsequent children. That will make a real difference to families who are supporting parents and have other responsibilities.

Yesterday's Budget also guaranteed a better deal for all pensioners. It provided a fivefold increase in the winter allowance, from £20 to £100, and took an extra 100,000 pensioners out of tax altogether. It provided for pensions to increase in line with wages rather than prices. It also provided a guaranteed income for pensioner couples of £121 a week, nearly £800 a year more than the amount that obtained when we took office in 1997. On average, pensioner households will be £240 a year better off.

I was particularly interested by the comments of Stella Hague, the mother of the Leader of the Opposition. Commenting on the £80 rise in winter fuel payments for pensioners, Stella Hague, aged 71, said, "It's very nice to have it. The £100 will be very acceptable." Given that the Leader of the Opposition now believes in "kitchen table" politics, perhaps he will get around the kitchen table with his mother, and take some of her advice in regard to the Budget.

Yesterday's Budget is a Budget for enterprise and fairness, a Budget which could be brought about only because of our prudent economic management of the economy. It will ensure a better deal for children and the elderly, a better deal for the hard-working majority and a better deal for Britain's enterprising small businesses and risk takers. It is a Budget for the many, not the few. It is a Budget which is radical and forward looking. It is a Budget for prosperity, fairness and social justice, and I commend it to the House.

6.6 pm

Mr. John MacGregor (South Norfolk): Given what the Secretary of State said about the mother of my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition, I must say that I do not consider the £640 million that has been devoted to those cold weather payments to be a prime example of the concentration of massive sums on those who are most in need.

Although I have escaped the 10-minute limit, I intend to limit my speech to 10 minutes anyway. Let me begin by making two declarations of interest. First, as I want to say something about savings—if I have time—I should declare that I am a non-executive director of Friends Provident. Secondly, I am a member of the Magic Circle—and, more precisely, an associate of the inner Magic Circle. It is for that reason that I shall say what I am going to say about the Budget.

In magic, or conjuring, what matters is not what people see on the stage, but what is hidden from their view. Yesterday, it was not what the Chancellor said that mattered, but what lay in the detailed notes behind it. Listening to the speech, as all the so-called goodies unfolded, I was somewhat bamboozled as to how it all added up—until, reading the press briefing later, I found that it was explained by two factors, as well as the windfall of the £4 billion reduction in debt interest payments resulting from lower interest rates worldwide.

First, the Chancellor has introduced a new principle in Budgets. I am something of a connoisseur of Budgets, having been involved in framing some. The new principle is this: "We have not got enough to announce in this Budget, so we shall announce next year's as well, and some of the following year's too". That explains why so many goodies could appear. Reading the press briefing, I could not believe my eyes. Time after time, I came across something that had been announced—something that we all thought would appear this year—which, we now find, will be introduced in the Finance Bill in 2000, or, in some cases, in the year after that. The presentation of the Budget involved an enormous number of conjuring tricks, if I may put it like that. It takes one to recognise another.

That is best illustrated by a table at the front of the press briefing. According to the table, the average household will be £380 better off. The implication is that that is a result of this year's Budget. It is necessary to turn to the notes for editors to discover that the measures involved are those announced in both the 1999 and the 1998 Budgets, and that they will take effect over the three years from 1999. Moreover, the national minimum wage will have an impact. Everything has been thrown in to produce the highest possible figure.

The other factor is this. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) pointed out, the Government—as is so common with them, especially in regard to public expenditure increases—have reannounced measures that had already been announced. When I started to look through them, I recognised, as a former Chief Secretary to the Treasury, that the Government had done what we used to do: they had taken some sums out of the year two contingency fund and put them into year one programmes. The number of additional programmes is small. The Government received lots of plaudits from Labour Back Benchers, but their actions are no different from those conducted in the past. We should not be overimpressed by the figures that the Chancellor announced.

It is dangerous for the Chancellor to take a three-year view in a one-year Budget. A possible trap lurks, especially given that the big tax reductions are earmarked for the later years—as usual with the Chancellor. Overall tax reductions total £1 billion in the year ahead and £3.5 billion in 2001—surprise, surprise. However, the danger is that, if the reductions in debt interest fail to materialise in the later years, or, more particularly, if growth, which, again, is expected to rise much more in the later years than this year, fails to materialise, the Chancellor will not be able to introduce additional improvements and benefits on top of those that he has announced. Therefore, he will depend on economic performance worldwide and in this country over three years to implement the Budget fully.

Of course, I welcome some of the measures in the Budget. Even more, I welcome the fact that it does not include measures that previous Labour Chancellors would have been tempted to introduce.

By introducing lower direct tax rates, the small business and enterprise measures, and employee share-owning schemes, the Chancellor is simply following policies and approaches that we Conservatives pioneered over 18 years. Naturally, I am pleased that Labour has been converted to what until now has been an entirely Tory approach, but the Chancellor should not claim, as he did yesterday, that he is embarking on new directions. He has simply recognised the success of the policies that we pursued over 18 years and carried quite a number of them on. It is those that I welcome.

I thought that the small business measures were going to be classic. In fact, I had a great sense of déjà vu because some of them were extremely like the measures that the Conservative Government introduced when I was the Minister with responsibility for small business between 1981 and 1983. However, I looked at the details and too many of the measures were too small and fiddly.

The 10 per cent. corporate tax rate for small businesses looked extremely good until I saw that it was limited to £10,000 profit. Small businesses might be advised not to become incorporated in the first place—the costs of doing so would probably outweigh the benefits of that tax change. That was not apparent in the Budget speech.

One of the features of the Budget is that it has further complicated the tax system, when it should be simplifying it. A range of the measures—all very small, apparently desirable, and which have immediately received a good press—will just complicate the system and not have a big impact.

Mr. Howard Flight (Arundel and South Downs): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. MacGregor: No, I will not, if my hon. Friend will forgive me.

The Government propose to establish the Small Business Service. When I was Minister with responsibility for small business I was responsible for the Small Firms Service. Then we used business people to advise small firms; at that stage, there were not many self-employed and small businesses. We changed the culture successfully over the succeeding years. The service was designed to advise small businesses on practical measures such as marketing, financial control and so on.

I was amused by the highlight of the press release for the Small Business Service:

"The SBS will have a new role helping businesses comply with regulation."

That is like someone saying, "I am going to torture you, but I have good news for you. I have a therapist who will help you to endure the pain."

I have grave doubts as to whether it is right to have publicly financed venture capital funds of the sort announced in the Budget when one of the great successes of the British economy is the growth of venture capital funds from the private sector. The £20 million is peanuts compared with what is being raised from the private sector, including that from venture capital trusts this year, so, again, it sounds like a gimmick.

The main point I should like to make about small businesses is that, overall, all the measures have few pluses when we compare the minus side of companies having to pay at least £4 billion more in tax in each of the next four financial years. The changes that reduce tax are very small compared with the measures introducing those big increases.

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry did not deal with that point in answer to my hon. Friend the Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley). If the Secretary of State looks at pages 112, 113 and 120 of the Red Book, he will see just how big the increases in tax in the corporate sector are in the 1997, 1998 and 1999 Budgets. They include road fuel duties and the changes in advance corporation tax, which, as Sir Clive Thompson, the Confederation of British Industry president, has pointed out, will add considerably to the tax burden of the business sector over the next four years.

I should like to mention only two more points, because I want to keep within the 10-minute limit if I can. I am really bothered that the fuel duty escalator is inflicting real damage to the economy and to rural areas, and is producing very little environmental benefit. It was originally introduced some years ago to deal with the effects of greenhouse gases and to meet the targets under the original Rio de Janeiro convention, which was followed by the Kyoto convention.

It was felt—as a former Secretary of State, I understand the reasoning—that there had to be some reduction in emissions and that pricing was one way in which to achieve that. With the escalation in that fuel tax, however, and given that the Government increased the escalator beyond what the Conservative Government established, and, in their first year of office, doubled the amount of tax by taking a second chunk of it, we have the highest petrol costs in Europe. Tax represents a higher proportion of the cost of fuel in the UK than anywhere else in Europe.

We have overdone it. We are getting to the equivalent of the law of diminishing returns in relation to the environmental benefits. Frankly, people want to use their motor cars. The damage inflicted by the tax on petrol is seen in rural areas in a constituency such as mine. Most of the representations that I receive are fiercely against the escalator. For many people in rural areas, there is no practical alternative to the car for going about their daily business: getting to work or taking children to school. That tax increase, which is bringing in vast revenue, will have serious consequences for such rural areas, on top of the consequences of earlier measures. It is often those on lower incomes who will have to pay the cost—at least £60 more this year—thus removing the benefits of many of the measures to help the lower paid.

The measure's effect on the economy and its competitiveness is also great, as many road hauliers point out. In addition, there has been a savage reduction in the road programme, which I strongly criticise because I believe that there will inevitably be an increase in road transport. That, combined with the fuel duty escalator, means that we are in danger of adding a factor of considerable uncompetitiveness to the British economy. The Secretary of State, who endorses the competitiveness White Paper, should deal with that issue. The time has come to stop the fuel duty escalator—it is one of the most damaging parts of the Budget.

There is not much in the Budget to encourage the saver or more people to take out pensions. That fact, and all the various measures that the Government have taken before, mean that I am not optimistic that we will achieve the increase in pensions that we seek from all age groups, but particularly younger generations.

The removal of £5 billion from pension funds in the Chancellor's first Budget, the impact of which the ordinary person has not yet understood, has helped him to fund quite a few of the tax reductions in the current Budget, but that measure will do long-term damage, disadvantaging those who retire on pensions. It is already taking away money from pension funds and increases the danger that companies will have to make higher contributions and, therefore, face a higher cost to fill that gap.

That problem is exacerbated by the fact that individual savings accounts are no substitute for the TESSAs and PEPs which we left to the Government. Moreover, the capital gains tax reforms are a huge missed opportunity and are not well directed, while non-tax paying pensioners are being treated appallingly by not being allowed to reclaim their dividend income. We can add to that the confusion over the pension schemes created by the Government and the discouragement of traditional occupational pension schemes as a result of their action on pensions and other matters. There is also the problem of personal pensions, for which I do not blame the Government; and the drop in annuity rates, caused partly by actuarial calculations and the fact that people are living longer, and partly by lower interest rates and yield on gilts. The latter factor is becoming a matter of common comment in the press and is bothering many people who are shortly to retire. It is clear that the overall cumulative effect of the various changes since 1997 has been disadvantageous to pensions and will ultimately be disadvantageous to pensioners. I regret that the Budget has done nothing to put that right.

After 24 hours, I now understand—finishing my speech where I started it—why I was bamboozled by the Budget. However, I know also that the reality of the Budget will become apparent when people read its small print and experience its impact. It will look a very different Budget then.

6.20 pm

Mr. Martin O'Neill (Ochil): Yesterday's Budget has done more to help relieve family poverty than probably any other Budget in the past 30 years. The Budget offers, for the first time in many years, a clear chance to those

[Mr. Martin O'Neill]

who are in low-paid jobs, or who have no job at all. It is little wonder that the Child Poverty Action Group said that the Government are genuine in their commitment to reducing family poverty, and that the Budget will take about 700,000 children out of the poverty trap, once and for all.

Such praise for a Labour Government from the Child Poverty Action Group is rich praise indeed. In the past 25 years, that organisation has been among the best-focused critics of Government, regardless of colour. I also well remember the problems that my right hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) caused previous Labour Governments, in the 1960s, through his analysis of how those Governments tried to attack family poverty.

In discussing working people and their life chances, we should start by acknowledging that this Budget will make a bigger difference to them than any other Budget in many years. Certainly in my own constituency of Ochil, the Budget will benefit 10,000 families. The living standards of many pensioner families in my constituency will also improve.

The right hon. Member for South Norfolk (Mr. MacGregor) said—at least I think that he said—that the way in which the money had been allocated to pensioners to help them with heating—the £100 instead of the £20—could have been improved. We are aware of the problems—perhaps he knows about the problems better than most of us do. As I recall, he had occasionally to stand at the Dispatch Box to try to defend schemes that helped some parts of the country, but not others, or helped some people, but not others. We know that, from start to finish, those attempts were a shambles.

We realise also that if we are to deal with an issue such as providing winter fuel payments, it makes a lot more sense to make the benefit universal. The 11,616 pensioners in my constituency who will benefit from the Budget's generous treatment will realise that it is much simpler simply to get the money in hand. Better-off pensioners may do whatever they want with the money—they might even wish to give it to charity. They might choose simply to benefit from the Government's generous provision. However, for the poor pensioners in my constituency, who have been frightened to heat their homes, the prospect of receiving an additional £100 is one not to be missed. I think that most hon. Members appreciate that.

Many hon. Members have already said, quite correctly, that the Budget is about enterprise, work and employment creation. In the past month, my constituency has suffered just over 300 jobs in the textile industry. Although the losses—40 here, 30 there or 25 elsewhere—have been in various companies, the case of one company, Coats Viyella, is perhaps worth mentioning. It supplied Marks and Spencer. Once the contract between the two had been settled, it was assumed that—for a long time to come, if quality was maintained—Marks would buy the blouses that the women at Coats Viyella made.

We know the saga of Marks and Spencer. We are aware of its boardroom battles, and the drop in its share price. We know that it has lost its direction as a company. We know also that it is no longer sufficient for Marks and Spencer to try the old trick of sending back all the stock if there is one flaw in one garment—which was how it used to exercise stock control and get the stock burden off its back. Marks and Spencer now realises that that practice alone is not enough if it wishes to compete with the other high street retailers which import large quantities of stock. Marks and Spencer is therefore going elsewhere for its business.

I am not attacking or criticising Marks and Spencer's investment policy, or making a severe criticism of the wages that employees at Coats Viyella are being paid—although those employees are not overpaid, and some of them could probably benefit from introduction of the national minimum wage. Nevertheless, the fact remains that Marks and Spencer—because of the mess that it is in—is forcing textile jobs out of Britain. Those jobs would have been forced out regardless of which party was in power.

Other textile companies, including those that are operating at the upper end of the market, look not only to the United States, France and Germany as potential customers, but to Taiwan and the countries of east and south-east Asia. The Japanese are not buying a new cashmere sweater, or any other sweater, every time they plan a trip to the golf course. They are not spending money as they were. The situation in those countries is part of the reality in the downturn in demand for United Kingdom textiles.

It comes a bit rich for a Europhobe, such as the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood), to criticise the Government's approach to the negotiations on bananas or the cashmere industry. Certainly, both in Scotland and elsewhere, there is frustration and impatience about the plight of textile workers as a consequence of the banana negotiations. However, let us not forget that the Conservative Government brought the original banana appeal.

There is no disagreement on the banana negotiations between us and the French. There is no disagreement on it between the United Kingdom, France and even Ecuador—which, although it is one of the mainland Latin American banana producers, is not one of Chiquita's customers. Ecuador is just as much under the cosh as the African, Caribbean and Pacific countries are. It is a complicated issue, and it does not do to simplify it, to try to make a party issue of it in the House.

Perhaps the current Administration have a better relationship with the Clinton Administration than the previous Administration had. Although it would not be difficult to improve on the previous Administration's relationship with the United States Administration, we should realise that other forces are also at work. I think that, in a Budget debate on trade and industry, it is harmful to dwell unduly long on the issue.

The Government have been attacked because we have not given away enough money—only £1 billion—and should have given away more. If more money had been given away—I ask Opposition Members to consider this—what would have been the reaction of the Monetary Policy Committee, at its next meeting, when it considers reducing interest rates? Would an interest rate reduction be the consequence of massive fiscal largesse? In today's press, Adair Turner made a reasonable point when he said:

"We asked for a boring budget and this is not a bad result. The fiscal balance is reasonable."

The Monetary Policy Committee has made successive interest rate reductions, to give the country an injection of confidence. In the past month, the MPC's message has

been quite clear: "We are not going to cut interest rates this month, but will let the Government take on the responsibility of increasing business confidence."

When one examines not only the Red Book fine print but the proposals announced today by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, one begins to see from where new businesses will come, and where Government assistance will be available.

Hon. Members have mentioned the new tax rate for small businesses. Let us face it: the majority of businesses that collapse are fledgling businesses. We have to do two things in the United Kingdom: first, help fledgling businesses through the very tough period when they are starting and profits are not very great; and, secondly, remove the stigma of failure from businesses and business people who fail. We have to make people realise that they should get back into business at the earliest possible moment and give them access to the maximum financial support.

I was interested in the point made by the right hon. Member for South Norfolk about the number of names that have been given to small business support organisations. However, we now have a plethora of organisations, something which we did not have when the right hon. Gentleman had responsibility for the issue. Previously, there was the Small Firms Service and nothing else; there was not the support system that we have now. There were occasional bits of support from the chambers of commerce and there was a wee bit from the DTI, but not much else. Nowadays, we have business links, about which we do not disagree across the Chamber.

We need a formal structure that can directly advise Government of the needs of small businesses. I am happy to welcome the establishment of the Small Business Service—I acknowledge that it is another agency, but it is one which is worthy of our support. It will be able to provide small amounts of money and appropriate advice. For businesses beyond the early stages of growth, it will be able to provide appropriate managerial skills supported by funding from outside. Companies that need experienced hands during a worrying period will have access to people who are used to running bigger businesses.

I could go through the whole Budget, but, in the short time at my disposal, I will not abuse the courtesy of the House, so I will touch on one important area. Much is made of our attempts to meet the Rio and Kyoto targets. The carbon taxes are probably a more sensitive way of meeting them than a blank energy target such as the multiplier. The Marshall report was a model of lucidity and fairness.

The Government have picked up the points on fiscal neutrality and they have nodded in the direction of the Institute for Public Policy and Research report, which suggested that if there was a reduction in national insurance contributions from employers, something like a quarter of a million jobs could be created. The Government's proposals strike a reasonable balance between the carrot and the stick. I hope that if the Government's proposals are successful, we can see some easing of the problems facing the road haulage industry.

Most of us who have been in the House for any time know that the road hauliers are the biggest crowd of whingers under the sun. We are largely inured to their pleas and complaints. However, I am almost concerned by what they are saying now. The imposition of tax on fuel is affecting some small hauliers such as those in my constituency who take goods down to England and bring loads back to Scotland.

Mr. John Swinney (North Tayside): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. O'Neill: I am sorry, the hon. Gentleman will appreciate that I do not have time.

Those hauliers find that their business is being taken by lorries coming over from France loaded with fuel that is far cheaper. There is a problem here and we have to balance prices up. We have to recognise that there is a split between the needs of the environment and the needs of the Chancellor.

I should like to think that we could be looking at the question of the trading of permits. That was one of the issues that Marshall considered in his review of energy taxation. It is an interesting market, of which Britain could corner a bit, but, more important, it would give us greater flexibility in emission control. To deal only with one part of the Marshall report is short-sighted.

We see a Government who recognise that we shall no longer be able to depend on the construction of steel mills or massive textile mills to mop up the employment of our people. We need small, effective businesses, and I look forward to continuing debates on e-commerce and the like, which are in their infancy and are only nodded to in the Budget. I know that that is part of the Government's programme. I see the Budget as an important step this year. I welcome it and hope that, by this time next year, we shall see that the small amounts that have been made available—if they were large amounts, the Government would be attacked for providing subsidies—for support and assistance to small businesses and industry in general, and the climate and stability that the Government have created, are the greatest aspects of the Budget. I welcome it.

6.35 pm

Mr. David Chidgey (Eastleigh): I am pleased to see the Secretary of State still in his place. It is unusual to see a Secretary of State here this late in the day. I am grateful, and I compliment him on being here. There are some things in the Budget that we can welcome. *[Interruption.]* In spite of Ministers' interventions from a sedentary position—although we always say with the Minister of State that we are not sure whether he is sedentary or not—I will try to get on with my speech.

The Chancellor has shown some recognition of the difficulties facing our economy, and we welcome that. We obviously applaud the fact that the aims that he sets out for tackling those difficulties are close to our own in many respects. However, aims are one thing and the means to achieve them are another. It is on the means that we have some disagreement with the Chancellor and some concerns. Some of the means that the Chancellor proposes run the risk of being clumsy, unfocused or, at worst, ineffective. That is not only our view but that of a number of respected analysts, not least the Institute for Fiscal Studies which, like us, has repeatedly warned of the problems building up in the economy. In earlier exchanges, the Secretary of State expressed his doubts

[Mr. David Chidgey]

about the IFS view, but we hope that he will tell us why he does not accept that the IFS has genuine reservations about some of the measures in the Budget.

The Chancellor's statement and the Red Book set out many of the problems in our economy in stark relief. They concentrate on poor productivity, low investment in research and development and low skill levels. Earlier today, the Secretary of State issued a statement on competitiveness. It is a good read. I had the opportunity during earlier exchanges to read it, and it was more enjoyable than the speech from the Conservative Front Bench. The statement refers to milestones and target dates for the process, but nowhere can I find targets for outcomes. I put that point back to the Secretary of State. I know that it is difficult, challenging and dangerous for the Government to set down outcomes, but if we are serious about improving our competitiveness, we should ask for a little more from the Government.

The United Kingdom produces less per person than other major economies. As was mentioned earlier, there is a gap of 40 per cent. between our productivity and that of the United States and more than 20 per cent. between our productivity and that of France and Germany. It reflects weaknesses of long standing in our economy. I do not blame the Government for that, but they recognise it, and I expect them to propose some positive measures to do something about it.

We invest less in research and development than our competitors. The United States invests 50 per cent. more as a share of GDP. It is in the Red Book, so it must be true. The United States and Germany invested 40 per cent. more per worker on new capital equipment than we did in the last economic cycle. Those are the stark facts. Those are the problems. Added to that, the skills gap in the United Kingdom is fast becoming a chasm. Twenty-two per cent. of our adult population has poor literacy skills—twice as many as in Germany.

In spite of the Chancellor's protestations to the contrary, he has been forced to admit that the predictions that we made earlier in this Parliament about the plight that manufacturing industry would suffer were right. He now accepts that manufacturing is in recession and that the recession will be quite deep—1 to 1.5 per cent. in 1999. The result will be unemployment in what is normally a skilled sector. Instead of being flat, as the Government predicted, unemployment will rise by about a quarter of a million in the next two years. That is a worrying figure, particularly for those involved. Hon. Members on both sides should show genuine concern about that, not just try to score cheap points. It is a huge problem which Parliament should address.

The Chancellor should not just carry on saying that the problem is all due to the collapse of the global market and the economic failures in Asia, Russia and Latin America. Those factors have not helped—no one is suggesting otherwise—but we export more to the Netherlands than to those three areas put together. Treasury figures show that business in our key export markets is growing at nearly 6 per cent. a year. Sadly, our take-up of that business is growing at only 0.5 per cent a year.

In our key export markets, British business is missing out on opportunities for growth. The reasons are crystal clear—the high value of sterling and high interest rates. Sterling is still 10 per cent. higher than its level when the Government came to office. No wonder the export forecasts of companies in my constituency have dropped by up to 50 per cent. this year. With interest rates 1 or 2 per cent. higher than in the rest of Euro[illegible], the extra cost of investment adds to our uncompetitiveness.

The Chancellor knows what he needs to do. It is the word that dare not speak its name. He knows that a clear commitment to a programme for Britain to join the euro would remove those burdens of an over-valued pound and high interest rates at a stroke. The boost that that would give to British industry would leave the gimmicky tinkering measures in the Budget in the shadows. We would get some real progress straight away.

The Chancellor has set out a wide range of measures that command broad support in principle from various sectors of industry and commerce. However, we must try to determine their impact in practice. We need to quantify and qualify the measures that he has set out. The Government have proposed a new small business service to co-ordinate advice and support small and medium enterprises. We are told that it will be staffed by civil servants and people drawn from business and that it will help business to comply with new Government regulations. That seems like an admission by the Government that the host of new regulations that have been drawn up by one group of civil servants are so complex that we need another group of civil servants to explain to business what to do about them. That is not what the Government intended, but it is beginning to look that way.

Would it not be better to have simpler, clearer regulations that were kept to a minimum? The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and the Prime Minister have both said on the record that they want to modernise and simplify regulations. We should be able to see that happen in practice, rather than passing legislation that adds more regulations to the statute book and more burdens to business.

We need to know how the new Small Business Service will operate. Will it be just another centralised quango controlled from Westminster, or will it get to grips with the needs of small businesses? I hope that the Government will follow the best practice of the American model. It has not been mentioned so far, but I am sure that the Secretary of State is well aware of the practice that I am talking about. The stated objectives of the United States small business administration scheme are to aid, counsel, assist and protect the interests of small business. It aims to ensure that small business gets a fair share of Government purchases and contracts. It makes loans to small business and small investment companies, working with banks and lending institutions to provide loans and venture capital to small firms which cannot secure financing through normal lending means. It is a proactive organisation which is not there just to explain the red tape that the Government have introduced. It is not a centralised organisation. There are 900 small business development centres across the United States servicing more than 500,000 small firms, in partnership with federal, state and local government and community and private sector groups.

The American model works. If we are going to follow their best practice, the Small Business Service must have a network of regional centres working in tandem with the regional development agencies. The emphasis must be on

providing advice and support from the established business community to new entrants, not more red tape from bureaucrats based in Whitehall.

We welcome the Chancellor's proposals to widen employee share ownership. We have long argued for an expansion of share ownership as part of our belief in developing a stakeholder society. Improved access to, and tax relief for, employee share schemes will help to align the interests of employees with those of managers and shareholders. It will help to spread incentives across the board. However, there are some problems to overcome. If new employees are to be offered share ownership, it helps if the share value is rising. In too many cases, the share value of small firms has fallen significantly. Employee share options are not attractive if the option exercise price is higher than the share market value.

An increase in employee share ownership is unlikely on its own to change the City culture of demanding a quick return on investment. As long as institutional investors and investment fund managers are driven by a need to maximise dividends in the short term, there will be little room to invest profits to gain stability and long-term growth. We have to change that culture.

The Chancellor has put forward some novel ideas on company taxation, targeted on reducing the productivity gap. They are aimed at small firms, but they will have little effect on aggregate research and development or investment, because the bulk of both is done by large firms. I asked the Secretary of State earlier about the rationale of targeting the incentive of research and development tax credits on small firms. It will be cheaper to implement than a scheme that applies to all firms, but it will also have much less impact on the economy because, although small firms employing between one and 99 people accounted for 36 per cent. of employment last year, they carried out only 9 per cent. of total business research and development. The Government are hitting the wrong target. Only just over half our small and medium firms are innovators, compared with nearly three quarters of large firms. Any extra incentives should be targeted where there will be most take-up.

The Government want to improve capital allowances for small firms. A move from 25 per cent. first year allowances to 40 per cent. implies an increase in the present discounted value of capital allowances of less than 3 per cent. Given that SMEs account for a relatively small proportion of investment in plant and machinery, the impact on the total level of investment is unlikely to be significant.

The measures on venture capital challenge are interesting. In 1997, UK venture capital firms invested more than £4 billion—£3 billion in this country. However, the investment in early-stage companies was a mere £159 million, of which only £58 million was in start-up firms. We should question the extent to which the provision of tax incentives for the formal venture capital sector affects early-stage financing for start-up firms. Estimates suggest that, in America and the United Kingdom, informal venture capital provides more finance to start-up firms than does the formal sector. We need to learn from that.

We welcome the extra money for individual learning accounts, to go to up to 1 million account holders. However, we have two main concerns. First, what will the administrative costs be? Secondly, how much of that £150 million will result in new training rather than simply a transfer of people who have done the training anyway?

The proposals for greater incentives to recruit high-quality managers come without any argument about whether equity-based remuneration is disadvantaged under the current tax rules, without any evidence of the success of past schemes and without suggesting how the incentives could be used selectively for certain managers without being susceptible to abuse. We need clarification on that. Many hon. Members will remember the effects of the original discretionary scheme, which operated until 1996 and allowed employers to target specific employees rather than offering a scheme to all employees. The previous Government abolished that on the recommendation of the Greenbury committee, whose report argued that there was no case for one form of remuneration to receive preferential tax treatment over another. Are we going through the loop again? We should be clear.

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry has made a great deal of the importance that the Government place on research and development. Yet the examples that he has given to me recently—particularly on one of our most important industries, the aerospace industry—do not tie up with what he says in the House. I am sure that he does not mean to mislead us. Many assume that the aerospace industry comprises a few giant international companies, but the truth is far from that.

It may well be that the industry employs more than 120,000 people, has an annual turnover of more than £15 billion and contributes significantly to our balance of trade. However, three quarters of aerospace firms in the UK are small to medium enterprises. It is vital that their interests in investing and research and development are maintained and encouraged. At present, we invest in aerospace research and development proportionately less than any of our major European competitors.

I have raised this question with the Secretary of State, who has agreed that Government investment through the civil aircraft research and technology demonstration programme has been vital to the industry, and has made a significant contribution to competitiveness in the industry, and to other industries outside aerospace. He has said also that we invest far less than our competitors from DTI funds into the industry.

The Secretary of State could not tell me whether he would maintain the minimal budget of £24 million, which is under threat. I think that I am right in saying that £24 million is about half the level invested in France, and a quarter of the level invested in Germany. We are talking about one of our few remaining world-class industries—providing a bright future that could spread research and development opportunities and synergy through manufacturing—and the Government cannot make up their mind whether to keep the tiny, miserly budget on which the industry depends for innovation and new ideas.

My concerns are that the Budget fails to tackle some of the major concerns of industry. The Government claim that prudence is a virtue—maybe it is, but lacking ambition is not. The Budget tinkers around the edges, and tends to ignore the major issues. My party's priorities are to reduce the burdens on business and to simplify the tax system. We want to introduce annual tax audits to reinforce those aims, and to state clearly the extra costs of administration on business.

[Mr. David Chidgey]

Our aim is to have less regulation, not just better regulation which burdens business. We want to simplify the tax system, and bring in higher tax thresholds—not introduce targeted tax wheezes which will have a limited effect in specific areas. We want a firm commitment to a programme for entry into the euro, which would boost exports and industry at a stroke.

We recognise that the key to Britain's future success lies in improving the level of skills and education of the work force. Rather than playing to the gallery with a penny in the pound tax cut, we would have invested the £5 billion that the Chancellor has given away on education, targeting the money on reducing class sizes, improving standards and creating the skills base that is vital to our long-term economic future.

6.53 pm

Mr. Tom Clarke (Coatbridge and Chryston): Yesterday, the Chancellor of the Exchequer began to challenge the biggest plight of our time in modern Britain—poverty. It coincided with measures aimed at reducing poverty abroad, too, but I begin by talking about domestic issues.

Coming from a constituency such as Coatbridge and Chryston in what was once the industrial heart of Scotland, I know that it is crucial to address some of the problems faced by those people in what, hitherto, have been known in many minds as the forgotten parts of Britain. In those parts, the people have often felt that politics and government have left them behind. Now, I believe that those problems are beginning to be addressed.

We may have begun to turn the corner. It is long overdue, and that makes the job so much harder. We cannot shirk from the challenge that presents itself in areas such as mine. Our people are not the underclass—they are indeed "our people". For too long, we have failed to acknowledge that it is in all our interests to offer hope to the poorest people in this country—as the Chancellor did, quite magnificently, yesterday.

An economy in which a significant proportion of the population is unable to fulfil its potential is far poorer and far less productive. Real hope lies in providing a decent standard of living for all, and real opportunities to all who want—indeed, need—to work. We need to help people who have been left out of too many Budgets for far too long: those who have worked hard in the past; the nation's elderly; those families who seek, but are unable to find, work; and, of course, those children of the poorest families who represent this nation's future.

Those children do the worst in life. Their chances of upward mobility, of something better, are, as they see it, no better than they were decades or many Budgets ago. In the schools, through no fault of their own, they often lack the educational skills that enable them to progress and to improve their life chances. Their health standards are often way below those of their friends. No one—still less a child—deserves that disadvantage.

At last—less than two years into the life of this Government—we have the signs that the Government believe that that change is not only necessary, but possible. Many of the resources were switched yesterday, for the first time in decades, to improve the chances of those very children. My right hon. Friend introduced measures such as the new children's tax credit, which will help all families—that is welcome—but clearly benefits the poorest children most. That is not just welcome, but necessary.

We cannot tolerate a society that is prepared to write off the potential work force through poor education. We need to employ the potential of all our people, and yesterday's commitment to utilise modern technologies in all schools was a major step in the right direction. The new deal for the unemployed was an excellent start, and we are seeing the fruits of the windfall tax on the utilities being shifted to help provide opportunities to those at the opposite end of the financial spectrum. I believe that to be right. If equality of opportunity is to mean anything, everyone must have that equal chance.

We must ensure that all the unemployed have access to skills and to work. That includes those who have worked for many years, but have, unfortunately, lost their job. Large numbers—very large numbers in my constituency—of men and women aged over 50 have, in effect, been driven out of the work force over the past 20 years as redundancy after redundancy has swept up millions of our older workers. At that time, the Government of the day had the benefit of what seemed to be almost inexhaustible revenues from oil, which they used not to invest in capital and jobs, but to pay for massive unemployment, and all the economic and social tragedies that went with that. There are now twice as many men over 50 without jobs as there were 20 years ago, and about 40 per cent. of men aged over 55 have no job at all. The plight of this group is one of the unspoken tragedies of our time. I am extremely glad that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor has recognised their needs. Not only do they need to work; we need their talents, experience and knowledge and their contribution to what ought to be their society as well as ours.

That is why I was particularly pleased about the commitment to provide opportunities for people over 50: a voluntary scheme, money to help with retraining and a minimum income guarantee mean that thousands, not least in my constituency, will be given the chance to relearn the skills needed to re-enter the work force with a much better chance of a real job. Creating employment opportunities will not only promote economic growth but ensure that the benefits of that growth are shared throughout society, through families and local communities that are often crying out for the renewal and regeneration that my constituency and many others desperately need.

People will be grateful for this opportunity, which represents enduring Labour values: the equal wealth of all individuals and the recognition of each person's dignity and potential, with everyone making the most of their talents. That is radical, realistic, right and consistent with the Budget.

We must remember that many people have worked all their days and are now retired. In the past, the pensioners were left out of the picture. It is unacceptable to have pensioners living in poverty, and in many cases they are in dire poverty. They have the right to a decent standard of living. They have earned it by working hard for many years. They do not deserve to live in a situation in which they have to choose between heating their homes and eating.

My right hon. Friend the Chancellor has responded to that situation with the warmth that we would have expected of him. I unreservedly commend the commitment to switch resources to the poorest pensioners, who are to receive a fivefold increase in their winter allowances to help to pay their bills. That is right, and long overdue. In my constituency, it will benefit more than 11,500 pensioners. I have to say with candour that some of them are the very poorest of pensioners. I am delighted that they are being recognised at last.

A minimum income guarantee linked to earnings rather than prices is long overdue and is an imaginative and major step forward in challenging the poverty that nobody deserves to endure; and challenge poverty we must.

Poverty—grinding, demoralising and simply wasteful—has, I am afraid, become the reality for thousands of people of all ages, not only in Scotland, not only in Britain, but throughout the world. It is time that we took action to change that, and change it we can. We live in a time of uncertainty but also of enormous opportunity. We hear that the ever-globalising world economy is creating rapid political, economic and technological changes. That is good. It is also creating vast amounts of wealth, which provides opportunities for all, but we have to ensure that it goes to all.

I am proud that the Government are taking a lead in tackling those issues head on, to ensure that the people of today and tomorrow, here and throughout the world, are given the standard of living that any human being is entitled to expect. We may not hear much talk of redistribution, but I have always thought, like my constituents, that actions speak louder than words. The Government's actions as demonstrated in the Budget are rightly targeted at helping those who really need that help. In that spirit, I welcome it and support my right hon. Friend the Chancellor.

7.4 pm

Mr. David Davis (Haltemprice and Howden): I have some sympathy with the aims of the right hon. Member for Coatbridge and Chryston (Mr. Clarke), but I spoke at some length last year on the mathematics of the working families tax credit, so I shall not follow him down that route and bore the House twice on the same subject. He intimated that the Government had got good headlines out of the Budget, and he was right. However, it is true that Budgets that are praised in March are often pilloried by May, and I suspect that that might be the current Budget's fate.

It is hard to see the wood for the trees—or, perhaps, to take a line from my right hon. Friend the Member for South Norfolk (Mr. MacGregor), the mirrors for the smoke—following the Chancellor's performance yesterday. Perhaps the wisest course is for me to talk a little about the Government's long-term financing and the effects on the real economy.

As the Economic Secretary is on the Treasury Bench, I want to make a public accounting point. The Finance Act arranges that the National Audit Office audits those parts of the Budget that the Chancellor directs. Some assumptions were audited in the past, and others this year. A valid assumption last year is not necessarily valid this year, and the fact that something has been audited in the past does not make it right today. It is rather like having a public company in which the auditors are allowed to audit only those subsidiaries that the finance director picks in any given year.

Will Treasury Ministers consider amending the Finance Act so that the audit of the Budget is under the control of the Comptroller and Auditor General rather than the Chancellor? That might lead to better public finances and more confidence all round.

I have some concerns about the Government's overall financial strategy. Over the decades since the war, every Government have faced—not unreasonably—welfare, health and education expenditure that has grown faster than the economy. That has been funded by taxation going up as a percentage of gross domestic product, but the process has hit a limit. The world's most successful economies have public expenditure of about a third of their overall economy. Ours is about 40 per cent. When the figure gets to 50 per cent., even countries as powerful as industrial giants such as Germany stagger and fail. There is a serious limitation.

Another method of funding is by transfers in spending. For Britain and other countries since the war that has largely occurred by transfers from defence—expenditure on which has halved as a percentage of GDP over the past 30 years from 6 per cent. to about 3 per cent.—primarily to welfare, but also to education and health. We have already reached a minimum for defence spending.

Too many Governments, including even the Government in which I was a Minister, took too much of a peace dividend at the end of the Soviet Union's hegemony. The present Government have gone even further—unwisely, in my view. The proper dividend of peace is peace, not money for other expenditure. That source of funding, then, is also running out.

A further option for funding is privatisation. The previous Government led on that, and Labour opposed it virulently, although it has now been persuaded to support it. Privatisation was a useful source of funds when nationalised industries accounted for 11 per cent. of GDP, but now they account for only 2 per cent., so that source of funding is limited.

What are the Government's solutions? We have heard a great deal about their stealth taxes, and even the Prime Minister admitted last week that the burden of taxation is going up. I will not comment on that, as others will have plenty to say about it. The national asset register is a Government innovation of which I rather approve. It identifies assets that are less than useful to the state and sells them off. In effect, it is the garage sale of the century of public assets. That is nearer to the sale of the family silver and the Canaletto to which Harold Macmillan referred than privatisation ever was. The plan is to raise almost £4 billion a year in that way in the next few years, so it is a significant component of the Government's funding. I think that it is a good idea. However, it will be much harder to deliver on than the Government believe. Indeed, last week a Liberal question identified that only about half a per cent. of the asset base was sold in the past year, so it will be difficult.

I am concerned that the Budget has coupled the policy of stealth taxation with a new policy of covert debt—a potentially dangerous cocktail which could burden our economy.

Mr. Geraint Davies: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Davis: I am afraid not, as I have only 10 minutes in which to speak. Normally, I would love to give way to my colleague on the Public Accounts Committee, but not today.

[Mr. Davis]

That cocktail could burden our economy in much the same way that it did in the 1970s. The pressure on welfare, health and education spending means that the Government will be tempted to finance much of their capital expenditure through the private finance initiative. That method avoids large sums of capital expenditure having to be found and spreads the costs over the life of the project.

The PFI has many virtues—after all, it was a Conservative policy in the first instance. The private sector brings good management, innovation and enterprise to the provision of public services. Properly used, it is a good thing, but the temptation will be to provide public services and public service capital assets on the never-never. Just as someone who accumulates hire purchase payments carelessly loses control of his or her financial affairs, the Government could do the same. I draw the attention of the House to the fact that the Red Book shows that they are planning about £11 billion in PFI expenditure. Every time that the Government undertake a PFI project, they commit tomorrow's taxpayer's money. If that is done imprudently, it will shackle the hands of future Governments every bit as tightly as though they had borrowed billions of pounds. Just like unfunded pension liabilities, that could grow to be an intolerable burden on the nation's finances. It concerns me that we may have a Chancellor who is living for the moment and forgetting his responsibilities to future generations in that respect.

The Chancellor may be behaving responsibly—I simply do not know—but to prevent that scenario he must set an explicit limit on how much capital expenditure he finances on the never-never. If he does not do so, his golden rule on capital expenditure will be meaningless. Clearly, stealth taxation accompanied by covert debt mean that today's expenditure will be financed not merely out of tomorrow's pensions funds, which we all know about, but out of tomorrow's taxes. That would be irresponsible and improper, and I urge the Government to avoid it by having proper rules to govern that type of expenditure.

On the longer-term aspects of the financial package that make up the Budget, rather than the details that my hon. Friends mentioned, this year, because there has been a change, assumptions relating to the labour market have been audited by the National Audit Office.

Incidentally, I broadly welcome the measures for the employment of people aged 50 and above—not merely because that decade is facing me, but because those people are socially valuable. In many ways, I think that the measures will be more effective than some of those aimed at younger members of the work force. The 50-year-old-plus man or woman is a valuable member of society and could continue to give a great deal.

However, within the labour market issues and assumptions in the Budget, the largest reduction in expenditure over the Red Book period—about £9 million—results from lower social security payments. That reduction arises because last year, not this year, the Department of Social Security told the Treasury that its assumptions for social security expenditure looked pessimistic. Fewer people were claiming income support and the job seeker's allowance than had been expected and fewer people were turning up for interviews. Why? It is a result of the reforms that were initiated by the Conservative Secretary of State for Social Security in the previous Government. I will give this Government credit: where they have continued and toughened up those reforms, as they have occasionally done, they have reinforced that case.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord): Order. The right hon. Gentleman's time is up.

7.14 pm

Mr. Michael J. Foster (Worcester): I shall begin by referring to the car industry in the west midlands. The area is extremely reliant on that industry—and not merely on the huge car factories, such as Rover at Longbridge. There are many smaller component factories, such as Metalcastings Ltd. in my constituency, which is a classic example of a small manufacturing company that relies heavily on the Rover Group as a customer. I speak as a member of the third generation in my family to work in a car factory. I urge the Government to do what they can to support Rover on behalf of the many component manufacturers in my constituency and elsewhere in the west midlands.

The car industry is not a lame duck. It is not a primary industry with low profits, but one capable of being highly value-added, with high skills and a high-tech base. The industry has huge export potential and it should be encouraged. I ask the Government to ignore the editorial in *The Daily Telegraph* last month, which stated that "BMW should close Longbridge" and that

"Subsidies simply do not work".

The small and medium-sized enterprises that rely on the thriving car industry will welcome the Budget because it will undoubtedly make it more profitable to invest, but they also need a secure business environment in their sector so that they have the confidence to do so. I am pleased to note that the Government have recognised that. The Red Book refers to key investment mechanisms and goes on to mention spill-over effects, where one firm's investment creates new growth opportunities for other firms. That is perhaps best seen in the development of clusters of firms, where the opportunity for a particular firm to make profits depends crucially on the presence and prior investment of other firms. Rover, Longbridge, could be a classic case of that, if it gets the grant aid from the Government.

On the proposals for small businesses, I am pleased that the Chancellor has had time to read the December 1998 small firms survey that was conducted by Hereford and Worcester chamber of commerce before he finalised the Budget. Clearly, this Chancellor has listened to what those small firms had to say in the survey. The new rate of reduced corporation tax for small business start-ups and the lower rate of corporation tax mean that retained profits are more available for investment and that there is a greater reward for enterprise. A feature of the United Kingdom economy is that small firms rely heavily on retained profits for their investment plans. Indeed, the survey found that 56 per cent. of the small firms used only retained profits for their investments and more than half thought that it was their most important source of finance.

The extension of the 40 per cent. first-year capital allowance adds to what previous Budgets have done to give incentives to invest. Some people argue that the

measure affects only the timing of the investment, making marginally profitable projects more viable. However, coupled with the economic stability that has been brought about by Bank of England independence, prudent fiscal management, an end of boom and bust and the positive growth forecast from the Treasury, that continued tax relief may affect the volume and not merely the timing of the investment.

Of special note is the small business service and the extra help with venture finance. In the survey that I mentioned, about 80 per cent. of respondents claimed that they needed more help from the Government in that area, 36 per cent. wanted easier access to the small firms loan guarantee, 35 per cent. wanted the Government to promote a wider range of finance options, and a further 36 per cent. wanted easier access to financial information and advice. Those small businesses will thank the Chancellor for his Budget. Those are the findings of those who are active within the chamber of commerce. Imagine what they would be for those who are not active members—those who are perhaps too busy to seek such advice.

I particularly welcome the help for automated payroll support. I spent six years teaching night school students how to do manual payroll calculations and I can assure the Government and every small business out there that computerisation works. That is a further example of the Government's reduction of the burdens on business by enabling businesses to process a piece of essential work. It adds to the already enlightened approach that the Government have taken in bringing together the Contributions Agency and the Inland Revenue, an act which was welcomed in the survey to which I have referred.

I have a few remarks to make on employee share schemes. I worked in the car industry for a company that gave employee shares to the workers—me included—and I saw at first hand the real interest that employees began to take in the financial success of the company. They love sharing in the good times. It is interesting to see workers on the production lines in the huge car factories of the west midlands scanning the newspapers to find out the daily share price of their holdings. They also quiz their line managers on what has caused particular movements. That interest and involvement should be admired and encouraged.

I taught accountancy at a college, and that included teaching about labour remuneration schemes—or new labour remuneration schemes as I used to call them. Employee share schemes clearly show a sense of partnership and team work in a business. They enhance other productivity measures that the Government are keen to see in industry. In particular, they will enhance new investment opportunities that will result from reduced tax levels.

Coupled with the works council directive and our fairness at work legislation, the Budget will equip the United Kingdom for the 21st century with workers who know that they will achieve more working together than acting individually within an organisation. The employee share scheme meets all the basic criteria of a good remuneration package. It is fair to all employees, because they are all eligible. It has a regular reward because dividends can regularly be converted into more shares. It is certainly easy to operate, and it focuses on long-term commitment to a company.

The three-year commitment if full tax advantage is to be gained will mean that, at a time when many small businesses are suffering from skill shortages, workers may commit themselves for longer to particular organisations. That will reduce the high costs of labour turnover that small firms face.

The Budget is good for business. It lowers business taxes, it improves investment incentives, it takes measures to improve productivity and it gives extra training opportunities. All that has been done the new Labour way. Employees and employers will be able to work together, and the Budget will complement existing Government policies. In short, a Government of joined-up thinking have produced a joined-up Budget.

7.23 pm

Sir Raymond Whitney (Wycombe): The hon. Member for Worcester (Mr. Foster) believes that the Government are good for business. I fear that he will be disappointed in future. I am sorry about that, and I shall tell the House my reasons for thinking so later.

We are accustomed these days to the phrase "spin doctor". It is a feature of modern politics, and yesterday proved that it has become a feature of economics and Budget presentation. The Chancellor of the Exchequer, however, qualifies less as a doctor of spin than as a doctor of obfuscation. It was he who gave us the famous phrase about neo-classical endogenous growth theory, and he has talked about the symbiotic relationships between growth and much more. He has progressed from that to the performance that he gave yesterday: the words were simpler and crisper, but they were no less misleading.

We must carefully consider the reality beneath the golden words of the Chancellor. Two points may be briefly made. The first concerns the tax position and the reality that my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Hague) so successfully exposed in his exchanges with the Prime Minister today. The reality is that Labour's first two Budgets involved an increase in taxes of nearly £41 billion, and in the coming year taxes will rise by more than £7 billion. Stealth taxes are an important theme, and we should hear much more about them.

The second reality obscured by the Chancellor's carefully phrased delivery was the matter of the golden legacy, on which we have already heard some exchanges this afternoon. It is a sensitive point with the Government. The going concern that took over in May 1997 will of course always reject the proposition that the Conservative Government left a golden legacy, so I must draw Labour's attention to *The Times* yesterday, in which Anatole Kaletsky wrote:

> "The real authors of Britain's present economic prosperity—and of the present Chancellor's good fortune—were Kenneth Clarke and Norman Lamont."

Mr. Kaletsky points out that automatic revenue growth is built in to the British system, which is ungainsayable, but which has not been said by Treasury Ministers, who seem always to try to reject a legacy that truly was golden.

Kaletsky also rightly makes a proviso—that the economy must not be in recession if automatic growth is to occur. That is one of the dangers that the Chancellor's seemingly solid edifice stands precariously against. In his projections for the next two or three years, the Chancellor

[Sir Raymond Whitney]

still relies on growth of 1 to 1.5 per cent., which is about twice the average forecast of well-respected economic commentators throughout the country.

There is surely no doubt that manufacturing industry is already in recession, or that it has been seriously damaged. Many of yesterday's measures will increase the damage to that unhappy sector. We have heard quoted many times the assertion of Sir Clive Thompson, president of the Confederation of British Industry, that an increase of £20 billion in business taxes has already been inflicted.

Business does not face merely taxes, of course. A bureaucratic burden is also being heaped on industry. I am not prepared to enter a Dutch auction between the present Government and their predecessor about whether there have been 3,000 more documents or 2,500, but we all know that there have been too many of them. That is certainly the view of British industry, and many quotations to that effect can be adduced.

Another danger manifest in the Budget is the temptation to meddle. In *The Times* today, Anatole Kaletsky cites the interventions that will burden and harass industry, saying:

"Individually all these may be small measures, but taken together they seem to represent a covert triumph for the traditions of interventionist economic meddling and social engineering that appeared to be buried with old Labour."

That is true, and it is being said by an independent economic commentator rather than coming only from Conservative politicians. The Labour party still believes that everything can be done from Whitehall. We heard bland words from the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry about the necessarily limited role of Government, but by their deeds shall know them. As the Budget works out in the months to come, I fear that it will become all too clear that it spells bad news for industry.

There is another danger. The Budget will make it harder to continue the downward pressure on interest rates. If anything, it might put pressure on interest rates to rise again, when set against the inflation target. We all know that if that happens, the impact on the pound, on our export potential and on business and jobs will be hugely negative, coming on top of an already difficult situation for British exporters. That would have negative consequences should we approach membership of European monetary union, although I do not wish to go too deeply into that subject from the Conservative Benches tonight.

Like many Budgets in the past, this Budget received a warm reception on the day and the day after, but that means that in six months' time there will be wailing and gnashing of teeth. This will be a classic example of such a Budget.

7.31 pm

Gillian Merron (Lincoln): It used to be the case that the Chancellor wore the heavy mantle of chief distributor of misery, entrusted with executing Budget provisions in a limited and predictable manner. However, now the headlines proclaim, "Flash Gordon", "Everyone's a winner" and "Brilliant". How Budgets, Governments and Chancellors can change!

The Budget is supported by good housekeeping, including a major reduction of the inherited national debt and the costs associated with it and a determined yet practical reduction of unemployment and its associated social security, health and other costs, none of which properly serve the individual or the economy. However, I noted that the Chancellor again failed to realise the fears of George Bernard Shaw, who wrote some time ago:

"Give women the vote, and in five years, there will be a crushing tax on bachelors."

I wondered whether I should be generous and say that even Conservative Members would not have added that to their intended list of items such as food, books and children's clothing that were under threat of imposition of VAT, had the Conservatives won the election.

I especially welcome the Budget's impact on my constituency of Lincoln. More than 11,000 families will benefit from the further increase in child benefit plus the new children's tax credit. That will mean that the Labour Government, since coming to power, will have doubled the financial support available to children. More than 16,000 of Lincoln's pensioners will benefit from an increase in the winter allowance from £20 to £100 which, together with the other measures including the reintroduction of free eye tests—I strongly supported the local Age Concern group's campaign on that issue—and the lifting of many pensioners out of tax liability, will provide a better deal for pensioners than they have been used to for some time.

To achieve all that, support for business and enterprise must be a priority. I know that many in the business community will be pleased by the Government's practical responses to their needs, which Labour has listened to for some time. The business community will welcome the Budget announcements, including the tax reductions and credits, the new small business service and new proposals to increase share ownership, to help to increase productivity. Lindum Construction in Lincoln proudly announced such a scheme some time ago and I believe that it will be successfully replicated around the country.

I recently addressed business representatives at a busy chamber of commerce lunch. In discussion afterwards, I heard how business people genuinely felt a sense of stability that, slowly but surely, is rebuilding the confidence lost in the Tory years of boom and bust. Such confidence supports an American parent company's decision to establish a new manufacturing site in Lincoln. A year ago, I was pleased to welcome Sermatech UK to its new Lincoln facility, which employs some 33 people. Sermatech established that plan in partnership with Alstom Gas Turbines, which—incidentally—supplies the turbine that powers the Whitehall energy efficiency scheme. No. 10, the Ministry of Defence and many other key buildings rely on Lincoln's skill and technology for heat and light. That is a powerful position to hold. Sermatech has a positive future and I believe that it will be enhanced by the final Budget of the millennium.

This is a Budget for work. Lincoln has seen a steady reduction in unemployment, which has fallen by 15 per cent. in the past year. The new deal is part of that, and I am especially pleased that the over-50s will have an opportunity to benefit from a new programme to get them back to work so that they are not left on the scrap heap. Anglia Water last year invited me to support its 37 new deal young recruits and their mentors in Lincoln. I was

delighted to hear that since my visit, Gary Peck, a trainee leakage operative, has obtained a permanent job as an assistant surveyor. He is just one example of the powerful effect of a partnership initiated and funded by the Government. Gary's view is:

"I wouldn't be in this position if it wasn't for all the help I've been given."

He is a bright young man with great potential: he just needed the opportunity of the new deal to get him into work. There are many more like him, who will benefit from the Government's determination to get people into work, including those who find it hardest to get their feet on the employment ladder.

On education, I especially welcome the £470 million investment to broaden access to technology for both children and adults. I was delighted to see that principle already in action at Ermine junior school in my constituency, which has a dedicated room with IT equipment for that very purpose. Especially impressive is the availability of the new technology to those in the local residential home. The friendships and exchange between the children and the elderly people provide an example of true and meaningful education.

I especially welcome the allocation of £2,000 to every school for books. I welcome it for the contribution it will make, but also for its directness. We all know what the money is, what it is for and where it is going. The path of previous allocations of extra funding for education from this Government has not been so clear in my constituency.

I also welcome the recent intervention by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment who has written to Lincolnshire county council to urge it to ensure that the additional Government provision is spent on education and, especially, to support schools so that resources can be spent directly on raising standards. Not surprisingly, the Conservative leadership of the county council takes issue with that point, but the issue is not only how much is spent on education—important though that is—but where it is spent and what it is spent on. I know from parents, teachers and governors—whether at Ancaster, Sir Francis Hill or any other school in Lincoln—that the education priorities voted for by the people in Lincoln and across the country at the general election are not being met in my constituency.

In contrast, yesterday's Labour Budget is just what the people voted for on 1 May 1997. It is a Budget which speaks of how all players, from the company director, through the NHS manager, to the pensioner or parent managing a household, can see and feel the links to and benefits from each other. I welcome the Budget with enthusiasm. It is a better deal for Lincoln and a better deal for Britain.

7.39 pm

Mr. David Prior (North Norfolk): As I listened to the Chancellor's Budget statement, my impression was of massive complacency, and that same complacency was exhibited by the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry this afternoon. There was more than a touch of Dr. Pangloss about both statements. Where have the Chancellor and the Secretary of State been for the past year? Do they have industrial companies in their constituencies? Are they aware that orders, sales and profit margins are being squeezed, and that many manufacturing and engineering companies are laying off employees?

Almost worse is the impression that neither right hon. Gentleman has grasped the lesson that the country had to learn so painfully in the 1980s: we operate in a global marketplace, so we have to be the best by the best world standards. It is because this country embraced those two lessons that we were able to attract so many foreign companies during the 1980s and the early 1990s. The benefits of that investment, such as improved working practices and product quality, are still with us today.

Whereas the challenge in the 1980s was for this country to catch up with Europe, especially our competitors in Germany and France, today's challenge is no longer confined to Europe; we have to be better than our competitors in the United States, Asia, south America and other parts of the world. It is becoming increasingly widely recognised that the European way of doing business is not competitive. Take the case of Germany today: many large industrial companies are disinvesting from Germany and reinvesting in new manufacturing capacity in the countries of eastern Europe and south America.

We have to judge the Budget against that background because only if we get right the fundamental decision about what sort of economy we want in this country will we be able to afford in the long term decent pensions and public services and to achieve a high level of employment. Getting that judgment right is crucial, but I believe that, as we adopt an increasingly dirigiste style of government, with bigger government, more interference and more regulation, we build a higher costs base that will eventually lead to protectionism in Europe.

The lead measure in the Budget was the reduction in the headline rate of corporation tax. I welcome that, but have to point out to Ministers that the problem currently facing British industry and commerce is not the level of corporation tax, but the fact that our costs are too high to enable us to compete. Our regulatory costs, employment costs, transport costs, energy costs and administrative or bureaucratic costs have become too high.

Let me give a few examples. Take inspection costs in our abattoirs, which are going through the roof because of new European Union regulations, or the hygiene and welfare standards imposed on our pig and livestock producers. Take the effect of the minimum wage on a company in my constituency that employs a lot of casual workers and now faces the bureaucratic problems of filling in all the forms needed to comply with the minimum wage. Take the effect of the working time directive, which has had a big impact on companies that work in shifts, especially those that have night shifts. Take the effect of the increased recognition of trade unions. Most damaging are the new rules on unfair dismissal, which will deter many companies from taking on new employees. Finally, the social chapter is, in effect, a means of making all EU countries operate at the same level of uncompetitiveness.

When they took office, the Labour Government inherited a culture of business and entrepreneurialism—a culture which had changed dramatically during the 1980s and 1990s. We had embraced the new competition and were able to compete throughout the world. We have now taken a wrong turn, however: just as we were about to

[Mr. David Prior]

embrace success, we have gone off in the wrong direction, towards a more highly regulated dirigiste form of government. I had hoped that the Budget would demonstrate that the Government had taken on board the lessons of the 1980s and early 1990s but, sadly, they have not.

7.44 pm

Mr. Stephen Hepburn (Jarrow): I shall concentrate my remarks on the effects of the Budget on the northern region and the constituency that I represent. I shall explain how the Government's actions are continuing to improve the quality of life of the people in my area, by rewarding work and supporting families. However, first, I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Chancellor and his team and to the team at the Department of Trade and Industry who have worked since the beginning of this Parliament to bring about that better standard of life for the many and not the few. The many are the people on low incomes and middling incomes—the real wealth creators in this world.

The great thing about the Budget is that it continues that work in a spectacular way, by recognising and rewarding the central aspects of life—families and work—and putting great investment in public services. Families are given more by increasing child benefit to £15; 12,000 families in my constituency benefit from that. That increase plus the new child tax credit mean that families will be hundreds of pounds better off and that the youngsters in those families will have a better start in life.

The £40 billion for public services, such as health and education, was promised some time ago, but the fact that it was widely discussed before the Budget statement should not take off the shine. The importance of public services to the poor, who cannot afford private health services or to send their children to private schools, cannot be stressed too strongly. The modernisation of my local accident and emergency unit will be greatly appreciated; and the £2,000 for every school for books will be gratefully received by hard-pressed teachers and governors. The Budget also delivers a better deal for pensioners by increasing the winter fuel allowance from £20 to £100 which, taken together with the earlier cut in VAT on fuel and the minimum income guarantee, means that more than 16,000 pensioners in my constituency will be hundreds of pounds better off.

It is significant that the Budget rewards work by building on the new deal, which has already had an impact in Jarrow where it has halved both youth unemployment and long-term unemployment. The minimum wage will make hundreds of people better off, as will the 10p starting rate of income tax and the future cut in the basic rate from 23p to 22p. Taken together, all those measures mean that there will be more money for people to spend in the area. Individuals and families will be better off, with the result that the local economy will receive the boost it needs. The stronger the local economy, the more jobs are provided for local people.

We in the northern region, in the Jarrow constituency and on the Tyne, still rely to a great extent on engineering. We welcome the service industries, which have created valuable jobs, and we welcome the high-tech industries, because they represent the future and we have to look to the future. However, we have to remember that balance is important in any economy, so I pay tribute to the employers and the workers in the north who have survived the bad times—the boom and bust under Tory rule.

It is a disgrace that the average age of a skilled worker on the Tyne is now 50. It is more important than ever that Tyneside and Swan Hunter get the Ministry of Defence work for which tenders are currently being submitted. If the £130 million tender for Royal Navy supply ships is accepted, work will be provided for hundreds of skilled men for many years to come. Perhaps more important are the opportunities that that will create for youngsters to learn skills and carry on the good work that made Tyneside great.

In my area, small businesses were set up as the larger firms closed down. Redundant workers used their skill and determination to provide a living, not only for themselves and their families, but for their work colleagues, whom they took along when they set up the business. Although many have gone to the wall over the years because of problems in the economy, some have survived. They have told me that they welcome the new climate of economic stability; they welcome the new deal, which has given them opportunities to employ people who they might not have employed in the past; and they welcome the cut in the small business tax rate to 10p.

With mortgage rates at a 35-year low, tax incentives to work and massive investment in public services—£40 million has been identified—people in the south of England must be asking why they did not listen before to those in the north and cast their vote for the Labour party. I am pleased that the good people of the south have now listened to those in the north and cast their vote with sense. I know that the Labour Government will not let them down: they are providing jobs and a good standard of living for all the people of this country.

7.50 pm

Mr. John Townend (East Yorkshire): We live and operate in a global economy, and this country is very affected by the world economic situation. I find it strange, therefore, that the subject is dealt with only scantily in the Red Book, which devotes a mere two pages to it. I believe that the Chancellor's forecasts are too optimistic when one considers the possible dangers to the world economy in the year ahead. The danger worldwide is no longer inflation but deflation. The problem is that few people alive today—bankers, politicians and business men—have lived through and experienced deflation and know how to deal with it.

Asia is still in difficulties. Japan is, at best, bumping along the bottom and, at worst, heading for even more deflation. Europe's economy is weakening and unemployment is rising. The current world economy is being kept on the rails by the motor of the American economy. This situation cannot last indefinitely because of the growing United States trade deficit. The US cannot, and will not, be willing to be the importer of last resort for ever.

If there is a financial crisis in Brazil—all commentators accept that the Brazilian economy remains fragile—it could spill over into the rest of Latin America. If the American stock market were to fall sharply, it could cause a drop in consumer demand and the world economy would move quickly into recession and deflation unless the European Union was prepared to change its policy to

allow an increase in growth and open its markets. By announcing next year's tax reductions now, the Chancellor has become a hostage to fortune. I do not believe he has taken sufficient account of the dangers.

I turn now to a constituency matter: the burden on the motorist. I represent a rural constituency where people must use cars to travel to work and the shops and to take their children to school. Once again, the Government have used the injudicious commitment given by the Deputy Prime Minister at Kyoto as an excuse for another pernicious attack on the motorist. Fuel tax now constitutes 85 per cent. of the cost of the petrol that we buy—that is the highest percentage in the European Union. I do not know whether the Government are proud of the fact that, since Labour came to power, British tourists, for the first time in history, can fill their tanks more cheaply in Calais than in Dover.

This is an anti-motorist Government, and I am delighted that the Leader of the Opposition indicated in his response to the Budget a change in our policy. I have long advocated abandoning the concept of an automatic escalator for petrol tax. With my right hon. Friend's statement, we at last have a political party in this country that will fight for a fair deal for the motorist.

The policy has proved an absolute failure on conservation grounds. People have not given up their cars or used them substantially less. My constituents have no alternative: they must pay the tax with money taken from elsewhere in the family budget. The poorest motorists suffer the most, particularly the poor who live in the country. This tax also hits the family because many families' main pleasure is the family car: taking the family out for a day trip is often the highlight of the week.

The change in the vehicle tax does not help the family. The Chancellor clearly has no experience of such things. It is impossible to get two or three growing teenagers and all their luggage into a car of 1,000 or 1,100 cc. Has the Chancellor not heard of the family saloon? This tax hits the family and the countryside.

The Government are proud of their Budget policies for small business. Unlike most Labour Members, I have owned and operated medium-sized enterprises for the past 40 years. I have looked carefully at the Budget proposals, and I have discovered that 98 per cent. of small businesses will get very little. For those who receive something, the benefits will pale into insignificance compared with the cost of implementing the 2,000 additional regulations introduced by the Government through the social chapter, the working time directive, the "Fairness at Work" White Paper, the national minimum wage, the new hygiene regulations, the Sex Discrimination Act 1975 and the Race Relations Act 1976. The list goes on and on.

Most Labour Members have never run a fish and chip shop and they have no idea of the burden that such regulations impose on small businesses. It is not just the financial cost, but the enormous amount of management time that is devoted to such matters that should be spent on productive development of the business.

I shall give an example from my constituency. Mr. Simpson has been a butcher and his family have operated an abattoir for four generations. He spent £30,000 in order to comply with the hygiene regulations introduced by local authority environmental health officers. New regulations will now be imposed from 1 April. Mr. Simpson tells me that when he slaughters for six hours on Monday—he slaughters once a week—three staff members are present as well as up to five members of the inspection staff, for whom he has to pay. Mr. Simpson will be forced to close his business from 1 April.

Labour Members have made much of the 1p cut in corporation tax for small business. A company that makes £50,000 a year will save £500. Apart from the cost of regulations, that sum will be more than gobbled up by the increase in the cost of petrol. For most businesses, motoring costs are a major expense. Most goods are delivered to customers by road, and sales representatives must have cars to do their jobs. The increase in the tax on DERV will be badly received by the haulage industry. As many of my right hon and hon Friends have said today, more and more hauliers are flagging out their trucks. While returning to my constituency by train last week, I spoke to a man who owns a haulage business in Wakefield, who told me that he had just sent 20 vehicles to be registered in Luxembourg.

The tax increases will also be a bitter blow to agriculture, which is important to my constituency and which is suffering badly at present.

The company car has also come in for another battering this year. The reduction of the rebate for high mileage and the abolition of the reduction for cars that are more than four years old mean that an owner could pay an extra £776 for a five-year-old car worth £19,000 that does about 10,000 miles a year. The changes will hit particularly badly sales representatives who work hard and do high mileage. That is most unfair, and represents another attack on middle England.

My right hon. and hon. Friends have talked about stealth taxes. I draw the attention of the House to the increase in tobacco duty. Hon. Members have probably forgotten that there was an increase on 1 January this year of 21p per packet. Less than three months later, there has been another increase of 17.5p. I do not smoke—I think it is a foul habit—but I think that that increase will simply encourage smugglers. Smuggling is no longer an amateur operation: it has been taken over by professional criminals. Many people are shifting from trafficking in hard drugs to trafficking in cigarettes. That is not the way to deal with the problem—it should be addressed by gradually reducing taxes.

The price of sparkling cider has increased by £1.02 a bottle. That will damage the British cider industry. What is the reason for the increase? The Government have given in to pressure from the Italian Government, who believe that cider competes unfairly with cheap Italian sparkling wine. If the Government wanted to deal with the problem, they should have reduced the duty on sparkling wine to the level of that on ordinary wine. There is no reason why we should pay a tax on bubbles as well as face increased cider prices.

This Budget is bad for middle England and destroys the Government's claim to be the party of the middle classes. Those on above-average pay will pay more national health insurance, as will the self-employed. Home owners will lose MIRAS and pay more stamp duty when they move house. Middle England's company car taxes have increased dramatically. The married couples allowance has been abolished, and private and corporate pensions have been attacked yet again. The penny will start to drop with middle England. The Budget, which is bad

[Mr. John Townend]

for business, agriculture, the countryside, the motorist, the smoker and, above all, the hard-working married man who works long hours to provide a better standard of living for his wife and children, will in time prove to be bad for Labour.

8 pm

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas (Harrow, West): I join other Labour Members in congratulating my right hon. Friend the Chancellor and his team on yet another excellent Budget. He impressively balanced the need for radical new measures to promote enterprise and the need to deliver additional support to those who need it most, while at the same time not putting at risk our hard-won economic stability. The 16,500 pensioners in my constituency will be particularly delighted by the £1 billion package of extra help for pensioners, especially the uprating by average earnings of the minimum income guarantee.

In Harrow, we are lucky to have high numbers of people in work and a high proportion of small businesses. The new 10p rate for income tax and the 1p cut in the basic rate, coupled with my right hon. Friend's measures to stimulate investment and growth in the small business sector—rewarding, as they do, hard work and entrepreneurial talent—will be extremely well received.

I want to concentrate my remarks on the Government's welcome commitment to the introduction of a business energy tax in April 2001. I never believed that environmental protection and economic growth were direct opposites. I also never had much confidence in the arguments and mindset of those on the right or the hard left of British politics, who seemed to believe that sustainable development and enterprise were at different ends of the policy spectrum. There is clearly a third way which marries environmental aims with economic goals. Economic instruments such as the business energy tax which stimulate effective business and market responses to the environmental challenges which we face are examples of sensible new Labour policies.

Over the past few weeks, Labour Members have had to endure much windy piffle-paffle from Conservative Members about the Government's attitude to Select Committees. The centrepiece of the Environmental Audit Committee's response to the last two pre-Budget reports has been to call for the implementation of a business energy tax. I congratulate the Government on their sensible response to those reports. Such a tax will be an important tool in meeting the targets that were set at Kyoto for reducing greenhouse gas emissions and will clearly encourage industry to conserve energy and switch to much cleaner forms of energy.

Crucially, the commitment to make the levy fiscally neutral will also protect business competitiveness. The notice that has been given and the consultation that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor has announced will give business time to plan and an opportunity to work with the Government to decide on the details of the levy.

As countries across the world consider how they will meet their climate change commitments, the introduction of a business energy tax is increasingly recognised as a useful and essential tool. Six European countries have already introduced an energy or carbon tax since 1990, and Germany and Italy are working on similar proposals.

In the middle of the next decade, carbon emissions are projected to start increasing again in the UK. According to the projections of the climate change consultation paper, the proportion of the six Kyoto greenhouse gases accounted for by CO_2 will rise from 78 per cent. in 1990 to 84 per cent. by 2010. As my right hon. Friend the Chancellor made clear yesterday in his statement, we are locked in, rightly, to a legally binding target of a 12.5 per cent. reduction in our carbon dioxide emissions.

Labour Members recognised a long time ago the necessity of reducing carbon dioxide emissions—hence our manifesto commitment to reduce them by 20 per cent. That is an ambitious goal, and it is a recognition not only of the present Kyoto targets, but, more importantly, of the stringent requirements that are likely to follow the first round of the agreement.

Industry produces 40 per cent. of those carbon emissions in the UK and will, along with other sectors, have to make a significant contribution towards meeting climate change targets. A signal needed to be given to the whole of industry that energy efficiency and the use of renewable energy supplies had to be a priority in its future investment decisions.

In an ideal world, I would have preferred the tax to be levied according to carbon content, rather than pure energy usage, but I recognise the difficulties that would arise in trying to calculate accurately the carbon content of electricity, as well as the inevitable complexity and resulting uncertainty that it would introduce.

I welcome the comment in the consultation document that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor will keep under review the possible exemption of energy supply from small-scale renewable generators, albeit if pool reform allows. Studies cited by Lord Marshall's report demonstrate that energy taxes effectively produce cuts in emissions. The Swedish environmental protection agency has estimated that the introduction of its carbon tax has reduced emissions by 2 per cent. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor estimated that the levy alone would save about 1.5 million tonnes of carbon a year by 2010. That, together with the other measures that he announced, would achieve an overall reduction of 3 million tonnes of carbon, which is equal to about 2 per cent. of Britain's emissions. That would be a significant contribution to our climate change targets.

There is no reason per se why a business energy tax should hurt Britain's competitiveness. I have already referred to the fact that many of our European neighbours are implementing or considering proposals for an energy tax. That tax will not place Britain at a competitive disadvantage with our major trading partners.

I welcome my right hon. Friend's announcement that the revenues from the levy will be recycled back to business through the national insurance system, ensuring that there is no increase in the overall tax burden for business. That clearly demarcates the tax as one for environmental purposes and ensures that it will be judged on that basis.

The announcement that energy-intensive industries can seek voluntary agreements to reduce their levy in return for undertaking energy-efficient measures is clearly sensible. The energy tax in Denmark works in a similar fashion to protect the competitiveness of its energy-intensive industries, and has lower tax rates for companies in those sectors that agree to invest in

energy-efficient measures. That is in line with the aims of our levy to reduce emissions by focusing on changing industry behaviour, not loading extra costs on business or raising revenue for the Treasury.

Research quoted in Lord Marshall's report found considerable scope for cost-effective energy-saving measures in all sectors, including those identified as energy intensive. Another important feature of the Danish energy tax is the strong support given to small businesses to improve their energy efficiency. The CBI has rightly argued that if a business energy tax were to be introduced, it should include support for small businesses to adopt energy-saving technologies through the provision of information and advice. Clearly, the welcome £50 million investment fund will provide some support, and it will help to promote an expansion in renewable energy.

The exemption for renewable energy where it is supplied direct to the consumer is also sensible and welcome, and reflects the environmental benefits that accrue from renewable power sources, which are not currently recognised in their prices.

A significant increase in the supply of energy from renewable sources is important in the interests of a long-term, secure, diverse and low-emission energy supply in the UK. In that context, I look forward to the renewables review due to be published by the Department of Trade and Industry shortly.

Under the previous Administration, we had the worst record in Europe for exploiting renewable energy sources. Eurostat figures reveal that, in 1995, the renewable share of inland energy consumption was 0.7 per cent. in the UK, compared with 25 per cent. in Sweden, 24 per cent. in Austria, and a European Union average of 5.3 per cent. I therefore particularly welcome the Chancellor's commitment to examine whether further incentives could be given to promote the take-up of renewable sources of energy by utilising part of the revenues from the business energy levy. Other European countries have implemented various means of supporting renewables which have resulted in a much larger share of the energy market for that sector. Capital credits on the purchase and installation of new renewables equipment to overcome the barriers of high initial costs have been utilised in Belgium and Finland.

Another model that has been suggested is the Dutch system of tax relief for green investment funds. Banks managing the funds in the Netherlands are able to offer good rates of interest to green projects that would not otherwise have been financed, while still providing a reasonable rate of return to investors. So far, £1 billion of private sector finance has been levered into those green funds.

My right hon. Friend has delivered undoubtedly the greenest Budget that we have seen. It builds on the lead that Britain gave at Kyoto and will continue to ensure Britain's place at the forefront of the drive to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. I warmly welcome it.

8.10 pm

Mr. John Swinney (North Tayside): The hon. Member for Lincoln (Gillian Merron) commented earlier that newspaper headlines had been broadly favourable to the Budget. Of course that must be conceded—the Government have had a great day in the press. However, one press headline might not have cheered up one of the households in Downing street, because it stated that "The future's Brown". That might have gone down well at No. 11, but I suspect that it would not be the centre of attention at No. 10.

I welcome some of the measures in the Chancellor's Budget, especially the adoption of the 10p starting rate of taxation, a measure which clearly supports the position of low-income households.

The moves on pensioners, particularly the winter payment of £100 and the Chancellor's guarantee yesterday that that would be sustained throughout the term of this Parliament, are welcome, but I urge the Chancellor to ensure that that is protected against inflation.

The more direct and targeted support for children is equally welcome and shows a willingness by the Government to tackle direct support in the most effective way.

The measures on lower corporation tax, to which I shall return, are also welcome. The Government expressed scepticism when the argument for lower corporation tax was advanced by my party before the election. Their change of heart is welcome.

The Chancellor's growth assumptions have been the subject of debate today, and I join in the scepticism about them. The sweep of independent forecasters believe that the 1999 forecast adopted by the Chancellor is broadly double the mainstream position. The forecasts for the year 2000 settle at about half a per cent. lower than that made by the Chancellor. It is stretching credibility to assume that there will be such a lively bounce-back from the close proximity of recession as the Chancellor implies by his growth assumptions.

As we survey various economic information relating to the volume of job losses that have taken place in Scotland since the general election—there have been 14,000 job losses since May 1997, and only yesterday further job losses were announced in manufacturing in Scotland—the Red Book commentary on the position of the manufacturing sector and the downturn in manufacturing output illustrates the severity of the problem.

The Chancellor's growth assumptions are not just a point of academic interest—they are fundamental to the plans that he has announced. At column 175 of *Hansard* yesterday, the Chancellor gave an assurance that the delivery of the £40 billion of public expenditure envisaged in the comprehensive spending review was safe within the fiscal rules and assured as a result of the assumptions that underpinned the Budget. A great deal hangs on the Chancellor's ability to deliver those growth assumptions, especially in relation to valuable public expenditure programmes.

I am concerned about the fiscal and monetary balance that has been struck by the Chancellor in the Budget. The delivery of further fiscal loosening is clearly part of his judgment, but I fear that that may jeopardise the ability of the Monetary Policy Committee to deliver further interest rate cuts that will take our level to one comparable with European short-term interest rates, which are such an important factor in the competitive position of British companies. If that disparity continues, it will create a competitive disadvantage for our companies. Some of the beneficial business measures that the Chancellor announced yesterday will be undermined by this fiscal stance.

[Mr. John Swinney]

On the proposals for enterprise, I welcome the cuts in corporation tax, as I said. We should learn from some of our European counterparts that, by lowering the rates of corporation tax, we can expand the yield of tax generated to the economy.

I welcome the measures on small and medium enterprises, but I caution that new initiatives should not be allowed to clutter the existing SME support initiatives. Additional bureaucracy should not prevent resources from reaching front-line companies that could benefit from the new services.

Let me comment briefly on particular industries. In the Chancellor's statement yesterday, there was cursory reference to the whisky industry, which is fundamental to the economy of parts of Scotland. The £2.54 billion a year trade in the whisky sector underpins 12,5000 direct jobs in Scotland and 50,000 indirect jobs.

Hon. Members have commented extensively on the importance of spin doctors in the presentation of the Government's Budget programme. One of the national newspapers in Scotland ran a front-page story on Tuesday, speculating with a high degree of certainty that there was to be a 4 per cent. cut in the duty on whisky, and suggesting that that was due to intensive lobbying by the Secretary of State for Scotland.

That cut did not materialise. Whisky is still the most heavily taxed spirit in this country. Is it any wonder that sales of that important commodity are depressed? There was a 7 per cent. fall in sales in the UK last year, and declining revenues as a result of the depressed sales. In 1991-92, more than £1.7 billion in tax revenues were generated from sales of whisky, but, last year, the comparable figure was £1.5 billion. The opportunity to solve some of the problems in that sector have been missed in the Budget.

The other sector on which I shall comment is road haulage and the more general issue of fuel duty. I thought that the hon. Member for Ochil (Mr. O'Neill) was about to get himself into serious trouble with some of his remarks about road hauliers, but he saved himself. Road fuel duty is becoming an enormous problem to the economic health not just of rural and county constituencies, such as the one that I represent, but more widely across the economy.

I refer to comments made by Mrs. Pat Grant, the managing director of Norfrost Ltd., an important manufacturing company in the north of Scotland. The company manufacturers what used to be called white goods—refrigerators—at its factory at Thurso in the north of Scotland, and transports them for distribution throughout the world. Mrs. Grant estimates that the last increase in the fuel duty escalator put her company's costs up by £100,000. It is a large company which employs many people. The increase in fuel prices is becoming a serious issue in the manufacturing sector in Scotland. Mrs. Grant reckons that the fuel duty escalator is as big a competitive impediment to her business as the overvalued pound.

The compensatory measures from the rural transport fund announced by the Government—a 20 per cent. increase—do not address the problem for rural areas. In my constituency, a large rural part of Scotland, three rural petrol stations have been defined as being capable of benefiting from additional support from the rural transport fund, but one of them has already closed. What help is that to car users in the rural areas of Scotland? The Government must think carefully about future initiatives in the sector. We will oppose them on Monday night on that issue.

The Chancellor boasted in his Budget statement that he had delivered a public expenditure position that was £2 billion lower than the spending plans that he inherited. No wonder. The Government have confirmed that £211 million has been cut from Scottish education in the past two years. I can see no new money for public services in the Budget. If the Chancellor had £2 billion for tax cuts in the future, the public would have expected that to be directed towards public services. Even under the Government's current plans in Scotland, public expenditure will not recover to its level under the Conservative Government in 1994–95. The expectations of the Scottish people will be diminished by the Budget.

8.20 pm

Ms Claire Ward (Watford): I, too, congratulate my right hon. Friend the Chancellor on an outstanding Budget, which will, without any doubt, introduce many measures that will benefit my constituents. That is in stark contrast to what we had from the previous Government. A Conservative Member referred earlier to some strange golden legacy. I do not remember a golden legacy when the Labour party came into office. Our only legacy was one of poor investment in public services, poor standards in education because of a lack of investment, poor investment in our infrastructure, including our rail services, and a crumbling national health service. This Government have invested far more money in our public services than the previous Government could ever have dreamed about.

I returned to my constituency today to meet some pensioners who were celebrating an exhibition on memories with local students at West Herts college. I asked those pensioners for their views on the Budget. It was summed up for me by one pensioner who said, "There is something there for everyone and a bit more for those who need it most." That is exactly what the Budget is about.

We can judge our society by how we treat our pensioners, who deserve the very best that the country can offer them after they have committed so much of their life and effort to it. We have shown a clear intention to deliver the best for pensioners. The £20 a year winter fuel allowance has been increased to £100. The pensioners to whom I spoke today recognised that as a major asset. It is difficult for them to decide how to share their small income between heating, food and other necessities. That is clearly a welcome measure for pensioners in Watford.

Nearly 16,000 pensioners will benefit from the other measures introduced in the Budget. The minimum income guarantee will ensure that, through the income support system, a single pensioner will have a minimum income of £78 a week. While many of us with mortgages have seen the reduction in interest as a real blessing, many of my pensioner constituents have regretted them, because they rely on the interest from their savings. This is a section of society who need that little bit more income at a time when they deserve to live their lives in some dignity. Therefore, I welcome the introduction of pensioner bonds to provide better value for pensioners.

This is also a Budget for families, and I welcome the change in the married couples allowance, not because I am anti-marriage or in any way want to penalise those who are married, but because we have rightly given priority to families with children. We have decided that the most important thing is to give the best start to children in all families. By introducing a taper to the children's tax credit, my right hon. Friend has recognised that there are families who do not need that money and that the benefit should not be paid in full to higher tax payers.

The Budget will, without a doubt, reward work and make work pay. Far too often, those on benefits and seeking work have lost out on getting into work. There have been many disincentives to work. The Government aim to make work pay, and the Budget does that, along with all the measures that will be introduced within the next couple of years, including the minimum wage, which will be introduced this year, and the working families tax credit. The 10p rate of income tax will help those on low incomes most of all. Although Watford will be considered a southern town in comparison with other parts of the country that have problems, we still, unfortunately, have areas of low income and low pay. That measure will be an added boost to those families and individuals.

Lone parents will benefit from the Budget. Many have found a disincentive in moving from benefits into work. The extension of benefits for an additional two weeks will give extra security to those who wish to work but might otherwise have felt that they would lose out disproportionately by doing so. That, together with the increase in child benefit and the Government's child care strategy, will make it much easier for lone parents in my constituency to secure work that will pay in the long term.

My right hon. Friend's reluctance to increase duties on alcohol must be welcomed by those of us who like to indulge now and again. I also welcome the reduction in the duty on pools companies. The headquarters of the Ladbroke group is in my constituency and, on its behalf, I welcome such changes. I also welcome my right hon. Friend's decision not to increase duties on alcohol because, although no brewing now takes place in Watford, there are many brewing industries in the town.

I am also pleased that today, which is national no smoking day, the Government can confidently say that they are not encouraging smoking, and are doing everything in their power to reduce the amount of smoking that takes place by increasing the duty on cigarettes. As someone who does not smoke, and who does not wish to have smoke blown all over me wherever I may be, I am pleased that the Government have taken this step.

Mrs. Jacqui Lait (Beckenham): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ms Ward: I shall not give way because of the 10-minute limit on speeches.

This is a positive Budget for all my constituents and for businesses that will gain from the tax changes and from the incentives to encourage employees by means of the new grant for information technology. There is no doubt that information technology and education are the way forward for Britain, not low incomes and poverty pay. The Government have recognised that as a priority. The additional £2,000 per school for books will also show that the Government are serious about making education a priority, together with the additional funding for education and the health service.

I welcome the Budget on behalf of my constituents of Watford.

8.29 pm

Mr. Tony Baldry (Banbury): The Budget is a crucial time because there is nothing more fundamental in the state than what the state takes and what the state returns and redistributes. Therefore, it is important for democracy and good governance that what happens in the Budget is reasonably transparent. This Budget is deliberately opaque. Its opaqueness is such that, the day after the Budget, the Prime Minister and my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition are still involved in a lengthy wrangle about whether the burden of taxes has increased or decreased. That must be a matter of fact that could be resolved fairly easily.

Those who turned on BBC Radio 4 news this morning at the first opportunity—6 o'clock—would have heard the commentator on the business news confirm that, so far as the BBC is concerned, taxes are going up and will go up substantially each year for the next four years as a consequence of the Budget. That view is clearly confirmed by the House of Commons Library, but the fact that it is still a matter of dispute is a reflection not only on the Government, who persist in putting up taxes, but on the way in which the Budget has been presented. Different tax years have been confused, some measures that have been introduced will not be implemented for two years and we have had to try to compare the various figures, so it is not surprising that there has been a fair degree of confusion.

The Government are somewhat embarrassed by all that, because the Prime Minister said before the general election that the Labour party had no plans to increase tax at all. However, only last week he had to acknowledge that the tax burden will increase over this Parliament. The tax burden has already increased substantially during this Parliament—Labour's first two Budgets increased taxes by more than £40 billion. This Budget includes a substantial number of new taxes, the impact of which upon individuals, couples and families is not immediately obvious. Mortgage interest relief has been scrapped, the married couples' allowance has been abolished, company car taxes and stamp duty have gone up and petrol tax has gone up yet again.

In a number of ways, the delivery of the Budget was intended to obfuscate. For example, yesterday, the Chancellor made much to all of us in the Chamber of the fact that the bottom rate of income tax will be lowered to 10p, but there was no mention at all of the scrapping of the 20 per cent. band. People earning the maximum allowed at the basic rate of income tax will pay slightly more tax next year, despite the introduction of the 10 per cent. band. They will pay up to £141 extra tax because the 10p rate will apply only to the first £1,500 earned in excess of personal allowances. The 23 per cent. basic rate of income tax will be extended to cover earnings between £1,501 and £28,000.

At first sight, those measures looked like good news for those on lower pay, but the Chancellor forgot to tell us that he was scrapping the 20 per cent. band. When one

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looks at the facts, they are somewhat different from the spin. The 10 per cent. rate was trumpeted as the centrepiece of the entire speech, but the ending of the 20 per cent. rate went unannounced. It was simply abolished by omission—glided over as if it had never been.

Although attention is intended to be drawn to the 10 per cent. bottom rate of tax, no adequate attention was given to the fact that the upper earnings limit on national insurance will rise by more than 18 per cent., thus cutting take-home pay over the next two years. For most people there is little difference, whether in respect of tax or national insurance contributions, and many people will see more of their pay absorbed by national insurance contributions.

The Chancellor hailed the introduction of the children's tax credit as a reasonable quid pro quo for scrapping the married couples' allowance in April 2000, but the children's tax credit will not be introduced until 2001. That is a further example of the Chancellor confusing different years and seeking to give the impression that he is being generous, but all the figures show that the position is somewhat different and millions of households—couples with children, couples with a mortgage—will suffer a loss.

Pages and pages of the Budget were devoted to various schemes intended to help business, but many are so complex that an aspirant entrepreneur will find himself surrounded by eager officials from the new Small Business Service and accountants explaining the joys of tax breaks for investment and for research and development. There is also the offer of computers from the capital modernisation fund, but businesses in my constituency in north Oxfordshire want to be left alone by the Government and a substantial reduction in regulation.

I am prepared to lay a wager with Ministers on the Treasury Bench that an independent poll taken a year from now in a patch such as my constituency would show that very few businesses had contacted the Small Business Service or had been able to take advantage of any of the specific measures in the Budget.

Those businesses are really concerned about the general burdens on manufacturing industry and the manufacturing base and what they see as an ever-increasing army of health and safety officials, building regulations inspectors and VAT men who are only doing their job. They are concerned about the working time directive and all the new burdens on business that the Government have introduced from unnecessary European Union directives.

The self-employed are concerned about the substantial increases in their national insurance contributions, which were not properly highlighted by the Chancellor. Many businesses are set up by people who start off as self-employed, so that measure is a real disincentive to them.

It will be interesting to see which, if any, of the various specific measures announced for business come to fruition. Good window dressing and good headlines on Budget day made an impact, but, six or nine months down the line, few of those measures will have made much impact for British business.

The measures in the Budget are intended as spin. The various programmes on enterprise took up seven pages of the Chancellor's speech, but the announcement that he was ditching mortgage interest relief at source took only seven lines. He will give a little more than £290 million through the programmes referred to in those seven pages, but he will take away £1.4 billion by scrapping MIRAS.

Ministers must accept that, although at first sight this looks like a giveaway Budget, it is in fact very complicated. Business people and those involved in enterprise cannot be motivated if they cannot see incentives. I predict that those who will benefit more than anyone else will be chartered accountants: they will have a field day as a result of a Budget which, when it is analysed in years to come, will be seen not as a giveaway but as a Budget which continued to hike up taxes and tried to hide that with spin and obfuscation. It would have been so much better if the Government had sought to cut taxes—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. The hon. Gentleman's time is up.

8.39 pm

Mr. Geraint Davies (Croydon, Central): What a great Budget! It was not red nose day for the Opposition; it was red face day. We had a fantastic media reception, involving winners and more winners: pensioners, businesses and families. It has been reported that even Stella Hague, the Leader of the Opposition's mother, thought that this was a great Budget.

Nevertheless, it is important to take a strategic view of the impact of the Budget on UK plc, as we move forward in the global economy during difficult times. The Budget will create a fairer, stronger Britain for the future. We should look at the big picture, rather than making puerile jokes about Roger the dodger. No doubt Stella was not very impressed by that. Anyway, we should consider the broader impact on the British economy.

I think that we all welcome the lower tax rates: the reduction from 23p to 22p, the 10p tax band and the cash for families. Some 16,800 families in my constituency will benefit from that. We also welcome the stimulus for enterprise, the support for pensioners and the recommitment to health and education in the form of £40 billion. There is also extra money for accident and emergency services, and £2,000 for each school.

All that is welcome, but I heard some scepticism from Opposition Members. Where was the money to come from? In fact, this is the stability dividend from the drawing of a line under the period of boom-and-bust chaos created by the last Government. The reality is that we inherited a debt cost of some £28 billion a year—debts which have now been transformed into budget surpluses. The reality is that, since the new Labour Government took power, nearly half a million more people are now in jobs—no longer claiming benefits, but creating economic wealth. The reality is that long-term interest rates are lower than they have been for 40 years, and that short-term interest rates have fallen seven times in succession. For that reason, we are spending less on social security than was anticipated.

The current position contrasts with the vivid picture painted by the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood), who seemed to be describing another

world—a world to which, presumably, he has now gone. The right hon. Gentleman conjured up a picture of escalating unemployment; as I have said, nearly half a million more people are now employed. He talked of recession—and, of course, there is a recession in wider terms. A quarter of the world is in recession. Global forecasts have been halved, and difficult times lie ahead; but we must face those times realistically.

That does not mean a repeal of the independence of the Bank of England, which the right hon. Gentleman seemed to be calling for and which would cause interest rates to hurtle up. It does not mean rejecting, in perpetuity, entry into the euro, which would drive away all international investment. Conservative Members keep badgering us about the need for sterling to go down. Sterling will go down only if the City and the international markets lose confidence in it, and that will happen only if those markets have confidence in the Conservative party's ever regaining power and, as a consequence, preventing Britain from joining the euro—and the reality is that no one thinks that will happen.

Earlier this week, the *Financial Times* reported the International Monetary Fund as describing Britain as a glowing example to the world. One of our key objectives is to make work pay by guaranteeing an income of £10,000 for every working family in Britain, and—as we shall do through this Budget—lifting an extra 7,000 children out of poverty. Family support, in terms of income, is crucial to a Government whose priority is education, education, education: a Government who see that as the key to the liberation of our children, enabling them to be productive in a new economy and a new world.

In the world of Tory poverty, children in millions of households went to school with low self-esteem, low nourishment and low prospects. That sounded the death knell of Britain's economy, but we have turned the situation around.

I welcome the structural tax changes that will eliminate some of the distortions that we have inherited—distortions that were not tackled during the 18 solemn years of Tory rule. The move on mortgage interest relief at source is particularly brave. MIRAS is a distortion of the housing market which causes normal people to invest enormous amounts in housing rather than in British industry. It has also made the UK economy too sensitive to interest rates. We want to consider the prospect of joining the euro; we do not want interest rates to be set on a pan-European basis, and then to find that there is a particular sensitivity in the UK economy. That prospect has been eliminated. Moneys have been recycled more fairly and effectively, supporting enterprise and families.

I welcome the alignment of national insurance and tax, which goes hand in hand with the transfer of responsibilities for national insurance to the Inland Revenue. That is good for business, for the markets and for Britain. I also welcome the new tapering of business taxation. Corporation tax is at 30 per cent., an all-time low, the tax for small and medium enterprises is at 20 per cent. and the tax for companies that are starting up is just 10 per cent. The Budget is creating a ratchet for the generation of a new enterprise culture in Britain of prosperity and employment.

The support for SMEs will encourage rational risk taking. Lower capital gains tax, regional research and development tax credits and university cash for science and innovation are all to be independently welcomed.

For a new Government, their approach on environmental sustainability is forward looking and brave. They have taken the opportunity with both hands. The tax on fuel, the investment in transport, which is yet to be announced, the neutral system of business energy tax, combined with reductions in national insurance, the attack on company cars—it is about time that we did something about them—and supporting company schemes that provide communal transport for employees, are all to be welcomed.

We are creating a virtuous investment environment in Britain which is based on low tax, high skills, an open economy, market access to Europe, stability and an end of boom and bust. The fact that it is an environment in which English is spoken will be well received by the north Americans, the Japanese and others. There will be opportunities for more and more investment in a new Britain and new world.

The Budget has been good for families, the elderly, small business and the environment. Well done Gordon for making Britain great again.

8.47 pm

Mrs. Angela Browning (Tiverton and Honiton): I shall concentrate on matters in the Budget that particularly affect my constituency. I begin with a point that I raised with the Prime Minister this afternoon at Question Time, although I did not, of course, get a satisfactory reply.

In my constituency, which forms a large chunk of rural Devon, 80.4 per cent. of householders have cars. Those cars are necessary to their everyday lives. Users are of all ages. If they did not have access to a car, many elderly people in rural areas would have to move out of the villages and their homes elsewhere, and move into towns and cities. It is mobility, and the flexibility of that mobility, that make the car so important, yet today, those people face paying £3.13 for a gallon of unleaded petrol.

The Prime Minister seemed to indicate to the House this afternoon that, because of some of the pluses in the Budget, it did not matter that cars are being taxed at that level, but, in rural areas, there is a distorted effect. People living in rural areas will not enjoy any benefit that the Budget has given them in any other measure because they will need to spend the extra money keeping their car on the road.

The Government have increased the fuel tax escalator to 6 per cent. The tax has kicked in in three Budgets in two years; it has rocketed up since the 1997 general election. I was pleased to hear my hon. Friend the Member for East Yorkshire (Mr. Townend) say how the Conservatives would not only oppose but vote against the measure, which has been of great concern to me over many years, particularly on my constituents' behalf.

If the Government and the Prime Minister in particular are not willing to listen to Conservative Members about how unfair the measure is to people living in rural areas, perhaps he will look at the *Hansard* of yesterday's debate on the Budget, when his former Chief Whip, the right hon. Member for Bishop Auckland (Mr. Foster), said that he would be torn to pieces by his mainly rural constituents because of the imposition of that tax on petrol. It does discriminate against those who live and work in rural areas.

Many of those car drivers are also self-employed people. In rural areas, starting up small businesses is very important. People have a choice in rural areas: they either

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start a small business or they go and work somewhere, very often somewhere quite a long way away. Encouraging entrepreneurs in rural areas is therefore extremely important. However, those people are being hit not only by additional petrol costs but by the increase in class 4 national insurance contributions, which will affect 500,000 self-employed people.

We have heard much today, particularly from the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, on large businesses' support for the Budget. However, the response from small businesses has not been so favourable. I should like to quote two responses that we have received today.

The first is from Brian Prime, chairman of the policy unit of the Federation of Small Business, who estimates that increased class 4 national insurance contributions—from 6 to 7 per cent.—will hurt not only those additional self-employed people but

"The real entrepreneurs and risk takers—the sole traders will miss out on the corporation tax changes, but will be hit by increases to national insurance contribution."

The Federation of Small Business said that the Budget has

"completely missed the target where the majority of small firms were concerned".

Again we heard the Government praying in aid the support of the Confederation of British Industry and big businesses. However, as Conservative Members know, if one is really serious about developing entrepreneurial skills across the United Kingdom, whether in rural areas or in towns, one realises that it is small businesses—the genuine entrepreneurs—who create wealth and growth. They are the people who, in the main, create the jobs. The Government should take seriously the fact that the Budget has hit that sector.

It would be wrong for me not to take this opportunity to talk about another sector, which includes many small businesses, which I know have made representations to the Government prior to the Budget: the road haulage industry. In his speech today, the hon. Member for Ochil (Mr. O'Neill), quite astonishingly, described road hauliers as whingers, which I am sure will not go down well with his own hauliers—I imagine road hauliers live in most constituencies.

In my rural constituency, in Devon, I have many road hauliers. I have also received a whole bundle of letters from such hauliers who are small businesses, many of which were established by owner operators, employing up to 12 or 20 people. They are very important employers in my constituency, but are now fearful—as they were before the Budget—about the very future of their businesses. The Government ignored the representations that they received in a document that was sent, before the Budget—it was also sent to hon. Members—from the Freight Transport Association and the Road Haulage Association.

Hon. Members are aware of the issues that the associations raised in their representations to the Government, and the urgency with which they wanted the Government to deal with their problems in the Budget. However, their concerns have not only been ignored by the Government, but been exacerbated in the Budget because of the increased tax on diesel.

Therefore, not only will we lose individual small businesses, but there will be a sea-change in how the industry operates. I believe that the change—the way in which businesses are so-called "flagging out"—will gather momentum, with businesses establishing themselves across the channel rather than operating in the United Kingdom.

I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for North Shropshire (Mr. Paterson), who is in the Chamber, for raising the issue on the Floor of the House in a previous debate, in the hope that, prior to the Budget, the Government would listen not only to the industry but to representations from hon. Members on both sides the House.

It was with absolute dismay that I read the information provided today by the Road Haulage Association, after it had analysed the Budget's impact on the haulage industry. I beg the indulgence of the House to read it out. The increase will affect all my haulage companies. It says:

"Britain's hauliers reacted with 'anger and disbelief', to today's announcement by the Chancellor that Duty on Diesel Fuel is to be raised by more than 11 per cent.

According to the Road Haulage Association, the rise will add more than £20,000 to the annual fuel bill of an average haulier"—

fuel costs in the industry often represent about 36 per cent. of business costs, so this is a huge increase on a section of their costs—

"(vehicle fleet of 10 40te gvw artics), pushing their total average fuel bill beyond £200,000 for the very first time. The hike means that since the new Government came to power in 1997, fuel costs for the average haulier have increased by more than £50,000."

Hauling goods around the country is important, but nowhere more so than in the south-west peninsula. In Devon and Cornwall, we have to haul goods further because of the topography of the region. We are trying to encourage new investment and to persuade new companies to establish themselves there. The cost of hauling goods once they are manufactured is critical to the decision on where in the country to locate. The increase in diesel duty has not only put a block on investment but jeopardised the companies that already exist in my constituency.

Commenting on the increases, the director of the Road Haulage Association said today:

"The reaction of my members to this increase will be one of anger and disbelief. Despite strong joint representations . . . the Chancellor has just rung the death knell for over 53,000 jobs in the UK haulage industry. It is particularly bad for hauliers who are competing against unfair competition from abroad. Increasing numbers of my members are asking how they can get out from under this Government"—

by flagging out. The flagging out package will enable them to avoid the United Kingdom's very much higher vehicle excise duty, as well as giving them access to cheap foreign fuel. Many hauliers are simply awaiting the outcome of the Government's review of vehicle excise duty before making that decision, but—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I call Mr. Richard Page.

8.57 pm

Mr. Richard Page (South-West Hertfordshire): I start by apologising to the House for inadvertently making a misleading statement last Monday week. I was standing in this very spot, and I said to the House:

"I rather like Budgets, because they are just about the only Government announcements that are made to the House before they are made to the media."—[*Official Report*, 1 March 1999; Vol. 326, c. 834.]

An hon. Friend of mine said, "Just wait and see." I have to say that my hon. Friend was right and I was wrong. I got it wrong because the headline-grabbing measures announced by the Chancellor yesterday—the decision to abolish MIRAS and the married couples tax allowance, the increase in child benefit, the creation of partnership shares and the 10p starting rate for income tax—were all trailed in the weekend press.

The Observer had the proposals for a minimum guaranteed weekly income for the over-50s. *The Sunday Telegraph* had the tax break for research and development plus cuts in corporation tax for small firms. I can cite many further examples, but the basic point is clear. Before coming to the House, the Government leaked the details of the Budget on a selective basis so that each newspaper could have its mini-exclusive. It shows the Government's hypocrisy that, a couple of weeks ago, the Home Secretary went to the courts as a "matter of principle" to prevent the press leaking details of a report submitted to it before it was submitted to the House. Yet, when we have the Treasury leaking like a sieve about the Budget, even without the support of Charlie Whelan, we hear nothing about that principle, as it would compromise Labour's manipulation of the media. Spin today is, indeed, everything.

I genuinely congratulate the Chancellor on his performance. It was a superb presentation. I take nothing away from him. If I were an ice-skating judge, I would give him 5.9 out of six for performance.

However, the marks for content would be considerably lower. I have been in the House long enough to know that the mood created by a Budget, with much waving of Order Papers from the Government side on a Tuesday, more often than not turns decidedly sour in the weeks that follow. In that one hour, five minutes and 40 seconds—I am told that that was the Chancellor's presentation time—we heard nothing but a flood of facts, figures, details and projections. Not a single financial stone was untouched.

I thank the Chancellor for his consistent praise for the previous Conservative Government. He again made much of the present strength of the economy, speaking about the deficits reducing and, in the same breath, repeating Labour's manifesto commitment, saying:

"We said in our manifesto we would work within the existing spending plans for our first two years".

That means working within the figures of the previous Conservative Government.

We have seen the success that has flowed from that, because the Government inherited a golden legacy. However, the two years are up and the Government are starting to fly blind. For me and many in the media, a sober analysis of the Budget shows that millions of taxpayers will be out of pocket within two years, particularly thanks to the changes to the upper earnings limit for national insurance, which *The Daily Telegraph* has described as the "forgotten tax". It will rise by 18 per cent., cutting take-home pay over the next two years. The measure will be particularly damaging for constituencies with a profile similar to that of South-West Hertfordshire.

The Government have started to gamble and they have got themselves into a box because of their actions in their first Budget. I admit that there was a potential for an increase in inflation. I understand that they were reluctant to use their powers to reduce consumer expenditure. Instead, through interest rate hikes and bashing industry at the start, they have ensured that our exports have been hit by a high pound. The recent reductions in interest rates have merely been following world figures. The effect of our strong pound continues to damage our industry, in addition to the extra taxes that the president of the CBI has eloquently referred to. If rates are reduced further, the price of British goods might become more attractive, but inflation would become a threat. If it is held, unemployment looks set to rise.

That is what the Government are planning. The National Audit Office today endorsed the predictions of several financial bodies that a further 400,000 will become unemployed over the next two years. With falling output, the Secretary of State's call for increased efficiency will result in an increase in unemployment.

Of the measures in the Budget, particularly those affecting small businesses, I support the continuation of the 40 per cent. write-off allowance against investment for small business. The idea was blocked by the previous Government, but I have always supported it. I have made my views clear several times. However, it is not extra money, but merely a continuation of the allowance. I would like a higher percentage that was more closely focused on the means of production rather than being spread all over. In other countries, particularly Japan, the idea has been used as a specific generator.

I welcome the 10p starting rate for tax on profit for small business, but, again, I must record my admiration for the Chancellor's careful choice of words. He said:

"Every company making a profit of up to £50,000 will benefit."

On closer examination, that 10 per cent. applies only to the first £10,000, after which a taper comes in. For a company earning £50,000 profit, the measure will be tax neutral.

I am slightly concerned about the various arrangements to help small business. The Chancellor referred to the

"one-stop open-door service . . . to offer loan guarantees, to support innovation, to advise on electronic commerce and deliver, for the first time, an automated payroll service".—[*Official Report*, 9 March 1999; Vol. 327, c. 175-79.]

I wonder whether that will cause confusion, because I understood that business links was the one-stop shop. I do not know whether the new service will be through business links, or separate from it.

I am sorry that the Budget contained no mention of the threat that the country will face from the amount of business that will be done through the internet, where the collection of tax will become so much more difficult. In horse-race betting, for example, people who bet abroad through the internet completely avoid paying any tax. That trend will spread through sectors of the service economy.

Behind the Budget are a large number of narrow, targeted measures, and the Budget must appeal to as wide a range of interest groups as possible. Everyone is in favour of the general economy and particular expenditure that Sir Anthony Eden talked about in the 1950s. George Bernard Shaw said that Governments who rob Peter to pay Paul can always rely upon the support of Paul. The trouble with this Budget is that it is built on that foundation, and you cannot fool all the people all the time.

9.7 pm

Mr. Owen Paterson (North Shropshire): The background to the debate is that there are three levels of taxation in the world. One, in the United States, has created 13 million jobs in the past six years. Here in the UK, we have created 2.5 million jobs. In the euro zone, there has been a net loss of 699,000 jobs.

The Budget shows that we are on the cusp of moving away from a free-enterprise, low-tax economy towards a higher-tax economy. It was breathtaking for the Prime Minister to state today that the Budget would lower tax. The Government came into power with the level of tax at 38.1 per cent. of GDP. Page 154 of the Red Book clearly states that that will go up to 39.7 per cent., as projected for 2003-04. The level of tax was £315 billion in 1997; it is projected to be £425 billion in 2003-04.

Another lesson from the United States is that we should have fewer regulations and less intervention in business. The huge growth in jobs in America is because of micro-businesses. Businesses with a turnover of less than $500,000 are exempt from the minimum wage and all sorts of discriminatory legislation. In contrast, since the Government came to power, there have been 2,000 new directives. Ian Fletcher, of the British Chambers of Commerce, has calculated that they will cost £500 million to set up and £500 million a year to administer.

There are signs in the Red Book that the cost of the Budget will be in increased unemployment. In the west midlands, unemployment is nudging up from 4.6 to 4.9 per cent. In my two boroughs, it is rising from 4.1 to 4.5 per cent., and from 2.5 to 2.8 per cent. Regrettably, the Red Book states that social security benefits will march away. In 1998-98, the figure will be £93.5 billion, rising to a projected £106.4 billion in 2001-02.

In my constituency—a rural one—the last census referred to manufacturing and a large agricultural element, but distribution and storage are major industries and employers in Shropshire. There is nothing in Shropshire that does not move by diesel-powered truck: it is estimated that 97 per cent. of freight moves by road in rural areas. In that regard, I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning) for her generous comments earlier. Haulage is being savaged by the Government. That is an extraordinary feature of their taxation policies, because it is one area of policy which remains 100 per cent. in the Government's hands.

Mr. Alan Johnson (Hull, West and Hessle): And Europe's.

Mr. Paterson: No, there is no European impact on vehicle excise duty and petrol or diesel duty.

We are talking about a major strategic industry. If we doubled rail investment, it is unlikely that more than about 10 per cent. of freight would go by rail. In 10 years' time, it is likely that 90 per cent. will still go by road. The Red Book contains an astonishing increase in duty: not the escalator of 6 per cent. that we were promised but an increase of 11.6 per cent., which puts 28p a gallon diesel.

Thirty-five per cent. of the cost of running a lorry is diesel, and more than 85 per cent. of the price of diesel is tax. The average small haulier, running perhaps 10 trucks, has had to pay an extra £35,000 a year since the Government came to power, and now the Government have added a further £20,000. That means an increase of £9 billion to £10 billion in fuel duties in this Parliament. The diesel-petrol escalator is worth more than 1p on income tax.

Our diesel is easily the most expensive in Europe. To fill a large truck with two tanks with 1,200 litres costs £756 here, as opposed to £438 in France or £354 in Luxembourg. I mention those countries because, in September, the French Government, who have a more intelligent attitude to their haulage industry, introduced a rebate to help French hauliers to compete with those of Luxembourg.

Vehicle excise duty is also totally out of line with the duties in other European countries. UK VED for a 38-tonne vehicle is £3,210; in France it is £486; and in Portugal it is down to £308. The Budget contains a savage hike in VED for a 40-tonne vehicle, up to £5,750. That gives a French operator a comparative advantage of £2,700, or about 3.5 per cent. of operating costs.

We discussed this issue in European Standing Committee A this morning, the Minister for Transport in London gaily said that we have lower social costs and management costs; but there is not a haulier in the country making a margin of 3.5 per cent., so our hauliers are already out of pocket on VED alone.

There was a move in the Budget to push people towards fitting catalytic converters so that they can burn ultra-low sulphur diesel. That is a chimera. To convert a Euro 1 engine costs £4,000 and a Euro 2 engine £3,500. The £1,000 rebate is not enough because—this is a critical fact that the Government have completely missed—the fuel does not generate the same amount of energy as ordinary diesel. A large haulier, Newell and Wright in Sheffield, converted 130 38-tonne vehicles and reported an 8 per cent. increase in fuel consumption that cost them £250,000 a year.

There is worse news on ultra-low sulphur diesel: more crude oil needs to be burned to get a given amount, so more carbon dioxide is produced in the refinery as well as more diesel being burned in the lorry. That cannot help the Government's environmental commitments.

The fundamental flaw is that the freight journey has to be made. There is no marginal impact in making freight more expensive, because the load has to be carried. Either it can be carried by a foreign-owned truck or the domestic haulier is forced to go abroad or be put out of business.

The Kyoto accord requires us to reduce emissions by 12.5 per cent. from 1990 levels. According to the Library, in 1990 power stations emitted 54 million tonnes of carbon; road transport 30 million; and other sources 76 million. That is 159 million tonnes in all. However, only 16 per cent.—emitting a maximum of 5 million tonnes—of that traffic was goods vehicles. Therefore, page 84 of the Red Book does not add up. I do not envisage that the carbon dioxide reductions that the Government have promised will come about and I would be grateful if the Minister would explain how they will do so.

I foresee the end of the British road haulage industry as we know it. Today, the Road Haulage Association has been flooded out with calls from people who want to take up its offer of a streamlined package of legal fees and administration costs to flag out abroad. The director general of the RHA has asked:

"What can we do to get out from under this Government?"

and has said that the association's members are, "voting with their wheels". Nowhere will that be more obvious than in Northern Ireland. All the road hauliers there will be based in the Republic.

The damage to the industry is considerable. According to the Centre for Economics and Business Research, more than 26,000 jobs will go in the haulage industry, but there is worse, as the economy as a whole will be seriously damaged. Every business is made less competitive by the swingeing increase in transport costs and that is particularly so in a constituency such as mine. The load has to be carried. As it is estimated that a further 26,000 jobs will go in the general economy, the job losses will amount to more than 53,000, which is more than the west midlands would lose if BMW took the drastic decision to move Longbridge production to Hungary.

The loss in tax revenue is a bigger down side. In 1998, the Excise lost £411 million. By 2002, it will be losing more than £1 billion in excise duty. I know hauliers who have not filled up a single truck in this country for two years. If they flag out and base abroad, many domestic-oriented British hauliers will be using foreign-purchased fuel. The total reduction in gross domestic product could be as high as £2.1 billion. As my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton said—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman's time is up.

9.17 pm

Mr. Colin Breed (South-East Cornwall): I shall take a few moments to deal with the small business aspect of the Budget, and I welcome the new tax regimes. However, I shall concentrate on the venture capital side. Last year, the Chancellor said that venture capital trusts would be reformed, and that initiative will continue this year. Frankly, in the past couple of decades, various Governments have recognised that small businesses are generally under-capitalised. They also suffer from far too much red tape and bureaucracy and from not being able to get skilled employees at the right time.

On under-capitalisation, it has always been difficult for Governments to inject public money into private businesses, even though small businesses find it extremely difficult to get hold of that capitalisation to provide them with the stability that they need to allow them to grow successfully and provide employment opportunities.

Far too many small businesses are just about managing. They really are under-capitalised and more than afraid of going to their banks to borrow money. Even if they did so, the banks would not be able to provide the sort of real capital that would give the businesses the stability that they need.

Venture capital trusts have perhaps concentrated on high-tech industries, which offer the opportunity of making not exactly a quick buck, but not a slow one either. They have supported businesses that have the opportunity of a meteoric rise. Such businesses are relatively small and, by their very nature, do not employ many people. Most high-tech businesses have a low ratio of employees.

How are we to help the majority of small businesses to get the capital that they need? I suspect that most of the help has to come from the private sector. Venture capital companies cannot provide low levels of help for small companies cost effectively. Amounts under £250,000 are difficult to invest and expensive too. However, the fact that venture capital companies and individuals find it difficult to get out of the investment when they want to realise some of the profit is one reason for those high-risk reward profiles. The reason for that is largely the huge hurdle between small private companies that have some outside investment and their ability to be listed on the stock exchange or even sell out to another company.

I hope that the Government—perhaps through the regional development agencies—may consider an opportunity to provide an interim step. We have heard from the Prime Minister that he wants us to consider American models. One of those models can be found in what is called the over-the-counter market. It offers an opportunity for private individuals, small venture capital companies and regional operations to invest in relatively small businesses that they may know and support. They may know the product or management. They may genuinely support a company that they believe to have good opportunities for growth.

Such a company cannot go to the stock exchange, and it is not cost effective to get in small amounts either from venture capital trusts or from small venture capital investments by bigger companies. The opportunity exists for private individuals and regional investment companies to support indigenous small business—not necessarily high-tech business, although they could be included.

I believe that a number of private individuals would welcome such an opportunity. Many people who are reasonably well off and who have decent investment portfolios sometimes find it rather boring to receive a return on their investments that is broadly the FTSE average. They would like something a bit more spicy for their money or something more local with which they can have a closer connection. Yet there is no such opportunity in the United Kingdom.

Some years ago, the Conservative Government tried to provide business expansion schemes. I am sorry that the schemes were largely misused for property companies, in which there was little risk, simply so that a tax shelter could be achieved for investment. That idea was not successful, but that does not mean that the intention was not right. I believe that opportunities must exist between the situation in which individuals put relatively small amounts of money into family businesses and that in which venture capital companies seek to invest the £250,000 or £500,000 that would make their investment both cost and time effective.

I am talking of investment of between £50,000 and £250,000 in companies that have been going for perhaps two or three years and which have an opportunity to expand. That level of investment simply is not available. Because of the nature of venture capital trusts, it is not likely to come from them. Such investment is equally unlikely to be attractive to some individuals because of the lack of opportunity to move the company on to the next stage and to realise a return on their investment.

I hope that the Treasury will examine the American models and consider how regional development agencies might be able to assist local or regional over-the-counter markets to provide opportunities for individuals to invest in small companies that they may know or wish to support. They could provide an added opportunity for real investment that would cure the under-capitalisation of much small business.

[Mr. Colin Breed]

Successive Governments have recognised the problem, but have found it difficult to provide a model for putting public money into private companies. The Government must try to provide the means by which private individuals may more successfully promote and invest in small businesses.

9.24 pm

Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory (Wells): My hon. Friend the Member for South–West Hertfordshire (Mr. Page) said that he was initially rather impressed by the presentation of the Budget speech, but became progressively disillusioned as he read the detail. I completely agree. We have learned from the Government that the packaging may be good, but the substance always turns out to be disappointing. The rhetoric of the Budget speech is beginning to fade, and we are faced with the reality of the Budget as set out in the Red Book. We have always known that this is a tax-raising Government—they broke all their promises on tax within a few months of taking office in their first Budget—but that reputation was confirmed in yesterday's Budget statement.

The Chancellor had an opportunity to repair the damage of the first two Budgets, because, as a result of the earlier tax increases, tax revenue is buoyant. He could have reversed earlier tax increases, but he did not. Therefore, if all the Budgets are taken together, the Government are committed to a £40.7 billion tax increase during this Parliament. That figure is derived from Government documents and was not materially altered by the Budget we heard yesterday. Therefore, the supposed tax reductions, and the other handouts and benefits, are funded from other tax increases in the same Budget or from previously announced tax increases that will take effect in the coming financial year.

Naturally, the Chancellor did his best to try to disguise those facts, but they have been exposed by Conservative Members in the debate today. My right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition started the process earlier today when he pointed out that the Chancellor had boasted a lot about the new measures for enterprise and business, while saying nothing in his speech about a much bigger tax increase—the £240 million extra national insurance contributions from the self-employed. That measure is coyly referred to in the Budget report as a reform of the contribution system.

A helpful press release provided a list of some of the enterprise measures. Some are well meaning and may have merit and we shall scrutinise them carefully when we come to the Finance Bill, but they are essentially tinkering at the margin. A £20 million venture capital challenge is all very exciting, but it hardly offsets the £25 billion extra burden of business taxation that the Government have already levied.

Nor have the Government learned the lesson that one of the best things that Government can do for businesses, especially small businesses, is to stay out of the way. My hon. Friend the Member for North Norfolk (Mr. Prior) and others referred to the regulatory burden and pointed out that businesses usually do best when they have least to do with Whitehall and meddlesome Ministers who have no business experience. To take just one example, the working time directive is contained in 72 pages of guidance, and even that is called a basic guide. The minimum wage regulations take up 112 pages. It is not surprising that the British Chambers of Commerce have estimated that the extra regulations so far in this Parliament will impose an extra burden on British businesses of £5 billion every year. If the Government really wanted to help business, they could start by simplifying those regulations. Instead, they have decided to set up a new body called the Small Business Service, which will give businesses advice on how they can comply with all the regulations. Businesses do not want new bodies: they want simplified regulations and fewer of them.

Mr. O'Neill: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Will the hon. Gentleman forgive me for not doing so? I would normally give way, but I want to answer some of the points raised in the debate, including his. I am short of time and the Paymaster General has to speak as well.

Two weeks ago, the Prime Minister went to Milan to speak to the socialist convention, where he lectured his European Union colleagues on how they should adopt the United States business practices of low taxation, fewer regulations and less Government interference. That is what he said, but it is not what he does—instead, he is converging on the wrong economy. If he really believed what he said, why does he not have a convergence programme with the United States? Instead, we are converging with the European Union economies. The EU is increasingly a high-tax, high-cost, high-regulation, high-unemployment zone, yet it is that disease which the Prime Minister invites this country to catch all over again. It is hardly surprising that his remarks were greeted with amused contempt by his colleagues, who pointed out—if not to him then certainly to each other—that he was telling them to adopt the US model while doing the opposite in his own country, as demonstrated by yesterday's Budget.

Increased regulation is not the only problem. My right hon. Friend the Member for South Norfolk (Mr. MacGregor) complained about additional complexity in the tax system. Take stamp duty: the Chancellor inherited two rates of stamp duty, but now we are to have four. The right hon. Gentleman said, completely misleadingly, that the measure was all about householders and that only those who buy expensive houses will pay the additional rate—but most stamp duty is paid by the commercial sector, so it is the firms and enterprises that the Chancellor says he wants to help which will pay the additional taxation. The same is true of corporation tax; the Chancellor inherited three bands of corporation tax, but now we are to have five. The story is the same on income tax; the right hon. Gentleman inherited three bands, but now we are to have five. Massive additional complexity is being built into the tax system with which the Chancellor expects people to comply.

The much-leaked 10p rate of income tax is advanced as a means of tackling poverty, but if the Government were really interested in tackling poverty, they would take people out of taxation altogether, because a 10p tax band is not a good way to help people on lower incomes. If the Government are serious about helping people on the bottom of the income scale, they should reverse

the disgraceful decision to end the repayment of dividend tax credits to non-taxpayers—a matter we debated a few months ago. There are 300,000 non-taxpaying pensioners who, from April this year, will not be able to reclaim those dividend tax credits. They are among the most disadvantaged people in the country, yet the Government have decided to do nothing to help them.

Instead, the Government are bringing in a 10p rate of income tax, but, as my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury (Mr. Baldry) pointed out, abolishing the 20p band, which the Government are doing simultaneously, pushes people upward into the higher 23p band as well as downward into the new 10p band. That has been spotted by commentators outside the House, and David Major, a partner in Deloitte and Touche, is quoted in today's newspaper as saying:

"There may be an illusion that he has given something away with the 10p band . . . What he has done is to abolish the 20p band to more than pay for the 10p band."

There we have it—another example of stealth taxation. The Chancellor says that he will bring in a tax credit for children, but he will do so a full year after he abolishes the married couple's allowance. Therefore, for a full year he has the benefit of the money from abolishing one allowance before giving some of it back to some people by introducing a measure of greater complexity in a future Budget.

We have also heard about the relentless increase in indirect taxes, especially excise duties on tobacco and fuel. My hon. Friend the Member for East Yorkshire (Mr. Townend) raised the issue of tobacco smuggling, which has become epidemic and results in lost revenue of at least £1.5 billion a year, perhaps more.

It is noticeable that the Budget report now estimates that the revenue from tobacco will be £7 billion next year. However, last year's pre-Budget report estimated that the revenue would be £8.9 billion, so nearly £2 billion in revenue has suddenly disappeared. I think I know where it has gone: it has gone overseas or been lost through smuggling. In giving his reasons for increasing tobacco taxation, the Chancellor referred to the importance of dissuading young people from starting smoking. However, if they buy tobacco from uncontrolled outlets in clubs, pubs and car parks, they are more likely to take it up.

When in opposition, the Prime Minister was fond of saying that we should be tough on crime and tough on the causes of crime: The cause of this crime is the Government's widening even further the gap between our rates of duty and those of continental Europe. It is a particularly odd policy move from a Government who are committed in principle to tax harmonisation in Europe—indeed, the Paymaster General, who is about to reply to the debate, chairs a Committee on tax harmonisation. Yet the Government are doing the opposite at home: they are disharmonising and making the gap bigger.

Another example is fuel duties. I agree entirely with my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning) who said that increased fuel duties are particularly unfair on the rural motorist for whom a car is not a luxury, but a necessity. The rural motorist was abandoned long ago by this Government. My hon. Friend the Member for North Shropshire (Mr. Paterson) highlighted another serious problem. He has done a tremendous amount of work raising the profile of this issue, so the Government are fully aware of it.

Quite simply, the British haulage industry is being rendered uncompetitive in European terms as a result not of anything that it has done, but of something the Government have done to it. The Government are erecting a green smokescreen: under the guise of an environmental measure, they are piling tax upon tax. That is bad not just for the haulage industry directly but for manufacturing industry as a whole, because all manufactured goods must be transported.

The Government's policy is particularly destructive because they have singled out diesel for special increases. Diesel is the fuel of industry—if the Government do not know that, someone should have pointed it out. We are talking not about the private motorist but about British jobs—particularly those in constituencies with a heavy manufacturing bias. Diesel is to increase by another 12 per cent. Even the low-sulphur diesel, to which the Chancellor said that he would give an "additional tax advantage", has increased by 10 per cent. If the Chancellor is considering any more special tax advantages, I hope that he will think again. I do not want a tax advantage if it means an extra 10 per cent. rate of duty.

The haulage industry must not only try to pass on some of the costs to the rest of British industry—and thereby make it uncompetitive—but must face competition from abroad. We have the most expensive fuels in Europe and there is a smuggling problem in northern Ireland. I tabled a parliamentary question asking whether the Government had estimated the amount of fuel that is being smuggled across the border by criminal gangs and paramilitaries. They replied that no estimate had been made. That is not good enough. We are talking about colossal sums of money which induce criminality. The tobacco and fuel tax increases are certainly bad for individual taxpayers, for industry, for competitiveness, for employment and for the rule of law—and, in the longer term, they are bad for the Revenue as well.

I turn briefly to the overall impact of the Budget. My hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe (Sir R. Whitney) raised, quite rightly, the prospect of a manufacturing recession. The Budget report records that manufacturing output will fall this year by between 1 and 1.5 per cent. That is not only a technical recession, but a severe one. My hon. Friend also said that he does not believe the Government's growth forecasts. They, too, are optimistic. Almost all outside commentators estimate growth to be well below Government estimates, not only this year but next year. That would make any manufacturing recession even worse.

The hon. Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Thomas) spoke eloquently in favour of an energy tax, but, if that is introduced, it will be another hit on manufacturing industry. He may have put forward a good environmental case, but he entirely overlooked the industrial damage that will be caused.

Mr. O'Neill: I want to make two points. First, if there are to be energy taxes, they must be fiscally neutral, and the Government have accepted that. The attack on my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Thomas) and the general thrust of the right hon. Gentleman's argument therefore has no substance. Secondly, vehicle excise duty is a complicated issue and there is much special pleading by the road haulage industry. Some of us have sympathy with the industry, but VED will not

[Mr. O'Neill]

necessarily undermine the opportunities available to manufacturing industry in this country. The Opposition spokesman has not done justice to that case—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman's intervention has been far too long.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: It is intolerable that a well-considered case advanced by the British haulage industry should be dismissed as special pleading by Government Members in that way. The industry has made a good case, which the Government have not answered at all. The industry would have more respect for the Government, as would we, if its case for a lower or non-existent escalator had been answered by Ministers. We shall shortly hear a reply to the debate and we shall give the Paymaster General an opportunity to answer that case, but so far we have heard nothing.

On the fiscal neutrality of the energy tax, we should be forgiven for being a little cynical about whether the Government will pocket something along the way.

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Heathcoat–Amory: If the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, I will not because I am answering some of the points that he made.

By definition, the firms and sectors that pay the tax will not be those that will be reimbursed from the revenue. Manufacturing, as a whole, will pay more than its share of the tax, and the money will flow back to different sectors, mainly the service sector. There will be a net distribution of wealth from manufacturing to the service sector. I hope that hon. Members with large manufacturing concerns in their constituencies—I certainly have some in mine—will bear that in mind before they advance the case for the tax on environmental grounds alone.

The estimates on which the Budget is based are extremely shaky. My right hon. Friend the Member for Haltemprice and Howden (Mr. Davis), who has told me that he cannot attend this part of the debate, put forward the good idea that the National Audit Office should audit and check parts of the Budget that it is excluded from auditing at present.

The Government have given in on unemployment. They used to assume that it would simply be flat. They have now agreed that it is more realistic to accept the National Audit Office assumption of an increase in unemployment over the next few years. I am afraid that very little in the Budget will prevent that 400,000 increase in unemployment that the NAO is projecting.

All the Government schemes in the world will do nothing unless the economy generates real new jobs, and the Government keep taxes down and reduce the cost of employing people. I do not believe that the Government have understood that message. If they have understood it, they have not acted on it. They are squandering the golden economic legacy that we left to them, and the country as a whole will pay the price.

9.45 pm

The Paymaster General (Dawn Primarolo): The official Opposition have been whistling in the wind this evening to keep up their spirits in the face of the congratulations that the Government have received on their economic policies and yesterday's Budget, from sources that range from the International Monetary Fund to the mother of the Leader of the Opposition, Mrs. Hague.

During the debate, the Opposition adopted not so much a kitchen table approach as a pick-and-mix approach. The quote from the hon. Member for Tunbridge Wells (Mr. Norman), who welcomed the help for small business in the Budget and described the Budget as not bad for business, was not echoed by many of his hon. Friends, despite the fact that the hon. Gentleman is vice-chairman of the Conservative party.

The comments of the shadow Chancellor, who described MIRAS as having outlived its usefulness and said that it should be abolished—the sooner the better—were not echoed in the Opposition's official policy this evening, presumably because the shadow Chancellor had to rush off to the shadow Cabinet meeting. The shadow Secretary of State for Trade and Industry suggested that we had deliberately timed the debate in order to deny him the opportunity to attend that meeting.

The Leader of the Opposition said that if we were going to phase out the married couples allowance, we should replace it with a better-targeted allowance for families who need help. That is precisely what we have done, but did the Opposition stick to that policy? No. They are into their kitchen table pick and mix.

The Opposition could not explain why Sir Ronnie Hampel, chairman of ICI, welcomed the overall approach of continuing the direction adopted, in order to strengthen the foundations for business growth; nor could they explain why Alan Leighton, the chief executive of Asda, said that he welcomed the Budget and called it a Budget for individuals, a Budget for families, a Budget for enterprise, saying that the benefits that it will bring will flow through to every sector.

The Opposition could not explain why they disagreed with Lord Harris, the chairman of Carpetright, who said:

"I think it is a good budget for my business. This is a budget that will help people to spend, especially at the bottom end of the income scale."

Throughout the debate this evening, the Opposition complained about what they did not like, denied what they had been committed to in government and said nothing about what they would do to tackle the skills shortage, investment, the productivity gap, help for families, incentives to help people into work and investment in our small businesses. They speak of their golden legacy, but even they do not believe that they left us one, because they cannot tell us now what they would do to help the economy.

In their many contributions to the debate, my hon. Friends touched on various aspects of the Budget. My hon. Friend the Member for Ochil (Mr. O'Neill) welcomed the Small Business Service and said how important that would be. He welcomed the Marshall report and, in an intervention on the right hon. Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat–Amory), he re-emphasised the importance of taxing the bad and helping the

good—exactly what we are doing—to deal with the issues and challenges arising from the Kyoto conference and our international obligations on greenhouse gases.

My hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Thomas) made an interesting speech, going further than the Budget with regard to environmental commitment, but, none the less, raising important points about how to tackle the environmental problems that we face.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Coatbridge and Chryston (Mr. Clarke) underlined the importance of the Budget in helping those in most need. My hon. Friend the Member for Worcester (Mr. Foster) reinforced that point, but went on to deal with the importance of introducing employee share ownership.

My hon. Friend the Member for Lincoln (Gillian Merron) also made important points about how many families and pensioners in her constituency will benefit from the Budget, and those points were echoed by my hon. Friend the Member for Jarrow (Mr. Hepburn).

My hon. Friend the Member for Watford (Ms Ward) spoke of a meeting today in her constituency at which pensioners told her that there is something for everyone in the Budget, and a bit more for those who need it most. She summed up the assessment of the Budget across the board. Even the Institute for Fiscal Studies had to admit that as a result of its analysis today. A single pensioner will now receive £500 a year more than when the previous Government left office and pensioner couples will receive £800 a year more.

Central to the Government's strategy is the need to tackle the employment and poverty traps, to deal with skills shortages and to encourage investment in our economy.

Opposition Members referred to the fuel escalator. The hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning) said that it was a policy which she had been unhappy with for some time. Presumably, she was alluding to the fact that it was her Government who introduced the fuel escalator, and even though she was unhappy then, she decided not to say anything, and has only now discovered the problem.

Mrs. Browning: I articulated that on several occasions. The hon. Lady might like to know that, during one television interview that I gave after a Conservative Budget, someone said that I sounded less enthusiastic than the Liberal Democrat representative.

Dawn Primarolo: The hon. Member for Eastleigh (Mr. Chidgey) may wish to take that up with the hon. Lady, but perhaps not now.

Just to reinforce the point, the policy that the hon. Lady now decries was started by the Conservative Government for good environmental reasons, but she wants to forget that. That is part of the previous Government's amnesia.

Mr. Townend: Will the hon. Lady accept that the Conservative party has changed its policy? *[Laughter.]* How can she laugh when new Labour has changed all the policies of old Labour? It is no longer in favour of nationalisation and wants to privatise; it now supports business and enterprise. It has changed its policy. Will she not accept that we have changed ours?

Dawn Primarolo: I offer the hon. Gentleman a challenge. When he can come to the Chamber and tell us the united policies of Conservative Members, we will consider listening to them. Not only do the hon. Gentlemen and his hon. Friends want to forget the 18 years of Conservative Government and encourage the electorate to pretend that they never happened: they now think that they can have opposition without responsibility and without policy. But perhaps that is a bit unkind. They probably want opposition with 1,000 policies, because each of them needs to change his policy each day.

Mr. Lansley: Does the Minister still subscribe to the view expressed in the Labour manifesto that it is an explicit objective of a Labour Government to raise the trend rate of growth of the United Kingdom economy? On what assumption about the trend rate of growth is the Budget based and why has she not subjected that assumption to audit by the National Audit Office?

Dawn Primarolo: The hon. Gentleman is avidly reading the Red Book so he will see what we are doing in a whole range of areas—tackling the productivity gap, investing in skills, investing in small business and creating sustainable growth. That is precisely what the Government are about.

The Budget is locking in the economic stability that the Government are creating and sustaining. We are introducing a small business tax rate of 10p. We are rebuilding our public services with extra resources for school books and for accident and emergency departments. We are making work pay with a new 10p starting rate of tax and a cut in the basic rate of tax to 22p next year. Conservative Members say that, somehow, the disappearance of the 20p rate means that people are not better off, but they should study their figures a little more closely. People are better off as a result of the 10p starting rate.

Mr. Townend: By how much?

Dawn Primarolo: The hon. Gentleman shouts his intervention across the Chamber, but I will take it. Individuals will be better off by in excess of £300.

Mr. Townend *rose—*

Dawn Primarolo: I think that I have answered the hon. Gentleman's question.

Mr. Townend: Will the Minister tell the House how much the average taxpayer will save with the 10p rate, given that the Government have done away with the 20p rate? According to my calculations, the £150 saving comes down to £60.

Dawn Primarolo: For people in 2 million households, the measure halves the rate of tax that they will be paying. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman can understand that clearly.

The Budget is about locking in economic stability, controlling public finances, ensuring that we are investing and ensuring that we cut borrowing and continue to do so. It is about raising—

Mr. Paterson: Will the Minister give way?

Dawn Primarolo: I do not have time to give way. I apologise to the hon. Gentleman.

[Dawn Primarolo]

The Budget is about raising productivity on a foundation of stability. We must work to raise productivity. We must deliver better skills, innovation, competition, information technology and a secure environment for small businesses. Yesterday's Budget introduced seven major reforms for a knowledge-based enterprise economy, opening it up for all. The Budget invests in families by ensuring that the new children's tax credit will maximise support to those families with the lowest income. It raises child benefit, which the Conservatives froze, to a higher level than at any time since its introduction.

The Budget gives a fair deal to pensioners, with £100 for the winter payment and a guaranteed minimum income which will be linked to earnings. It will build a better society, which will ensure that we have a fairer society in which we support each other and ensure that there is opportunity for all to fulfil their potential. The Budget is about making sure that nobody is excluded; everybody should be included in the prosperity of our nation.

The Budget is about helping the British people. Conservative Members are interested only in helping themselves. When they talk about the Budget, they deny their past and want to take the credit for our future. They will be sorely disappointed. This is a popular Budget. It has been widely recognised as such and welcomed by this country as a way forward for the Labour Government.

It being Ten o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

Debate to be resumed tomorrow.

Testicular Cancer

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Hanson.]*

10 pm

Ms Linda Perham (Ilford, North): It is estimated that a third of all men will develop some form of cancer. Worldwide, the number of cases of testicular cancer has risen: the number of cases has doubled in 20 years, and is expected to double every 20 years on the basis of today's trends.

The increased incidence of testicular cancer is linked to a decline in sperm count. Cases of prostate cancer are also increasing. Scientists have predicted that, in 20 years' time, one in four men may risk developing prostate cancer. That is double a woman's risk of developing breast cancer.

I decided to speak about testicular cancer in order to draw attention to the work of a charity called the Orchid Cancer Appeal. It was started by one of my constituents, Colin Osborne, who was diagnosed as suffering from testicular cancer in 1994. He was one of approximately 1,500 men who are diagnosed every year.

During Colin's treatment, his chance of survival kept falling. First it was 80 per cent.; then it was 40 per cent.; then it was 20 per cent. That was very worrying not only for Colin, but for his wife and family: his wife had become pregnant with their second child at the same time as his diagnosis. Through his determination and courage, however, Colin managed to get through all his treatments.

During Colin's treatment, he was aware of the financial crisis affecting the men's cancer unit that was treating him. The unit, led by Professor Tim Oliver, is based at St. Bartholomew's hospital, in the department of medical oncology. As well as providing care for patients in east London through its partnership with Oldchurch hospital, it has links with the major cancer centres in Essex and East Anglia as part of the Anglian germ cell cancer group comprising Southend, Colchester, Norwich, Ipswich and Cambridge.

Colin knew that, without the work of the unit, he would probably not be alive, and that inspired him to do something to help the unit. He started a fund-raising organisation—the Orchid Cancer Appeal. He gained great support, and the first event raised £20,000. In July 1997, the Orchid appeal was recognised by Diana, Princess of Wales, and a donation was made by the Princess of Wales's charities trust. The Orchid Cancer Appeal is now a registered charity. It has attracted a number of high-profile celebrity supporters, and boasts Michael Parkinson as its president, Steve Davis—the snooker champion—as patron, and other sporting stars as vice-presidents, such as 1966 world cup winners Sir Geoff Hurst and Martin Peters, and the former Wimbledon champion Pat Cash.

I have been very impressed by Colin's tenacity and commitment, and his fighting spirit. Ever since my invitation to the launch of the Orchid appeal in October 1997 at Planet Hollywood, I have been a firm supporter, attending fund-raising events and sponsoring a reception in the House of Commons in November 1998.

The aims of the appeal are to

"sponsor more research into the diagnosis, prevention and treatment of the cancers involving the male sex organs",

such as testicular and prostate cancer, and to target aspects of cancer research and treatment. In comparison with women, men are not very aware of their risks of cancer. Many men do not know that they have a prostate gland, let alone what function it performs; yet cancer of the prostate is the commonest cancer in men after lung cancer, and its incidence is rising fast. The same lack of awareness is prevalent in young men with regard to testicular cancer.

Jane Griffiths (Reading, East): Is there not a pressing need for young men to become aware of the possibility of contracting testicular cancer, which, by and large, strikes young men? Should not parents and teachers instil that awareness in them, and encourage them to examine themselves?

Ms Perham: I appreciate my hon. Friend's intervention. As she knows, testicular cancer predominantly affects men aged between 15 and 40, yet few regularly check for lumps. The fact that it affects 15-year-old boys makes it important that parents make their sons aware of potential problems. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Reading, East (Jane Griffiths), who has started the all-party group on male cancers and is involved in the Everyman campaign to combat cancer.

The Orchid Cancer Appeal is raising funds to support three research developments. The first is to develop new diagnostic tools both to detect the cancer without needing to lose a testicle to make the diagnosis—which happens at present—and to investigate the cause of declining sperm count, which is now known to be a major precursor of the cancer.

The second is to support a combined clinical and laboratory programme aimed at translating new knowledge on the genes that are involved in making testis cancer sensitive to chemotherapy to develop a new approach to treating prostate cancer. The final programme is to support epidemiological research into understanding what causes the large difference in prostate cancer deaths between the west, which has intermediate incidence, the middle and far east, which has low incidence, and Africa, which has high incidence.

Testicular cancer, which starts as a lump in the testicle, quickly enlarges and then seeds to glands in the abdomen. It then seeds to other organs such as the liver, lung and, ultimately, the brain, via the bloodstream. If the cancer is caught early on, only one testicle may need to be removed.

The way in which to treat testicular cancer has, until now, been to remove the infected area, or to undergo a course of chemotherapy. Chemotherapy is often very distressing for the patients. Hair loss and severe infections can occur in the short term because of the treatment.

Recent research has involved developing ways in which to give shorter courses of chemotherapy to patients who have early highly curable diseases. There is now a one-day treatment without hair loss. That is proving to be as good as radiotherapy for stage 1 seminoma. New evidence shows that two thirds of patients may have damage in the other testicle, so attempting to conserve the testicle with the tumour is becoming ever more important, especially as the victims of the disease are usually young, as my hon. Friend the Member for Reading, East (Jane Griffiths) has pointed out.

Testicular cancer is the most common form of cancer in young men aged 24 to 35. If the testicle were to be removed and the other testicle became infected, a young man could be left infertile. That could be very sad for the men affected, adding to the stress and worry already caused by having such a disease.

Testicular cancer is an unusual cancer because it can sometimes be eliminated very quickly; the cancer is particularly susceptible to treatment. The number of drugs that work when other, more conventional drugs have failed to work is increasing. That sets apart testicular cancer from other cancers, and scientists are asking whether they will be able to learn something valuable from a study of the cancer, which could help in the treatment of other cancers.

Dr. Ian Gibson (Norwich, North): Does my hon. Friend agree that the work of BACUP—the British Association of Cancer United Patients—and the Cancer Relief Macmillan Fund in advising patients about the problems and looking after them in the traumatic period, has been important? Does she further agree that, because of the success in testicular cancer treatment, we now need to look at reducing the doses of drugs that are given to people because secondary cancers may develop later in life among those young people? It is a British success story in that our cure rates are as good as anywhere else in the world. Now we can think about reducing the number of drugs and the amount of drugs that are given to patients.

Ms Perham: I thank my hon. Friend for making those points. I pay tribute to him as chair of the all-party group on cancer. I congratulate him on his inspirational, energetic work in focusing attention inside and outside the House on cancer issues.

One scientific discovery often leads to another. That has happened in the advance of treatment for testicular cancer. New knowledge from bone marrow transplantation and leukaemia treatment has led to a development. Patients can now be given double the dosage of chemotherapy that was previously considered to be acceptable. The research has helped patients who have not recovered after one or two conventional treatments, and has led to more research, which has opened up treatments for more common adult cancers, such as cancers of the breast and the bladder.

Currently, improving resistance to, and the early detection of, testicular cancer is regarded as the best way of improving long-term survival. Research is being conducted into screening techniques for testicular and prostate cancer, and into the genes involved in making testicular cancer so sensitive to chemotherapy—in the hope that scientists will be able to make prostate cancer, which is currently resistant to chemotherapy, respond like testicular cancer. If the relevant genes can be identified, potential hereditary risks can be recognised.

The Royal Hospitals NHS trust's men's cancer unit has conducted research into the part that diet plays in developing cancer. Poor nutrition, particularly lack of vitamin A, is increasingly thought to be a factor in many

[Ms Perham]

different types of cancer, which may help to explain the large number of deaths from cancer around the east end of London.

I am so impressed with what Colin has done with the charity. By learning from a cancer for which we have a 95 per cent. cure rate, we may learn to develop treatment for currently untreatable cancers.

The Orchid appeal is initially focusing on east London and East Anglia, not least because Colin Osborne is a north-east Londoner, but also because of the relative lack of funding in those areas in the past 15 years. There are plans, however, to work towards achieving national and overseas targets as part of the charity's research. That may be helpful in explaining why there is global variation in the incidence of testicular and prostate cancer. The funding issue is the obvious reason why the appeal has been started.

In a written answer given, on 9 November 1998, to my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner), central records showed that totals of over £18 million for breast cancer research, over £10 million for cervical cancer research, and a mere £265,000 for prostate cancer research were provided in the five-year period 1993–98. In the past few years, much good work has been done to highlight women's cancers. There is now a very active and well-supported all-party group on breast cancer. I am therefore very pleased, as I said, that a new all-party group on male cancers was formed on 17 November 1998.

I have already paid tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Reading, East, who has been very active in working with the Everyman campaign of the Institute of Cancer Research. I should like to mention also the hon. Member for Mid–Dorset and North Poole (Mr. Fraser), who, on 12 May 1998, initiated a debate in the House on the subject of prostate cancer screening.

I am very encouraged by the interest and support shown by hon. Members. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will join me in congratulating my constituent, Colin Osborne, and all those who have been involved in the Orchid Cancer Appeal on their work in promoting awareness of male cancers. I should like my hon. Friend also to give some indication of the Government's view on the future of screening, treatment and research into cancers affecting men.

10.13 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. John Hutton): I warmly congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford, North (Ms Perham) on raising the subject today, and on her very thoughtful and constructive comments. I also join her in applauding and congratulating Colin Osborne on his strength and determination, not only in his fight with cancer. but in continuing the fight for all other men through the Orchid Cancer Appeal—a charity that Colin established and which raises considerable sums for research.

Little is known about the causes of testicular cancer. There may be a family history of testicular tumours, and northern Europeans have a greater incidence of the disease than do southern Europeans, with Denmark having the highest percentage of cases. The cancer is rare in non-Caucasians, except among Maoris in New Zealand. Similarly, the causes of prostate cancer are poorly understood—although we know that a family history increases the risk of developing the disease. There is evidence also that a high-fat and low-vegetable diet increases the risk.

Therefore, unlike lung cancer—of which we know that smoking greatly increases the risk—we are not yet able to advise men of ways in which they might reduce their risk of developing prostate and testicular cancer. There are other steps that we can and are taking, but, because so little is known about these cancers, the Government are committed to raising self-awareness of symptoms so that early diagnosis and referral can be made. I shall say a few more words about that in a moment.

My hon. Friend referred to the incidence of the disease and its mortality rates. Testicular cancer is the most common cancer in men in the UK aged between 20 and 34, an age at which cancer is comparatively rare. Around 1,000 new cases in total are registered each year, over half of which occur in men under 35. Incidence rates are rising for both testicular and prostate cancer, but it is encouraging that the overall mortality rate for both cancers has fallen. Indeed, for testicular cancer the death rate halved in the 20 years to 1992, and there has also been a welcome, but modest, fall in mortality rates for prostate cancer since 1993. However, the fact remains that prostate cancer is second only to lung cancer as a cause of cancer deaths in men.

As the Orchid Cancer Appeal recognises, research into the causes and treatment of these cancers is vital. The Government are firmly committed to encouraging research into the causes, prevention, early detection and treatment of all cancers, including testicular and prostate cancers. The Department of Health spent £8.4 million on cancer research in 1996-97. The Scottish Office spent a further £500,000 and, as part of the NHS research and development programme, an additional £1.2 million has been spent.

The research and development strategic framework for the use of the national health service R and D funding is being reviewed. As part of that review, five topic working groups have been established to consider research coverage in key areas. One such group is considering cancer. The outcome of the reviews will help guide future priorities for research expenditure through the NHS research and development levy.

The main agency through which the Government support biomedical and clinical research is the Medical Research Council. The council, as many hon. Members will know, is an independent body deciding what research to support according to its own expert judgment. The council spends, on average, £13 million a year directly on research into cancer, and much other research funded by the council is also relevant to our understanding of cancer—for example, research into genetics and health, the immune system and infections.

One area in which there is considerable scientific interest is recent evidence that has suggested a possible role for environmental oestrogens, which have been linked to falling sperm counts. As my hon. Friend mentioned, some reports suggest that there is a connection between low sperm counts and testicular cancer. The United Kingdom, I am glad to say, is playing an important part in internat onal activities in this field, not least through the Medical Research Council's reproductive biology unit, and the Institute for Environment and

Health. However, despite a lot of research, it is still not clear that sperm counts have been falling over the years and we know of no evidence that low sperm counts, as such, indicate a risk of developing testicular cancer.

In April last year, we announced a £1.7 million programme of epidemiological research over three to four years into the possible relationships between chemical exposure, sperm counts, and penile congenital abnormalities. This is a joint programme involving three Government Departments and the European Chemical Industry Council. We are also funding an 18-month epidemiological study of testicular cancer, prostate cancer and the condition now known as—I am going to have trouble with this one, Mr. Deputy Speaker—cryptorchidism, in which the testicles have incompletely descended, which is known to lead to an increased risk of testicular cancer.

On the subject of screening and awareness, there is currently no certain method by which a man can reduce his risk of developing testicular cancer. There is also no effective screening method for testicular cancer, so the focus must be on raising awareness, early detection and high-quality treatment.

The Department of Health launched a campaign to encourage testicular awareness in the hope of reducing death from this disease. The Department, in conjunction with the Imperial Cancer Research Fund, published the leaflet "A Whole New Ball Game" in the summer of 1995. Distribution of the leaflet is targeted on the age group most at risk, young men at universities and sixth form colleges, as well as GP surgeries, pharmacies and so on. The aim is to make men aware of what is normal and, when there are any unusual changes, to realise the importance of contacting a doctor early to ensure the maximum chance of cure.

There is also no method by which a man can reduce his risk of prostate cancer. Of course, there are calls for the introduction of a screening programme for prostate cancer. The Department of Health's standing group on health technology therefore made prostate cancer one of its original priority areas for health technology assessment. The Department commissioned two systematic reviews of the diagnosis, management and screening of early localised prostate cancer from the university of Bristol and the Institute of Cancer Research.

The results of the two reviews were published early in 1997. They produced a clear recommendation that the current evidence did not support the introduction of a national screening programme for prostate cancer with the available technology. I am well aware that that recommendation came as a disappointment to many, but it is important to understand the reasons for it.

Current evidence suggests that the introduction of a screening programme would result in unnecessary, painful and potentially harmful treatment for many men. Although prostate cancer can be a killer, the evidence suggests that many prostate cancers are slow growing and unlikely to cause clinically important symptoms during a man's life. Autopsy studies show that 30 per cent. of men over 50 who had no symptoms of prostate cancer while alive had histological evidence of prostate cancer at the time of death. That figure rises to over 50 per cent. in men over 80 years of age.

It is ethical to offer someone a screening test only when it is likely to do more good than harm. Given the lack of evidence of benefit and the possibility of harm, the reviews concluded that a national prostate screening programme could not be justified. It was on the basis of those studies that the national screening committee recommended that there was no case for a national prostate screening programme. Ministers accepted the recommendation, and guidance issued in June of last year advised health authorities that prostate cancer screening should not be routinely offered to patients.

However, prostate cancer continues to be a priority for the Department of Health. The Department's health technology assessment steering committee recently agreed to fund a £200,000, 12-month feasibility study for a trial of treatments of localised prostate cancer. It is expected that the study will lead to further research. The national screening committee continues to keep the position under close review.

I am aware of the excellent work achieved by Professor Tim Oliver of St. Bartholomew's Hospital, who leads the group that includes north-east Thames hospitals, hospitals in Ipswich and west Suffolk and Addenbrooke's. Professor Oliver, who specialises in cancer of the testis, has achieved a formidable 97 per cent. success rate in treating it.

We are continuing to improve cancer treatment and care. Fortunately, testicular cancer is highly susceptible to modern methods of treatment. The survival rate for those with early-stage disease is between 95 and 100 per cent. My hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North referred to some important advances in treatment. Combination chemotherapy has proved highly successful for patients with metastatic disease and about 90 per cent. can be cured.

The Government are determined to improve services for all cancers, including men's cancers. A great deal of work has already been undertaken to implement the recommendations contained in the Calman-Hine cancer framework and supplemented by subsequent guidance. A key element has been the identification of cancer units and cancer centres and the local agreement about which cancers should be treated at each hospital.

The Government have signalled their commitment to making cancer waits a priority. The White Paper "The new NHS" guarantees that everyone with suspected cancer will be able to see a specialist within two weeks of their GP deciding that they need to be seen urgently and requesting an appointment. Those arrangements have been guaranteed for everyone with suspected breast cancer by April 1999 and for all other cases of suspected cancer by 2000. We recognise that that will be particularly challenging for urological cancers such as prostate cancer. Achievement of the target will bring about real benefit by enabling prompt diagnosis.

Cancer is one of four target areas in the Green Paper "Our Healthier Nation", which set out our aim to reduce the death rate from cancer among people aged under 65 by at least one fifth by the year 2010. Progress on those targets through local partnerships and healthy settings, involving business and workplaces, will have a major impact on the health of men. Health care services will be encouraged to respond to the needs of the local communities—for example, where needs are identified,

[Mr. John Hutton]

consideration should be given to having well men clinics, which could bring male-specific cancer, such as testicular cancer, to attention earlier.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): How much money from the Wellcome foundation is involved here? Can we have an assurance that any lack of screening is not connected with a shortage of financial resources?

Mr. Hutton: I do not have the figures for the Wellcome foundation with me, but I can assure my hon. Friend that resources are not an issue in this case.

The Government welcome initiatives such as the Orchid Cancer Appeal and the Everyman campaign launched by the Institute of Cancer Research last year. My predecessor—the current Minister of State, Home Office, my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, South (Mr. Boateng)—indicated our support to the first all-party parliamentary group for male cancer. It is through initiatives such as those that we can increase public awareness of the symptoms and need for early diagnosis for those cancers.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ilford, North has done a singular service to the House tonight in allowing us the opportunity to discuss these important issues. I am sure that she will continue to take a close interest in these matters and, together, we will continue to improve the services for our constituents.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-six minutes past Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 11 March 1999

The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

The Minister was asked—

Coastal Zone Management Plan

1. **Mrs. Claire Curtis-Thomas** (Crosby): To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what progress his Department has made in drawing up and implementing an integrated coastal zone management plan. [74077]

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Elliot Morley): My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions has policy responsibility for co-ordinating coastal zone management and his Department has encouraged the production of coastal management plans. They are produced on a local basis to address a broad range of local issues, including flood and coastal defence.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that answer. As he may be aware, I represent the constituency of Crosby, which is bounded by 20 miles of beautiful north-west coastline, for which a coastal management plan is currently being—

Madam Speaker: Order. It is not in order to read questions.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: I am so sorry, Madam Speaker.

I support the coastal management plan, but I want to ensure that people in my community, who have a vested interest in it, are part of the consultation team. What reassurances can my hon. Friend give me that my constituents, as well as the experts, will also be part of the consultation process?

Mr. Morley: My hon. Friend made a powerful case on behalf of her constituents in our recent debate on the Select Committee report on flood and coastal defence. I assure her that local authorities are involved in the drawing up of coastal and shoreline management plans for flood and coastal defence, and local people can make representations. As a Member of Parliament, she can make direct representations. Given the powerful case that she has already made on behalf of her constituents, I am sure that she will not be slow to do so.

Common Agricultural Policy

2. **Mr. Andrew Love** (Edmonton): What progress he has made towards reform of the common agricultural policy in respect of environmental improvement measures; and if he will make a statement. [74078]

13. **Dr. Ian Gibson** (Norwich, North): If he will report on the current negotiations on reform of the common agricultural policy, with particular reference to issues relating to environmental improvements. [74091]

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Elliot Morley): Negotiations on the agricultural aspects of Agenda 2000 reached a conclusion early this morning. My right hon Friend the Minister hopes to make a full statement to the House tomorrow.

Mr. Love: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply and congratulate my right hon. Friend the Minister on the successful conclusion of the negotiations in Brussels. The deal has been described by the Agriculture Commissioner as the most radical reform since the inception of the CAP. It is certainly a great deal more than was done by the Conservatives during their 18 years in government. It will be good for consumers and good for the environment. What funding will be made available under the reform for agri-environmental improvements?

Mr. Morley: The agreement that has been negotiated offers benefits to consumers. The whole House will welcome that. The details on funding and the important measures in Agenda 2000 on rural development are matters for my right hon. Friend when he makes his statement tomorrow. All hon. Members will have an opportunity to ask detailed questions then.

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Skye and Inverness, West): Does the Minister agree that the apparent shape of the package that has emerged overnight represents a considerable improvement on the position of only a week or two ago and that the National Farmers Union's description of it this morning as something of a mixed bag was probably accurate? Does he share my surprise at the comments of the Conservative spokesman, the hon. Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo), who described the deal as a failure because CAP reform would cost more? No political party in any member state has ever believed that a reformed CAP would not cost more in the short term before becoming cheaper in the long term.

Given the importance of environmental improvement measures and the wider rural development strategies to which the Minister has just alluded, does he agree that the final shape of the package must maintain the essential integrity of the British family farm unit? Without that basic building block, we will not have the necessary personnel in the countryside for the environmental and other rural development programmes that we hope the eventual savings from CAP reform will help to deliver.

Mr. Morley: I agree that the impact on family farms must be taken into account in the final form of the package. I agree that it is surprising that there has been criticism of the cost of the package, because the original proposal suggested that there would be an initial increase

in cost, followed by a fall. I was also surprised that the Leader of the Opposition apparently argued against the interests of consumers by criticising all aspects of the package.

Madam Speaker: I apologise to the hon. Member for Norwich, North (Dr. Gibson), whom I should have called earlier because we are dealing with his substantive question. Please put your question now, Dr. Gibson.

Dr. Gibson: Thank you, Madam Speaker. What are the Government's priorities for rural development regulation? Who will implement that regulation? Will local and regional bodies have a part to play?

Mr. Morley: I can tell my hon. Friend the Government's priorities, although the final form of the package is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Minister to outline tomorrow in his statement. We wanted a significant expansion of the agri-environment budget and support for aspects of agri-environment, including organic aid. We also wanted provision for better targeting of support in the countryside, more transparent support to the agricultural community and support for the wider rural economy, encouraging diversification.

Mr. Cynog Dafis (Ceredigion): I wish to emphasise, as others have done, that maintaining the environment as a resource for everybody means that we have to have people on the land and in the countryside. Can the Minister confirm that yesterday's agreement on compensation made no reference to degressivity—the reduction of compensation over time? Can he also tell us what will happen in that regard at the Finance Ministers meeting on Monday? Will he take the message from us that it is terribly important that there remains sufficient support for farming to protect the family farm and to ensure that we move towards a system of environmental management payments as the basis of agricultural support?

Mr. Morley: I agree with the main thrust of the hon. Gentleman's argument. However, I am sure that he appreciates that it would be wrong for me to pre-empt my right hon. Friend's statement tomorrow.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): I am sure that my hon. Friend will agree that field boundaries are an important part of the English landscape. What money will be made available to help farmers maintain traditional boundaries? Hedges, ditches and walls are extremely expensive but very important if we are to protect the quality of the British countryside.

Mr. Morley: Field boundaries are very important to the English countryside, and agriculture has a key influence on the maintenance and enhancement of field boundaries. We already provide financial support and inducements through our countryside stewardship and environmentally sensitive area schemes. We want to enhance that through Agenda 2000. As I said, my right hon. Friend will be discussing those issues in his statement tomorrow.

Mr. Tim Yeo (South Suffolk): We look forward to getting the details of the package from the Minister in his statement tomorrow, but is it not clear already today that the agreement is bad for the taxpayer because the cost of the CAP will rise even further than previously thought; that it is bad for consumers because the prospect of lower food prices in the shops is now even further away than was previously thought; and that it is bad for Britain's dairy farmers as the much-needed reforms will not even start for another four years.

Mr. Morley: The CAP has many disadvantages and any increase in the overall cost is bad for consumers. For that reason we were surprised that the Leader of the Opposition criticised all the main aspects of our negotiations to try to reduce consumer costs.

Meat Hygiene Service

3. **Mr. John Burnett** (Torridge and West Devon): If he will make a statement on the Meat Hygiene Service's charges. [74079]

The Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Jeff Rooker): The Meat Hygiene Service charges licensed premises on an hourly rate basis for the inspection service provided by its official veterinary surgeons and meat inspection staff. The level of the charges is reviewed annually and is subject to a period of consultation with the industry and individual plant operators, which for 1999-2000 is still on-going.

Mr. Burnett: I am grateful to the Minister and I hope that he will shortly make an announcement on small rural abattoirs. I should like to draw the House's attention to the predicament of the larger abattoirs, particularly in Torrington and Hatherleigh in my constituency which face a doubling of meat inspection charges from 1 April 1999. In Torrington, the figure is some £410,000 and in Hatherleigh it is £170,000. Those increases will be paid for by the hard-pressed farmer. In Hatherleigh last Tuesday there were some 18 officials inspecting 25 people working at the abattoir. Does the Minister really believe that it is necessary to have two, or sometimes three officials inspecting the same animal at the same time?

Mr. Rooker: I fully understand and, indeed, share the concerns at the proposed increases currently being considered. Firm proposals have yet to be put to Ministers. There is nothing on our desks; negotiations and discussions are still going on and there will be full consultation with the industry before any final decisions are taken. We are receiving many representations, but the work is unevenly distributed throughout the industry. I understand that some 80 per cent. of cattle are slaughtered in just 20 slaughterhouses.

Mr. Gareth Thomas (Clwyd, West): Does my hon. Friend accept that when farm incomes are plummeting, particularly in less-favoured areas, the charges imposed by the Meat Hygiene Service are regarded as disproportionately high and indeed punitive? Will he undertake to look again at the matter with a view to mitigating the burden that is imposed, particularly on small farmers.

Mr. Rooker: The answer is yes, because that is implied in the fact that we will have consultations. The fact

remains that the taxpayer contribution in the past has been enormous and we are reducing it by charging for specified risk material controls. We will not allow unjustifiably high charges. The charges are fully audited. We do not see why the taxpayer should carry any greater burden.

Mr. Christopher Gill (Ludlow): I congratulate the Minister on having the good common sense to issue a press release on Tuesday saying that he would reconsider the position of small and low-throughput abattoirs. Will he hold off levying the charges until the consultations are concluded—in other words, will there be a stay of execution for those abattoirs? Will he give us an assurance that he will be very careful when considering the definition of small abattoirs so that those in strategic areas in the rural environment are not excluded? The loss of those abattoirs would be devastating to the local economy, small farmers, niche marketing, animal welfare and a host of other concerns. This is a very serious matter.

Mr. Rooker: By implication, I want to consider those matters. I do not want to hide behind the fact that European Union legislation drives and controls much of this. The definition of small or high or low-throughput abattoirs is not one that can readily be used to differentiate the charges. We can have some flexibility on how the charges are levied but we need the industry's co-operation.

Many people have urged us to charge on a headage rather than an hourage basis. That would be very unfair to operators who have invested huge amounts in larger-throughput abattoirs where the unit cost is very low. We must be very careful not to discriminate, but I accept the point about isolated abattoirs and the problems of animals having to travel long distances. It is a private sector industry; it is not controlled by the Government. We do not plan to introduce any compensation, as the industry would like, for it to reorganise itself.

Mr. Ben Bradshaw (Exeter): Does my hon. Friend accept that the proposals as they stand are unfair to small abattoirs? The owner of a small abattoir in my constituency estimates that his weekly costs will increase from £60 to £600 and that he will be out of business in a month. I urge my hon. Friend to act quickly. Am I right in thinking that the charges are to come in next month? We are talking not only about abattoirs but about butchers and consumers. The proposals go against everything that the Government are trying to do in encouraging local, high-quality production and local marketing of food.

Mr. Rooker: I have to be careful what I say, because of the lawyers and our friends across the water. All hon. Members can tell their constituents to watch the bills and the charges. Many estimates have been sent in by butchers and small abattoir operators, but they should watch the actual charges. We are limited in what we can do to implement the new proposals because of the shortage of vets, as I have said to every hon. Member who has written to me. It is not as though everything can start 100 per cent. all at once. We will seek to concentrate the extra resources on the high-risk abattoirs, and in particular those that consistently score low on the hygiene assessments. We will cut no corners whatever in meat hygiene.

Mr. James Paice (South-East Cambridgeshire): Of course the Minister is right to target resources where the risk is highest, but the extra charges to come in at the beginning of April for the specified risk material removals are an additional burden on top of the meat hygiene charges that have already been introduced and will continue next year. Does not he understand that not only the mechanisms of charging—per capita or per time—but the staffing levels required give rise to the high charges?

There is plenty of anecdotal evidence that in other parts of Europe the level of veterinary inspection in abattoirs is far lower than is required here. The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has already promised an investigation into the charges in the rest of Europe. Will any further increases, for whatever purpose, be suspended until the investigations into charging mechanisms and into European practices are complete?

Mr. Rooker: On the new element of the charges regarding the specified risk material removals, the taxpayer has spent £20 million subsiding that work in the past year, because we extended by a year the period for which we did not charge. We cannot construct a policy on anecdotal evidence in Europe—

Mr. Paice: I did not say that.

Mr. Rooker: That was the implication. We seek much more precise and targeted official information about the practice in Europe. Some 10 or 12 member states currently face infraction proceedings from the Commission because they are not doing what they should be doing.

Genetically Modified Crops

4. **Mr. Desmond Swayne** (New Forest, West): What assessment he has made of the recommendation of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds on the planting of genetically modified crops. [74081]

6. **Mr. David Chaytor** (Bury, North): To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the impact which failure to reach agreement at the Cartagena biosafety protocol negotiations will have on United Kingdom policy on genetically modified crops. [74083]

The Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Jeff Rooker): The failure of the negotiations does not directly affect UK policy on genetically modified organisms, because European legislation already controls all releases and marketing within the EU, including imports.

A moratorium on trials in the UK would not be helpful, because the purpose of the trials is to obtain information about the impact on biodiversity. I confirm to the House what I said two weeks ago during an interview: the extent of the current trials measures less than two football pitches.

Mr. James Gray (North Wiltshire): It is winter.

Mr. Rooker: Of course it is winter. However, the idea had got around that the whole country was covered with trial GMO crops: it is not.

Mr. Swayne: My question was about the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds. Is the Minister aware that the

RSPB has pointed out that any statements to the effect that his two football pitches will yield meaningful data are a sham? Does he really intend to proceed with the development of such crops as early as next year, when both the RSPB and English Nature have said that useful test data will not be available for three years?

Mr. Rooker: With respect, I did address the issue, because the point is that the RSPB has called for a moratorium. I addressed that point in my original substantive answer. The RSPB will be fully involved in the monitoring of the field-scale trials that will take place this year; we have been open about them. Several 10-hectare fields will be involved, and of course those trials will be larger than the current ones. The RSPB will be fully represented on the steering committee that will oversee the ecological studies on those trials.

Mr. Chaytor: Question 6. Madam Speaker—[HON. MEMBERS: "It was linked to question 4."] Forgive me, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Members: Why?

Madam Speaker: Because I am a very forgiving Speaker.

Mr. Chaytor: I am part of the new intake and I am still, two years on, not fully familiar with the arcane parliamentary procedures.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Minister on dealing with the issues very cautiously and thoroughly in the past few months. Does he agree that the failure to reach agreement at the biosafety convention—especially on producer liability, the right to ban imports and the right to label—will serve only to increase the concern that many consumers feel? Has he had the chance to consider the evidence submitted yesterday to the Select Committee on Science and Technology by the scientists from English Nature about the wider potential impact on biodiversity of the planting of GM crops? How can the Government ensure that consumers will have the right to choose between GM food and non-GM food in the light of the failure to reach an agreement on a biosafety protocol at Cartagena?

Mr. Rooker: My hon. Friend raises an important point. There are no immediate implications for the United Kingdom from the breakdown of the negotiations. The parties will meet again in May 2000 with a view to concluding the negotiations. I should add that there were errors in reporting the issue as regards the UK. We did not break ranks with the European Union to support the United States of America, as was suggested in *The Guardian*. That report was totally incorrect.

Mr. Gray: The Minister seems to have admitted that his use of the image of two football pitches in a recent interview was substantially misleading because, in the middle of winter, soya beans grow, but nothing else. The more accurate figure, given by the then Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Transport and the Regions, the hon. Member for Wallasey (Angela Eagle), was that 846 acres were under cultivation last July, which is about 400 football pitches. Will the Minister admit that he used a misleading image on the "Today" programme because he was so concerned about the public's notion of what GM means that he was trying to allay their fears by using substantially misleading statistics?

Mr. Rooker: Since that interview, I have double checked the briefing provided to me by the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, which oversees these trials. I was quite right to point out what the position actually was in February to people who were being told that the countryside is covered in trials of GM crops. Although we can talk about large-scale field planting in the spring, summer and autumn, the reality at the time when I was interviewed was that an area smaller than two football pitches was being covered.

Mr. Alan Simpson (Nottingham, South): Will my hon. Friend comment on how adequately he can monitor or control the release of GM organisms into the environment under the existing rules? Having just discovered that Monsanto plans field testing of GM crops just outside Nottingham, I was astonished to read a reply from a Minister at the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions that stated that permission to do so had been granted under EU directive 90/220—under which there is no obligation to consult local authorities, local farmers or local people. If that is the broad rubric under which access to GM planting may take place, how can adequate monitoring be undertaken on sites on which we do not know even the state of the existing ecosystem?

Mr. Rooker: I have seen the answers given to my hon. Friend by the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions. The short answer is that the purpose of the trials is to get the information that we need. The trials are being monitored and overseen. They are not secret, and Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food references are published. There is no doubt about where the trials are taking place.

Mr. Tim Yeo (South Suffolk): On 4 March, the Minister for the Environment told the House—at column *837* of *Hansard*—that farm-scale trials of herbicide-tolerant genetically modified crops would start next month and continue for four years. Will the Minister at last recognise that the Conservative party is not calling for a moratorium on those trials? What we want is a delay in the commercial planting of herbicide-tolerant genetically modified crops. How can the Government contemplate approving commercial planting before the trials have been completed and the results properly analysed?

Mr. Rooker: The Conservative party never told the country about all the approvals of food and crops that its Government made, but the Tories are trying to lead a scare about it now. We have made it clear that there will be field-scale trials and farm-scale trials this year. It is important to move on from the trials conducted previously. The trials will be independently monitored, and we need to receive information from them before we decide what will happen in future. Unlike the Conservatives, we are not prepared to say that we can be certain within four years or three—the figure seems to be changing—of whether we can or cannot proceed. We shall proceed with field-scale trials this year, and we shall have the results before we decide what happens next.

Organic Farmers

5. **Mr. Jeremy Corbyn** (Islington, North): What support he plans to introduce for organic farmers. [74082]

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Elliot Morley): Today I am laying before Parliament regulations that will double the rate of aid for farmers in England converting to organic practices, following approval of the revised scheme from the European Commission. We have also increased support for the organic conversion information service, which advises farmers about conversion.

Mr. Corbyn: I thank the Minister for that reply. I welcome any increase in support for organic farming or improvements in financial support to try to meet demand. Most organic products have to be imported because British farmers cannot meet demand. Is he aware that comparison of expenditure by his Department on organic farming with the investment in biotechnology by his and other Departments shows a £2 million increase in organic farming since May 1997 while £98 million has been invested in other forms of high technology farming that are anathema to those of us who want to develop sustainable organic agriculture in Britain?

Mr. Morley: I accept that, so far, support for organic farming has been small compared with the areas mentioned by my hon. Friend. That is why we have doubled the conversion rate. We want to encourage more farmers who choose to do so to convert to organic production. It is partly demand-led: the more farmers want to convert, the greater the proportion of resources that will eventually flow towards them.

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Mid–Sussex): Does the Minister accept that anything that can be done to aid and encourage organic farming is greatly to be welcomed? Will he pay tribute to the work of the Soil Association, which has done much to lead the way forward? Does he agree that the most important thing for organic farmers is the confidence that they will be able to sell their goods, particularly when they start out? To that end, will he support all the efforts being made around the country to establish farmers' markets, which provide organic farmers and other small producers with a welcome and valuable outlet? They are having a great impact, to the benefit of the consumer, and need to be further encouraged.

Mr. Morley: I warmly welcome the hon. Gentleman's comments. I certainly pay tribute to the work of the Soil Association, which has done much to promote organic farming. I was recently in Suffolk talking to the organisers of a successful local farmers' market, which attracted 2,000 consumers on its first outing. It is something that farmers should explore. My Department will do all that it can to encourage them.

Mr. Huw Edwards (Monmouth): I welcome my hon. Friend's announcement on increased aid for organic conversion. Does he agree that local authorities can also play a role in advising local farmers? Will he join me in congratulating Monmouthshire council, which recently held a successful seminar on organic conversion that attracted some 150 local farmers?

Mr. Morley: Monmouthshire council has played an important role in promoting that development. There is much interest in organic production. Demand is so high that 70 per cent. of organic produce is imported. We want to give British producers an opportunity to take a share of that market.

British Pork

7. **Mr. David Rendel** (Newbury): What steps he has taken to promote British pork. [74084]

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Elliot Morley): We will continue to work constructively with our European Union partners to see what help can be given to support the pigmeat market. In the meantime, we will miss no opportunity to make it known that the British pig industry produces a quality product to high welfare and other standards.

Mr. Rendel: I can only agree with the Minister that British pork is produced to the highest possible nutritional and welfare standards. What steps will he take to ensure that British pork in our shops is properly labelled so that it can be distinguished from imported pork to reassure consumers who want to know where their food comes from?

Mr. Morley: One of the most important things is to ensure proper labelling. The hon. Gentleman knows that the Meat and Livestock Commission has recently launched a quality British pork label, which has been enthusiastically embraced by the major retailers. Many hon. Members, including me in my constituency, have been promoting that in their local supermarkets.

Mr. Denis MacShane (Rotherham): I always like a good bacon breakfast and always seek to buy British bacon, but is my hon. Friend aware that often, when one puts it in the frying pan, a horrible white milky fluid with bits of pink floating in it appears—a bit like those on the Conservative Benches? Will he take to his discussions with the British pigmeat industry, which is seeking to improve the quality of British pigmeat, the idea of introducing higher standards, perhaps along the lines of the French appellation contrôllée or German Reinheitgebot system, which would give an absolute guarantee that such bacon would fry as it used to when I was a little boy?

Mr. Morley: I cannot be held responsible for what happens to the bacon in my hon. Friend's frying pan. A number of quality standards have been established by the industry—for example, farm-assured British pigs—and the Meat and Livestock Commission. Some important regional producers are promoting quality regional pork. Apart from guarantees of taste and standard, welfare and quality standards of British pork should also be taken into account.

Mr. Peter Luff (Mid–Worcestershire): I know from the evidence that Ministers and officials gave to the Select Committee on Agriculture inquiry into the pig industry that the Minister and his ministerial colleagues understand that there is a deep and continuing crisis in the British pig

industry. What message of hope would he have me take to the meeting of the Ulster farmers union which I am addressing tonight on precisely that subject?

Mr. Morley: The hon. Gentleman will know that special aid was given to Northern Ireland to deal with the problems caused by the accidental fire at its main slaughterhouse, so I, and my colleagues at the Northern Ireland Office, have recognised the problems. The hon. Gentleman will also be aware that the price of pigmeat has increased in recent weeks. That is a welcome trend. I recognise that it is nowhere near enough to give a decent return to producers, but we hope that the trend will continue. We shall do all that we can to promote it.

Dr. George Turner (North-West Norfolk): Does my hon. Friend accept that when British consumers write to Members of Parliament on animal welfare issues, they insist that high standards should be adopted in this country? Does he accept that it is for the supermarkets and British consumers to make sure that they are consistent and that, when consumers demand high quality and welfare standards, they should be willing to give the extra penny or two at the shop to pay for them?

Mr. Morley: There is no doubt that my hon. Friend is right about consumer pressure and demand. It can bring about dramatic change. There is no doubt that the British public are interested in high animal welfare standards. By working with the industry on labelling, we have ensured that consumer choice can support the high standards promoted in this country.

Mr. William Thompson (West Tyrone): Does the Minister realise that Europe wants to take back the money that has been supplied to Ulster farmers, and take it back from individual pig producers? I welcome the Minister's response and recognise what the Government are doing to promote pork, but does the hon. Gentleman realise that unless some drastic action is taken, the supply of pork will be greatly diminished because many farmers are in deep debt and will go out of business?

Mr. Morley: The hon. Gentleman has pointed out that the Commission has queried the aid that was given to Northern Ireland to reflect the special circumstances there on the basis that it might be an illegal state aid. Britain has queried payments given by other countries on the basis that they may be illegal state aids. We do not believe that the support given to Northern Ireland could be classed as an illegal state aid because the pig industry faced a crisis at that time and special circumstances applied. We shall certainly defend the package that Northern Ireland received and do what we can to support the pig industry. However, as the hon. Gentleman will be aware, the pig regime is a light regime so the opportunities for support are limited.

Common Agricultural Policy

8. **Mr. Bob Blizzard** (Waveney): What recent progress has been made with reform of the common agricultural policy in relation to likely food prices for consumers. [74085]

The Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Jeff Rooker): I regret that I have to give my hon. Friend the same answer that my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary gave earlier. The negotiations reached a conclusion only this morning and my right hon Friend the Minister hopes to make a full statement to the House tomorrow.

Mr. Blizzard: May I add my congratulations to my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on the key role that he played in bringing the negotiations to a successful conclusion? Does my hon. Friend agree that the 20 per cent. cut in production subsidies that has been agreed should lead to a substantial reduction of possibly £70 a year in food bills for British families? Does that not show that the Government's policy of engagement and gaining influence in Europe is much more successful than just standing on the sideline moaning?

Mr. Rooker: Yes. The success of the negotiations should inevitably lead to a reduction in food prices. We have no reason whatever to believe that those reductions will not be passed on to the consumer.

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough): A moment ago, the Parliamentary Secretary said that the price of pigmeat is going up. However, the Minister of State knows that, with the United Kingdom ban on stalls and tethering, it will always be possible for our continental partners to undercut us, and that there is no chance for many years of a Europe-wide ban being imposed. What action are the Government taking to use article 36 of the treaty of Rome to ban pigmeat that does not meet our very high welfare standards?

Mr. Rooker: I do not think that that matter figured much in the negotiations on CAP reform. Nevertheless, the Government have said, both inside and outside the House, that we have a voluntary agreement with supermarkets and with the British Retail Consortium that they will not import the products of producers who do not meet United Kingdom welfare standards. They will report back to us on the success of the approach. It is important that that approach should be led by the industry, as it understands British customers' concerns in wanting to buy pork and pigmeat that is produced to exactly the welfare standards that we demand in the United Kingdom.

Food Marketing

9. **Mr. Hilton Dawson** (Lancaster and Wyre): How he intends to assist farmers to market high–quality local produce and develop co–operative food processing and added–value initiatives. [74087]

The Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Jeff Rooker): The Department assists farmers to market their high value-added local produce through a range of financial and other measures. On Tuesday, the Department conducted a seminar on encouraging a partnership approach between organisations that are promoting farmers markets.

Mr. Dawson: May I welcome my hon. Friend's statement, and express my hope that the recent

investigation into Milk Marque's activities will result in that organisation being able not only to continue in its present form but to develop processing activities? May I also draw his attention to the Wyre brunch—a splendid celebration of local produce—which will be held next Tuesday, 23 March, in Garstang? A range of activities at the brunch—which is supported by Myrescough college, the National Farmers Union, Wyre borough council and many other organisations—will bring together people in a celebration of fine local Wyre produce. Is my hon. Friend aware that young people from Pilling will be hanging on every word of his answer to my questions?

Mr. Rooker: Yes. Surely the answer is that, next week, everyone should go to Garstang.

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): I shall do exactly that, as Garstang is a neighbour of my constituency. Further to the question asked by the hon. Member for Lancaster and Wyre (Mr. Dawson), will the Minister encourage the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry to make an early response to the Milk Marque inquiry? Last Friday, 16 farmers from my constituency visited me at my surgery. They are all members of Milk Marque, and all of them wish to remain members of it. Across the country, 16,000 farmers would like assistance to be provided to Milk Marque, so that they may participate in food processing—to ensure not only that their commitment to and investment in the dairy industry are rewarded, but that there is a future for other people in the industry.

Mr. Rooker: I cannot comment on the particular case. It is the fact, however, that United Kingdom producers do not control anywhere near as much of the food chain as producers in our European partner states. Milk Marque is an exception to that fact. We are trying to ensure—by encouraging farmers' collaborative and marque arrangements, producers' co-operatives and farmers markets—that farmers, who are the producers of the food, receive some of the added value in the food chain, so that all added value does not end up with the final retailer, which is the accusation against supermarkets.

Dr. Brian Iddon (Bolton, South-East): In the Fylde and the West Lancashire plain—where the food is produced to feed the constituents of my hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster and Wyre (Mr. Dawson) and those of other hon. Members—there are many small growers who rely on people called produce merchants to transport goods from growers to retailers and wholesalers. The process adds costs to food that, preferably, should go to growers. Does my hon. Friend the Minister agree that, among other things, the Government should promote co-operation in achieving that aim?

Mr. Rooker: Yes, and we are doing that. We provide financial support, in the form of grant, to establish regional groups for speciality producers. Eligible groups, for the first five years after formation, may receive up to £12,000 annually. Although the sum is modest, all the pressure and impetus from the Department is directed at enabling producer groups to come together to reduce costs, so that they may retain and gain more of the added value of their produce.

Common Fisheries Policy

12. **Mr. Andrew George** (St. Ives): What assessment he has made of the prospects of any European Union nation unilaterally withdrawing from the common fisheries policy and repatriating the nation's fishing waters to the 200 mile limit. [74090]

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Elliot Morley): Such action would breach European Community treaty commitments and be incompatible with membership of the EC.

Mr. George: I am grateful to the Minister for that reply. I do not wish to intrude upon the obvious problems that the Tories are having as they fish around for a coherent fishing policy, but does the Minister accept that we are now in a crucial position to reform the common fisheries policy by decentralising the fishing regions? Indeed, that policy was supported by Tory Members of the European Parliament only a few weeks ago.

Mr. Morley: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. The Conservative party seems to be very confused about what is its policy. There is no doubt that the common fisheries policy is in need of reform, and I believe that we have the opportunity to achieve that. However, the CFP will certainly not be reformed by threatening to break international treaties or saying that, no matter what negotiations take place, one side will always answer no.

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge): Let me make it clear yet again: in our defence of the British fishing industry, we rule nothing in and nothing out. Is not the moral of the exchange—one might even say the love-in—that we have just witnessed between the Liberal Democrats and the Government that neither of those parties has the slightest intention of demanding and securing the return of United Kingdom waters? It is only the Conservative party that would make and secure that demand, showing the same determination that Margaret Thatcher displayed when she made and secured our original budget rebate. Is it not starkly obvious that the self-same Minister who sold out to the quota hoppers in Amsterdam still cannot bring himself not to betray the British fishing industry?

Mr. Morley: The hon. Gentleman seems not to have noticed that, unlike the previous Government, we have negotiated the return of quota from some of the quota hoppers back to the United Kingdom fleet as part of our economic link arrangements. As to the Conservative party's policy, *Fishing News* reported that Hague was still vague on fishing policy. Whatever that policy might be now, when we came to power in May 1997, fishing policy was a complete shambles. It is quite clear that nothing has changed at all as far as the Conservatives are concerned.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

The Attorney-General was asked—

Crown Prosecution Service

26. **Mrs. Claire Curtis–Thomas** (Crosby): What is the breakdown of the reasons for cases referred to the Crown Prosecution Service not resulting in prosecution in the most recent year for which figures are available. [74107]

The Attorney-General (Mr. John Morris): Information available locally about the reasons for cases not resulting in a prosecution in the magistrates court is not collated centrally by the Crown Prosecution Service.

In the Crown court, the latest available figures show that 9.4 per cent. of cases do not proceed. In more than one third of those cases, the absence or refusal of a witness to give evidence is the cause. Other significant causes include the existence of other proceedings that may mean the public interest is not served by further prosecution and doubts about the evidence or medical factors.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: I thank the Attorney-General for those comments. Does he accept the recommendations in Sir Iain Glidewell's report, which call for a common approach to the collection of statistics by the criminal justice agencies? Does he accept also that it is only when that common approach is adopted that the House will be able to assess accurately the performance of the CPS and address concerns with regard to the levels of discontinuance?

The Attorney–General: My hon. Friend makes a very good point. We inherited an unsatisfactory situation, and we are determined to weld the criminal justice system into a properly integrated and coherent unit. I shall report to the House about that in due course.

As to the CPS power to discontinue, I can provide substantial reassurance to my hon. Friend—particularly in relation to discontinuance on public interest grounds, where criticism has focused. Of the CPS case load of 1.4 million defendants, public interest discontinuance on the grounds of small or nominal penalty accounts for about 25,000 cases a year, or less than 2 per cent. The figures also should be viewed in the wider context. For every 100 offences committed, 46 are reported, 23 are recorded, five are cleared up under current counting methods, and fewer than three are cautioned or presented to the CPS for prosecution. The 2 per cent. figure must be applied to the figure of three in order to put the CPS discontinuance into perspective.

Mr. John Burnett (Torridge and West Devon): My question does not imply any criticism of the Director of Public Prosecutions, in whom I believe there is widespread confidence, but does the Attorney-General believe that there should be greater openness in the appointment of judges and senior legal figures? Furthermore, does he believe that we should have an appointments commission with public hearings not only for the appointment of judges but for other sensitive appointments, such as Director of Public Prosecutions?

The Attorney-General: First, I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his remarks about the DPP. The appointment of judges is a matter for the Lord Chancellor. The appointment of the DPP was done with the utmost transparency. The post of director was advertised; the appointments board was chaired by the First Civil Service Commissioner, and other permanent secretaries sat on the interviewing board. Ultimately, the decision was mine.

The appointment of 42 chief Crown prosecutors was announced on Monday. Those posts were also advertised, and many people applied. That process is very transparent, and I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will welcome that.

Mr. David Lock (Wyre Forest): I am sure that the House will be extremely concerned to hear my right hon. and learned Friend say that up to a quarter of cases are discontinued because victims of crime are intimidated into silence or afraid to speak out. Will the Attorney-General tell the House what steps the Government are taking to protect those vulnerable witnesses, including victims of crime?

The Attorney-General: I am sure that my hon. Friend reads very carefully the number of discontinuances, which is small compared to the totality of the crimes that are prosecuted by the CPS. However, that matter will continue to be investigated through joint management performance indicators to ensure that difficulties with evidence or availability of witnesses are considered locally.

On the vulnerability of witnesses, last June, the Government published a document called, "Speaking up for Justice", which made some 70 valuable recommendations about witnesses. They are being dealt with by a supervising body on which the CPS is represented, and those measures that require legislation are included in part II of the Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Bill.

The CPS, with other agencies, is locally implementing many measures, including prioritising in appropriate cases, providing special waiting rooms and the use of suitable courtrooms where the witness does not have to face the defendant or public gallery and pre-court familiarisation visits. Those are just a few measures that are being taken to protect vulnerable witnesses.

Sir Nicholas Lyell (North-East Bedfordshire): I am sure that the Attorney-General, to whom we are grateful for his answers so far, is anxious to be as transparent as possible about this matter. He will recall that discontinuances have averaged 11 or 12 per cent. since the CPS was set up. Will he clarify for the House what is the current overall level of discontinuances?

We welcome the 42 new chief Crown prosecutors for each police area. An assistant chief Crown prosecutor has also been appointed in London. We recall that Glidewell—and I believe, the Attorney-General himself—said that their objective was to match chief constables. However, when the right hon. and learned Gentleman considers their salary levels and the number of people that they have at their command, compared to the police, does he accept that they will need the full support of the DPP—which I am sure they will receive—and the Law Officers, if they are to come to grips in a friendly and constructive way with the police to overcome the problems that still exist in the interface between the two services?

The Attorney-General: I am sure that the right hon. and learned Gentleman is right that there is still a great

deal of work to be done on that interface. I assure him that the candidates for the 42 posts offered very strong applications. The salaries offered had a degree of flexibility, and do not seem to have inhibited applications—certainly not from within the CPS. I am very conscious that, if they had been even higher and were able to compete with those commanded outside the CPS, there might have been even more applications.

The number of prosecutions dropped in the Crown court rose by 15.5 per cent. to 8,680. Proportionally, that represented an increase of 7.2 per cent. of completed cases in the Crown court to 9.4 per cent. I am advised that part of the reason is, first, plea before venue procedures, which have obviously changed the format of earlier stages of the case. As a result of that alone, more straightforward cases have been diverted from the Crown court to finalisation in a magistrates court. Secondly, in part, the abolition of old-style committals has removed the opportunity of testing witnesses until the case has reached the Crown court, which means that a large number of cases have been dropped owing to witnesses failing to attend or to come up to proof.

Serious Fraud Office

27. **Mr. Ben Chapman** (Wirral, South): How often he meets the Director of the Serious Fraud Office to discuss the work of the office. [74108]

The Solicitor-General (Mr. Ross Cranston): The Attorney-General and I meet the Director of the Serious Fraud Office regularly. We also meet on an ad hoc basis when circumstances determine.

Mr. Chapman: Does my hon. and learned Friend agree that, by the nature of things, the Serious Fraud Office develops specialist, esoteric but sophisticated skills? Does he also agree that those are not always shared with the police? Does that suggest that more work and more cases should be handled by the SFO?

The Solicitor-General: My hon. Friend will know that, as a result of the comprehensive spending review, £5.6 million extra has been allocated to the SFO for the next three years. The SFO works with the police; it depends on the police referring cases. The two work together; police officers work with the SFO. The SFO deals with complex and multi-disciplinary fraud, and is doing so successfully. Its conviction rate has risen considerably.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): Can the hon. and learned Gentleman tell the House now, or be good enough to inform me of in writing later, the average length of time between the start of an investigation by the Serious Fraud office and a decision to prosecute? Do the Government plan to improve targets to achieve better service?

The Solicitor-General: The hon. Gentleman will be very pleased to know that, as a result of the comprehensive spending review agreement between the SFO and the Government, the SFO has determined to reduce average time from accepting a case and completing investigations to 17.5 months, and to reduce to 16 months the average length of prosecution between transfer and committal on one hand and verdict on the other.

William Beausire

28. **Mr. Jeremy Corbyn** (Islington, North): When he expects to authorise a private prosecution for the death of William Beausire. [74109]

The Attorney–General: Solicitors acting for a number of individuals applied for my consent to prosecute Augusto Pinochet for offences in relation to William Beausire. As my hon. Friend knows, he wrote to me on 27 January regarding the matter. I replied on 1 February that I was then hoping to reach a decision soon, and that the solicitors would be advised. By my letter dated 11 February 1999, the solicitors were advised that I had decided not to grant my consent. The basis of that decision is that the relevant legislation is not retrospective and the material supplied by the solicitors in support of the application provided insufficient admissible evidence to justify a prosecution.

Mr. Corbyn: Does the Attorney-General accept that many of us are very disappointed by his answer and by the letter that he sent to Bindmans, which is acting on behalf of the Beausire family? Is he aware that there is a mountain of evidence that William Beausire, who was last seen at Buenos Aires airport in 1974 and then in prison in Chile a year later, was abducted from Buenos Aires in 1974, and that Michael Townley, who was convicted of the assassination of Orlando Letelier, has admitted his part in the abduction?

Is the Attorney-General aware that in 1977, the British embassy sent a memo to the then Foreign Secretary expressing its belief that the Chilean intelligence service, known as the DINA, was indeed responsible for the murder of William Beausire? Will the Attorney-General look again at that outrageous occurrence in which a British citizen was abducted from one country to another, tortured and murdered, yet we cannot prosecute somebody under national or international law for crimes against humanity, hostage taking and torture in the case of William Beausire? Will the Attorney-General go through the mountain of evidence that exists, look at the many *Hansard* references on the case, going back more than 20 years, and find that we can at least allow members of the family to try their day in court to hold responsible the people who murdered their brother?

The Attorney-General: I know the concern that my hon. Friend feels about the matter. May I assure him that I consider personally all the applications—more than five—as regards prosecuting in this matter. I have the

advice of senior Treasury counsel. My attention is drawn to all possible appropriate evidence, and I look at these matters personally, time after time. I give my hon. Friend that assurance.

May I say—I guard my words very carefully—that I do not want to go too deep into the matter, which the House will understand? Mr. Beausire, we are told, was arrested in 1974. I state without comment that an offence under the provisions on torture in the Criminal Justice Act 1988 came into effect and applied only after September 1988, and an offence regarding hostage taking, only after November 1982. The legislation is not retrospective.

If any additional evidence comes before me, I will look at it. I am sure the House will accept from me that I will look at it with the same care and attention as I have given to all the other applications.

Business of the House

12.32 pm

Sir George Young (North-West Hampshire): Will the Leader of the House give the House the business for next week?

The President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mrs. Margaret Beckett): The business for next week will be as follows:

MONDAY 15 MARCH—Conclusion of the Budget debate.

TUESDAY 16 MARCH—Third Reading of the House of Lords Bill.

Motion on the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1989 (Continuance) Order.

WEDNESDAY 17 MARCH—Until 12.30 pm, debate on the second report from the Environmental Audit Committee on the greening government initiative, followed by a debate on the sixth report from the Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs Committee on the Maritime and Coastguard Agency, followed by debates on the motion for the Adjournment of the House.

Remaining stages of the Tax Credits Bill.

THURSDAY 18 MARCH—Opposition day [7th allotted day].

Until about 4 o'clock there will be a debate entitled "reductions in the strength of the police" followed by a debate that the Opposition wish to call "The Government's failed roads policy". Both debates will arise on Opposition motions.

At 7 o'clock the House will be asked to agree the spring supplementary estimates, excess votes and defence votes A.

FRIDAY 19 MARCH—Private Members' Bills.

The provisional business for the following week will be as follows:

MONDAY 22 MARCH—Opposition day [8th allotted day].

There will be a debate on a motion in the name of the Liberal Democrats, subject to be announced.

Proceedings on the Consolidated Fund (No.2) Bill.

TUESDAY 23 MARCH—Second Reading of the Access to Justice Bill *[Lords]*.

WEDNESDAY 24 MARCH—Until 2 o'clock there will be debates on the motion for the Adjournment of the House.

Remaining stages of the Local Government Bill.

THURSDAY 25 MARCH—There will be a debate on the armed forces on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

FRIDAY 26 MARCH—Private Members' Bills.

The House will also wish to be reminded that on Wednesday 17 March there will be a debate on the welfare of laying hens in European Standing Committee A, and that on Wednesday 24 March, there will be a debate on deliberate release into the environment of genetically modified organisms, also in European Standing Committee A. Details of the relevant documents will be given in the *Official Report*.

[Wednesday 17 March:

European Standing Committee A—Relevant European Union document: 6985/98, Welfare of Laying Hens; Relevant European Scrutiny Committee Reports: HC 34-iv, and HC 34 xii (1998–99); Relevant European Legislation Committee Report: HC 155-xxviii (1997–98).

Wednesday 24 March 1999:

European Standing Committee A—Relevant European Union document: 6378/98, Deliberate Release into the Environment of Genetically Modified Organisms. Relevant European Scrutiny Committee Report: HC 34 iii (1998-99) Relevant European Legislation Committee Report: HC 155-xxvi (1997-98).]

The House may also wish to know that, subject to the progress of business, it is proposed that the House will rise for the Easter recess at the end of business on Wednesday 31 March and return on Tuesday 13 April, which will be a full sitting day.

Sir George Young: The House is grateful for being informed of next week's business, for the indication of the business for the following week and, indeed, for the dates of the Easter recess.

The Leader of the House has announced a debate on the armed forces. Can she confirm that, after discussions through the usual channels, we are moving away from three debates—one on each armed service—to a better structure, with debates on equipment, policy and personnel? Will she consider holding the debate on personnel on Thursday week?

Following a previous exchange at business questions, will the right hon. Lady find time for a debate and a vote on public expenditure? Having moved away from a unified Budget, with debates and votes on expenditure, the Government have so far not provided Parliament with adequate time for debates that are central to our role of voting supply. Can the right hon. Lady put that right?

In his Budget statement, the Chancellor trailed a number of further statements by his Cabinet colleagues. Will any of those be oral statements next week?

The right hon. Lady has not announced any debates in the next two weeks on recent statements and publications that need debating: the Macpherson report, the national changeover plan, the White Paper on Lords reform and the report of the royal commission on long-term care of the elderly. What plans has she to tackle that growing backlog?

May we also have a statement from the Deputy Prime Minister on council tax increases?

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): Where is he?

Sir George Young: Will not such reductions as were announced by the Chancellor on 9 March be wiped out by town halls on 1 April, leaving people to face the increases announced by the Chancellor is his previous Budgets?

Mrs. Beckett: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his courteous remarks about our giving further notice. He is entirely right that there is a new structure for defence debates, following discussions through the usual channels which involved the Select Committee. I think the whole House will feel that that is a better structure for debates.

[Mrs. Beckett]

Through those same channels, we will consider his suggestion that the debate on Thursday week should be on personnel. It had been envisaged that it would be on defence in the world, because it was thought that it might be preferable for the House to begin this new pattern by discussing the strategic approach, but we will discuss those matters through the usual channels. We will do the same in respect of the right hon. Gentleman's proposal that we should look again at the arrangements for discussing public expenditure, although I took advantage of his raising that issue, on the last occasion when I answered business questions, to remind him of the record of the previous Government on this matter. I did not intend by doing so to suggest that this Government are not much more sensible and reasonable.

The right hon. Gentleman asked about any oral statements following the Budget. We hope and envisage that, today, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment will be able to flesh out during the debate some of the matters in his area of responsibility. We hope that there will be oral statements next week—on Monday, from my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health, and on Tuesday, from my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary. I hope that it is helpful to the House to have advance notice of what the Government envisage for next week.

The right hon. Gentleman asked me about debates on the Macpherson report, the national changeover plan, the White Paper on Lords reform and care of the elderly. He described those matters as a growing backlog. I accept that we have not yet found time for full debates on them, but he will recognise that all those reports have been published only in the recent past. I certainly expect to try to find time for a debate on the Macpherson report—I hope in the not-too-distant future—and we have not yet finished dealing with the legislation on Lords reform. I have that, and the other issues that the right hon. Gentleman raised, very much in mind. Again, we can discuss those issues through the usual channels.

For the benefit of someone at the back of the Chamber who clearly was not listening to the "Today" programme, may I say that my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister is in Bombay at present? I envisage that my right hon. Friend will indeed address the issue of council taxes, although the right hon. Gentleman will know that the survey that was published today is a preliminary survey and that, in many cases, those matters are not settled.

Mr. Jimmy Hood (Clydesdale): May I remind my right hon. Friend of the steps that the Government are taking to promote family-friendly employment? It might help that cause if we debated what is currently happening in the House of Commons, and the contracts that have been imposed on some staff—in particular, some part-time staff who work 28 hours a week serving tea, buns, cakes and bacon rolls to Members of Parliament. I understand that they have been told that they must work for 11 hours before they can be paid overtime. We do not have many all-night sittings nowadays, but they are still a possibility, and in the event of such a sitting, members of staff might have to work for 11 hours before being paid time and a half. That is a disgrace, and I think that the House should discuss it.

Mrs. Beckett: I cannot promise time for a debate in the near future, but I was not aware of the issues raised by my hon. Friend, and I shall make inquiries—as, no doubt, will other hon. Members.

Mr. Andrew Stunell (Hazel Grove): May I join my—I am sorry, Madam Speaker. [HON. MEMBERS: "You've started well."] I thank the Leader of the House for announcing the dates for the Easter recess: that is very helpful to Members.

May I draw the right hon. Lady's attention to early-day motion 413, which is, a prayer against the social security and child benefit regulations? It asks

[That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty praying that the draft Social Security and Child Benefit (Decisions and Appeals) Regulations 1999, which were laid before this House on 4th March, be not made.]

The motion refers to a proposal to replace appeal tribunals by what I can only describe as "uni-unals", consisting of just one member. The proposal worries many Members, and it certainly worries a number of people facing appeals—a prospect that is already daunting enough for many.

The Chancellor promised us a number of statements. Will the right hon. Lady find time for a statement that he failed to promise—a statement about a renewables review? Such a statement would be very relevant to the Chancellor's proposals for an energy tax, and other environmental measures. The subject is clearly missing from the Government's current programme; it appears to be stuck in the system.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Stunell: Finally, let me say this. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh, no."] I may have started slowly, but I will finish quickly.

On Monday, the Select Committee on Culture, Media and Sport will visit Manchester to examine some of the facilities for the Commonwealth games that will take place in 2002. Will the Leader of the House find an opportunity for a Minister to make a statement of support for a project that could bring benefits not just to the north-west but to the United Kingdom as a whole?

Mrs. Beckett: I cannot tell the hon. Gentleman that we will try to find time for a debate on the form that tribunals should take, but he can raise the matter through the usual channels. I shall inform my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister of the hon. Gentleman's expressed wish for a renewables review, but I suspect that hon. Members will have opportunities to raise the issue, not least during debates on the Budget.

I take on board what the hon. Gentleman said about Manchester. I think the whole House supports Manchester's case, and I am glad to learn that the Select Committee is going there to see for itself. I shall bear the matter in mind, because it is of general interest and also in view of the hon. Gentleman's suggestion that it could be aired in the Chamber.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Is my right hon. Friend aware of what was said this morning on the BBC

about banking fraud? Apparently, it is taking place on a pretty big scale. Nine months ago, a loophole was discovered: top banks were allowing standing orders to be allocated to different accounts. That loophole is supposed to have been closed, but, according to the latest reports, it has not been. A BBC reporter was able to transfer a standing order from the account of one his colleagues to his own account.

May we have a statement—or, better still, will my right hon. Friend get in touch with Departments that are responsible for such matters, to ensure that the top banks sort this out?

Mrs. Beckett: I believe that Members on both sides of the House will share my hon. Friend's concern that these matters are not being resolved. The subject may have been mentioned in yesterday's debate. We all want to see the highest possible standards of consumer service. I say to my hon. Friend, however, that if anyone is willing to transfer money into someone else's account, mine is available.

Mr. Desmond Swayne (New Forest, West): Can the right hon. Lady ensure that on Monday, in the winding-up speeches, her right hon. Friend the Chancellor deals with the issue that was raised on Budget day by her hon. Friend the Member for Shrewsbury and Atcham (Mr. Marsden) in a petition in respect of excise duty on diesel? Will he address the fact that we now stand to suffer greater pollution as vehicles fill up in France on lower-grade diesel to avoid the highest diesel prices in the world, which now pertain in this country?

Mrs. Beckett: As the whole House must be aware, there will be ample opportunity to air those matters during the Budget debate. I cannot give the hon. Gentleman an undertaking as to what matters my right hon. Friend the Chancellor will include in his winding-up speech, as obviously he will be trying to summarise several days of debate, but I shall draw the hon. Gentleman's concerns to his attention.

Mr. David Chaytor (Bury, North): May I draw my right hon. Friend's attention to the publication this week of the Government's biodiversity action plan, a long-awaited document that is part of our international treaty obligations? Does she share my concern that, as of 12.25 pm today, that document was not available in the Vote Office or the Library? Does she agree that it is an important part of our environmental policy? In view of increasing public concern about the implications for biodiversity of genetically modified foods and our conformity with the requirements of the Kyoto protocol, will she make every effort to ensure that, at the very least, there is a statement on the biodiversity action plan next week?

Mrs. Beckett: I am not sure that I can promise a statement on the matter next week, but I share—as I am sure do all hon. Members—my hon. Friend's concern that such a document should not be available, and I shall take steps to ensure that something is done about that.

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Mid-Sussex): Will the Leader of the House speak to the Foreign Secretary and to the Defence Secretary and say that it is unacceptable to the House that the bombing raids on Iraq should continue without one of them coming to the House and explaining why, on so many occasions since the conclusion of the original Operation Desert Fox, those bombing raids have taken place, without any authority from the House, and—even worse—without the House being informed that they have been taking place? The chosen medium for the Secretary of State for Defence to discuss the matter was the letter page of *The Times*. That is not acceptable to the House of Commons.

Mrs. Beckett: As the hon. Gentleman will have heard from my statement, there is to be a defence debate a week on Thursday. He says that the House has not been kept informed; I fear that I do not entirely share that view. I know that the matter has been raised many times, and my right hon. Friends the Secretary of State for Defence and the Foreign Secretary have both repeatedly drawn attention to the fact that what is happening at present is that, where allied aircraft find themselves under threat of attack, they respond to that attack. All that—and the patrols that those aircraft are undertaking in the no-fly zones—follows on the decision of the United Nations to protect people in the north and south of Iraq from their own Government. It therefore appears to me that although the hon. Gentleman may seek further opportunities for debate, the matter has been aired repeatedly in the House.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): How can the Leader of the House say that those activities follow from United Nations decisions when the present President of the Security Council—the People's Republic of China—has officially voiced its strong objection to the bombing? Is it not high time that we had a serious debate in the House about the role of the United Nations and what the UN's obligations are in a changing situation, rather than simply going back to resolutions that were passed in different circumstances, a long time ago, which have been overtaken by events?

As 41 per cent. of British forces are committed in action areas, is it not important for there to be some discussion of the whole question of bombing? Has my right hon. Friend seen the dramatic pictures in the *Tribune* of those children in Iraq? Has she read in the *British Medical Journal* the article by Dr. Sikora, who is the head of the World Health Organisation cancer unit, which outlines the dreadful situation?

Furthermore, could we have a statement next week on the progress—or lack of progress, as I fear—on Lockerbie? If any constructive progress is to be made, is it not high time that British lawyers met the Libyan lawyers to discuss going ahead with a trial in a third country—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. I fear that all next week will be taken by the hon. Gentleman's questions. Could he bring his requests to a conclusion?

Mr. Dalyell: Can my right hon. Friend confirm that, from May onwards, Lockerbie and all its legal aspects will be matters for Holyrood rather than for the Westminster Parliament? Will people who raise the subject of the legal aspects of Lockerbie in the House of Commons be out of order after May? Is that the position? That seems to be the position from an answer given during Scottish questions. If that answer is right, no one could be

[Mr. Dalyell]

more concerned than I am about the authority of Madam Speaker and this House over matters that affect not only Scotland but the whole of the United Kingdom.

Mrs. Beckett: I tried to use my words with care when I said to the hon. Member for Mid-Sussex (Mr. Soames) that the actions in Iraq follow from United Nations decisions about no-fly zones. I reiterate that those actions do, indeed, follow from those decisions. I am aware that concerns have more recently been aired in the United Nations, but that does not alter the fact that those actions follow from UN decisions.

I am aware of the concerns that my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) has correctly raised in the House on many occasions about the suffering of many people in Iraq, particularly children. I differ from my hon. Friend in that I place more weight than he does on the fact that responsibility for that suffering lies at the door of the Government of Iraq. I am sure that my hon. Friend will have noticed a recent United Nations report, which suggested that, even as we speak, food and medicines that have been purchased by Iraq under the UN programme are being stockpiled in warehouses in Iraq rather than being released for use by the Iraqi people. That is obviously a matter of concern to us all.

On Lockerbie, my hon. Friend will be aware that we have asked the United Nations Secretary-General to report to the UN Security Council by the end of the month on the position. I repeat that there will be a defence debate in a few days' time. The shadow Leader of the House will have heard my hon. Friend's remarks and those of the hon. Member for Mid-Sussex, who raised the matter a moment ago. The right hon. Gentleman may be thinking better of his suggestion that we should have a debate on personnel rather than on defence in the world.

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): Following the statement by the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry yesterday and his comment that he was anxious to look into the reason for the huge differential in prices of products between continental Europe and this country, may we have an urgent debate, with both the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and the Chancellor present, so that the Secretary of State can ask the Chancellor publicly why he is contributing to the very high price of products in this country, as compared with prices in Europe? The Secretary of State could start with petrol, but could go on and ask about tobacco products and alcohol. Surely the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry will want to hold the Chancellor accountable for the huge price differential about which he has been complaining.

Mrs. Beckett: I was not in the House all day yesterday, so I do not know whether the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) was here. I know what an assiduous attender he is, so he may well have been here, in which case he will have seen my right hon. Friends the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and the Chancellor together on the Treasury Bench. As for whether my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State should wish to challenge my right hon. Friend the Chancellor on high prices, they will be conscious, as I am, that the issue subsisted throughout the 18-year life of the previous Government, including the time during which the right hon. Gentleman was a Minister, although I do not recall whether he was a Minister at the Department of Trade and Industry.

Mr. Tom Levitt (High Peak): My right hon. Friend will be well aware that my constituency is one of the most photogenic in the country. Most of those on the Government Front Bench visit it from time to time. It is regularly used as a backdrop by the film and television industry. I wonder whether my right hon. Friend could find the time—not necessarily next week, because I appreciate the pressures that are building up by the moment—for a debate on the film industry to allow us to draw attention to the extra help that it has been given in the Budget.

Mrs. Beckett: I am familiar with the great use that is made of the beautiful constituency that my hon. Friend represents. He is as fortunate in his constituency as his constituents are in their representative. I am grateful to him for his understanding of the pressures on the time of the House. He is right to draw to the attention of the House the confirmation by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor that the existing tax relief for the film industry will be extended until July 2002—part of our continuing commitment to supporting the growth of that industry.

Mr. Christopher Chope (Christchurch): Will the right hon. Lady assure us that there will be a statement next week on the most recent quarterly report on the millennium bug? Why has the statement not already been given to the House? It is now more than two weeks late. How can we seriously believe that the Government are treating the issue as an emergency and a crisis if they delay the publication of the report? Why are details of the quarterly returns available on the internet when they have not been made available to hon. Members?

Mrs. Beckett: I doubt very much whether all the details of the quarterly returns are available on the internet, although I recognise that some may be. The hon. Gentleman's question is based on an error. He assumes that the statement is late, but in fact the previous one was early. I hope to make a statement in the very near future.

Mr. Huw Edwards (Monmouth): Does my right hon. Friend agree that in recent weeks the Government have made important statements about elderly people and carers? If consideration can be given to a debate on the royal commission on long-term care, could consideration also be given to a debate on the national carers strategy?

Mrs. Beckett: My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to those important areas of policy. He is also right that it is crucial to look simultaneously at care and those who need it and at the needs of carers. The Government have been striving to do that. I shall bear his remarks in mind should we be able to find time for such a debate in the near future.

Mr. Robert Syms (Poole): I note that genetically modified products are to be discussed in European Standing Committee A. I should like to draw the right hon. Lady's attention to an article in today's *Daily Mail* that talks about genetically modified products found in baby milk powder products, particularly those that are

soya-based. Does she have any plans for a statement on what we all agree is a sensitive area in which public confidence needs to be maintained?

Mrs. Beckett: I am not aware of the article to which the hon. Gentleman referred. We have just had Agriculture questions, during which there might have been an opportunity to raise the issue. I cannot promise the hon. Gentleman an extra debate in the near future, but I assure him that the Government will continue to bring such issues to the House.

Mr. John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings): Will the Leader of the House arrange for an urgent statement to the House on the counting system for the European elections? I am talking not about the pernicious closed-list system, but about the problem of recounts and where votes are to be counted and reported. There are widespread concerns that recounts will be impossible because they must take place at constituency level, but candidates will not know how well they have done because the numbers are to be tallied at sub-regional or regional level. Where votes are reported is to be left to the discretion of returning officers. At best that will lead to suspicion—I say no more than suspicion—of fudge and muddle. At worst it will lead to suspicion of fiddle and malpractice. I am sure that the Leader of the House would not want to put honourable and hard working returning officers in that position, so it is essential that she makes a statement to the House that clarifies matters and puts an end to such allegations.

Mrs. Beckett: On reflection, the hon. Gentleman may regret that anything in his words suggested that putting matters at the discretion of returning officers in any way contributed to fiddle and malpractice. Having said that, I understand his concern, which is shared by many in the House. It is, however, a matter for my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary, so the hon. Gentleman may find an opportunity to raise the issue during Home Office questions on Monday. In any event, I shall certainly draw it to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary.

Mr. Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): Is the right hon. Lady aware that, following changes to the petrol escalator in the Budget, for the first time ever, petrol in the United Kingdom is now the most expensive in Europe, and possibly in the developed world? Can the Deputy Prime Minister be towed back from his holiday scuba diving in the Indian ocean and his visit to Bombay—whatever he might be doing there—to make a statement to the House?

Mrs. Beckett: My right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister is engaged with a trade mission which no doubt will be singularly unimpressed by the hon. Gentleman's view of its activities. The hon. Gentleman raises the cost of petrol, which was increased in the Budget. He will know that that is certainly a matter for the Budget debates. He will also know that the initial proposal for an escalator on fuel price was introduced by the Conservatives. Indeed, we have increased it by a mere 1 per cent. out of a possible 6 per cent. Finally, Opposition Members spend a considerable part of their time complaining that the Government are not doing enough to protect the environment, and the rest complaining when we do.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): Can we have a debate in Government time next week on the increasingly damaging regulatory burden on British business? The right hon. Lady will surely recall that in the foreword to Labour's business manifesto the then shadow Chancellor declared:

> "We will not impose burdensome regulations upon business because we understand that successful businesses must keep costs down."

Given that since the election there have spewed forth no fewer than an additional 2,400 burdensome regulations upon business from which many small and medium-sized enterprises in my Buckingham constituency are suffering, does the right hon. Lady not accept that it is essential—especially as the Chancellor said nothing about this important matter in the Budget—that the House has an early opportunity to scrutinise the Government's record and show them how they can do better in future?

Mrs. Beckett: Other than to say that all those matters can be aired in the Budget debates, I fear that I cannot offer to find time for a further discussion on the regulatory burden. As I understand that the hon. Gentleman raised the matter yesterday, I am deeply grateful to him for giving me an opportunity to point out that 50 per cent. fewer regulations were introduced in the first year of the Labour Government than in the last year of the Conservative Government.

Mr. Tim Yeo (South Suffolk): In view of the deep concern expressed on both sides of the House this morning about the acute crisis facing British abattoirs, and in view of the Government's refusal to suspend the imposition of extra charges on those abattoirs until we have accurate information about the treatment of the issue in other European Union countries, will the Leader of the House arrange an urgent debate later this month so that hon. Members can consider the matter before many abattoirs are forced out of business?

Mrs. Beckett: I cannot undertake to find the time for a debate, although I shall certainly bear it in mind. Of course, the hon. Gentleman had the opportunity to raise the matter earlier today with my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): Will the Leader of the House arrange for the Deputy Prime Minister, when he returns from his delegation abroad, to make a statement on capping criteria? I do not know whether she has read this week's *Clitheroe Advertiser and Times* yet. It refers to council tax rising by 7.6 per cent., which is three times the rate of inflation. Only the Deputy Prime Minister can decide what is an excessive rise. The residents of Ribble Valley think that three times the rate of inflation is excessive. Much of the rise has come from Labour-controlled Lancashire county council. What protection will the Deputy Prime Minister give the people of Ribble Valley against this stealth tax rise?

Mrs. Beckett: I fear that the hon. Gentleman, too, did not have time to listen to the "Today" programme.

Mr. Evans: I did.

Mrs. Beckett: In that case, he cannot have been listening with enough care, or he would have heard my right hon. Friend saying both that the final figures on what

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will happen with council tax are not yet available and that he will consider those matters with great care and make plain the reason for any decisions that he makes.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): In view of the increasingly disappointing attendances on Thursdays, will the Leader of the House bring forward the date of the debate on the Thursday sittings experiment? Many hon. Members believe that it has not been to the advantage of Parliament or of our proceedings and want the debate sooner rather than later.

Mrs. Beckett: It has been my experience that Thursday mornings have been extremely well attended. I understand that such is the attendance expected for our debate later today that Madam Speaker has had to impose a time limit from very early on. There will be the opportunity for a debate on the Thursday sittings, but yet again I am experiencing the phenomenon whereby Conservative Members protest publicly about Thursday sittings and the other associated decisions but many of them tell me privately how pleased they are with the experiment.

Point of Order

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. In the light of what the Leader of the House has just said about good attendance on Thursday mornings, I should be grateful for any comment that you may have on a situation that I have not observed in the House before. Were you given any notice by the hon. Member for Hazel Grove (Mr. Stunell) that when he spoke in business questions on behalf of his party from the Front Bench he knew that he would not be accompanied by anyone on the Back Benches?

Madam Speaker: That is a very good try, but it is not a matter for me.

BILL PRESENTED

CONTROL OF RESIDENTIAL HEDGEROWS

Mr. Jim Cunningham, supported by Mr. Lindsay Hoyle, Mr. Alan Hurst, Mr. Ian Pearson and Mrs. Christine Butler, presented a Bill to amend the Environmental Protection Act 1990 by extending powers to environmental health officers to intervene in neighbourly disputes involving residential hedgerows; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 19 March, and to be printed [Bill 61].

Orders of the Day

WAYS AND MEANS

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Question [10 March].

AMENDMENT OF THE LAW

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That it is expedient to amend the law with respect to the National Debt and the public revenue and to make further provision in connection with finance; but this Resolution does not extend to the making of any amendment with respect to value added tax so as to provide—

(a) for zero-rating or exempting a supply, acquisition or importation;

(b) for refunding an amount of tax;

(c) for varying any rate at which that tax is at any time chargeable; or

(d) for any relief, other than a relief which—

(i) so far as it is applicable to goods, applies to goods of every description, and

(ii) so far as it is applicable to services, applies to services of every description.—*[Mr. Gordon Brown.]*

Question again proposed.

Budget Resolutions and Economic Situation

[Relevant documents: The Second Report from the Treasury Committee, Session 1998-99, on the World Economy and the Pre-Budget Report (HC 91-I), and the Fourth Report from the Environmental Audit Committee, Session 1998–99, on the Pre-Budget Report (HC 93).]

Madam Speaker: I have had to impose a 10-minute limit on speeches by all Back Benchers.

1.8 pm

The Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Mr. David Blunkett): The Budget has gained acclaim from individuals and businesses in every part of the United Kingdom for its imagination and for its commitment to bridging the divide between rich and poor and to work, families and enterprise. It will help us to modernise our country, extend opportunity and narrow the gap between those who have and those who have not.

Last night, I helped with the launch of the *Evening Standard* awards for children. I am often reminded of the deep commitment of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to education and employment. As I stood up to speak, I was told that he was just behind my shoulder; on this occasion, it was his sculpture, bringing a whole new meaning to boom and bust. With him watching over me, I was able to celebrate the way in which excellence is being developed in schools.

Our task now is to generate the wealth that we must distribute to meet the challenge of the future through education and employment, liberating people's talents, narrowing the gap and ensuring that people are helped not only by the resources allocated for benefits or tax reductions but through the expenditure of public money wisely invested in the delivery of services. We have already set about that with a vengeance. Over the next three years, the sure start programme will spend £540 million on helping children and their families at the very moment they need it most, from the time that a child is born. We will double nursery places for three-year-olds, through the reinforcement of the promise that we have already made of giving all four-year-olds a nursery place. We are substantially implementing our promise on class sizes, having reduced from 485,000 to less than 200,000, from this September, the number of children aged five, six and seven are in classes of more than 30. That is a magnificent effort in delivering one of our key pledges. Our literacy and numeracy strategy, with the commitment and help of teachers, is already making enormous changes in the classroom and fostering a new belief and expectation in those who were written off in the past.

Investment in young people and in lifelong learning has already started to yield fruit in terms of raising expectations. More than 230,000 young people have joined the new deal and they feel that their lives and opportunities have been enhanced by a programme that gives tailored help and makes an investment in our future. Some £1 billion of the windfall levy revenue will be spent on ensuring that schools are fit to teach and learn in.

Those who were against the windfall levy—and against spending the revenue on the new deal and on the environment of our schools—and who now use it in their calculations for their claims about how much the Government have raised in extra taxes, should examine their consciences and what they say to their electorate, because they cannot have it both ways. Some of them are in favour of investing in reducing unemployment. Some of them even applaud the fact that we have halved youth unemployment since the spring of 1997. Many of them write in and say that they want their school to be able to invest in a decent roof or window frames. Many of them applaud the fact that local authorities do not have to pay debt charges on the new deal funding for schools, because it is a grant under the capital allocation, not a credit approval, saving local authorities large sums of money—up to £100 million over the next three years. Many of them applaud all those achievements, and then attack the Government for raising the funds required.

Thank goodness the electorate are becoming more educated by the day. Thank goodness teaching citizenship and democracy in our schools will ensure that all our electorate will be able to see through the wheezes and guises of the Opposition.

Mr. Don Foster (Bath): Will the Secretary of State confirm that newspaper reports yesterday that he has been unsuccessful in persuading the Prime Minister to allow citizenship lessons in our primary schools?

Mr. Blunkett: No, I will not confirm that.

The importance of adding to what we have already done was spelled out by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor in his excellent speech on Tuesday, including not least the importance of ensuring the extra £49 million for England—£61 million for the United Kingdom—that will give every school an extra £2,000 to invest in books, on top of the £2,000 that schools in England have already received, so that they can do their job better.

Mr. Desmond Swayne (New Forest, West): Will the right hon. Gentleman acknowledge that structure and order in the lives of pupils are more important than

[Mr. Desmond Swayne]

£2,000 per school? In what way can the Chancellor's assault on marriage in his Budget in any way assist in providing and stability in children's lives?

Mr. Blunkett: Structure and order come from ensuring that children have the income and decent home environment that enable them to grow up with confidence. Many of those in work take such incomes and environments for granted and, through the working families tax credit, the new children's tax credit and the increase in child benefit, we will completely transform the ability of parents to stay together, work together and invest together in the future of their children. We are creating that environment—not a poll tax, or deteriorating housing conditions, or accelerating unemployment, all of which really damaged the family during the 1980s. We are providing real stability in the economy, an opportunity to earn and to work and an opportunity to create a family for which stability can be provided.

Make no mistake about it—if the Conservatives to want to discuss the disintegration of the family unit, some of us are happy to take them on on that issue. Nothing damaged the family more than the disintegration of our social structure and cohesion. The Conservatives were responsible for under-investment in our public services and the imposition of the poll tax.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that a continuing monitoring of improvements in teacher training is essential? What guarantee can he give that no notice whatever will be taken in the formulation of future policy of the weirdo views of the teacher training academics Kimberley, Meek and Miller, who are on record as saying that, within the psycho-semiotic framework, the shared reading lesson is viewed as an ideological construct in which events are played out, and that children need to position themselves in three interlocking contexts? Will the Secretary of State dispense with that sort of drivel?

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): He's got his Norman Wisdom jacket on.

Mr. Blunkett: I do not know about Norman Wisdom, but the wisdom of hindsight is always the easiest to adopt. The previous Government did not introduce a curriculum for initial teacher training, but we did so in September. They did not emphasise the targeting of the teacher training institutions through inspections by the Office for Standards in Education; nor did they ensure that resources were allocated where teacher training is best, but we have done both for the first time over the past year. They did not target major resources on in-service training for teachers, including resources for information technology, but we are about to do so. Had the Conservative Government done any of that, the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) would not have needed to ask his question.

Mr. Huw Edwards (Monmouth): May I assure my right hon. Friend that the schools of Monmouthshire will be delighted by the Budget announcements of additional resources for schools, reading and books? May I inform him of my sheer joy and wonderment at attending a small village school in my constituency—Llanover—where I saw young children enthusiastically getting on to the world wide web and looking up my own website?

Mr. Blunkett: I shall do my best to draw attention to my hon. Friend's website on every possible occasion. I hope that it stands up to scrutiny.

We are preparing, not only through our schools and through lifelong learning, but at every point in our lives, for a new century in which the challenge of change will be enormous. The rapidity of what is occurring around us, the need to be able to know how best to use information technology—and when not to use it—and the ability to prepare for a knowledge-based economy of the future all mean that we need to invest in human capital. That means a transformation in thinking about the way in which we act as individuals, as employers and as a Government.

The philosophy that lies behind the Budget and behind the way in which we shall proceed in the months and years ahead seeks to create a tripartite approach, matching the responsibility of the individual with the duty to invest time, energy and other resources in their education and learning, with the commitment of employers and the Government to making all that possible. That is why Budget proposals and incentives for new individual learning accounts are so important. We will ensure, as we have with higher education, that the contribution of the individual is more than matched by the investment of Government in opening up new opportunities.

Portable skills and learning that are attached not to the individual training required for the moment but to the changes of tomorrow are the most important way to provide security at work and lessen people's fears of change in the economy and in society around them. That is why our new incentives for individual learning accounts—the 20 per cent. discount for all learners taking up ILAs and an 80 per cent. discount for those taking an introduction to information technology course—are so important. It is why the ability of employers to invest in those accounts tax free, and for it not to be counted for tax purposes for the individual, is so important. Employers will be able to provide, through skills and training, a wage or salary in kind that equips the work force of tomorrow and enables people to take responsibility for their own learning. We want to develop that, and the investment, to which I shall come in a moment, in respect of information technology. We will invest in ILAs and the computer revolution of tomorrow in a way that ensures that employers take their responsibility seriously and that the Government match that responsibility with resources.

Judy Mallaber (Amber Valley): Will my right hon. Friend take measures to ensure that individual learning accounts, which we all welcome, are made available to those who have not previously had access to such schemes? In the past, opportunities have gone to people who already know how to work the system to get them.

Mr. Blunkett: I can give that assurance. We are awaiting publication of the report by Sir Claus Moser on basic skills. I want to ensure that what we are discussing today dovetails with the report's proposals. About 7 million adults of working age have no qualifications. There is a major gap in basic skills between the haves and the have-nots. We need to ensure that there is provision

for free entry into the learning system for those who have no basic qualifications. We need to do that imaginatively to capture their interest, and to ensure that those on low and moderate incomes can access ILAs. That is why my right hon. Friend the Chancellor's statement on Tuesday emphasised that tax relief for employers and employees would be available to employers only where they extended the facility for such investment to their lowest-paid workers, so that it was not available just to the haves, who often get the best in-work training investment.

Mr. John Healey (Wentworth): Does my right hon. Friend accept that yesterday's decision to extend the training and enterprise councils review is a welcome chance to introduce greater coherence and local co-ordination to training and learning in respect of TECs, further education, the Employment Service and other local providers? What assurances can he give that any new arrangements will give local businesses the opportunity to influence plans, as well as to help deliver them?

Mr. Blunkett: As part of the development of the delivery of basic skills and lifelong learning, and of equipping our country with the skills of the future, we will build on the report of the skills task force, which will be available in a few weeks. We shall develop the recommendations of the Further Education Funding Council quinquennial review—it is a good job that it is lunchtime; one cannot use words like that when one has had a drink. With these reviews, we have the chance, with the TECs, to get it right for the future and achieve coherence in the funding, structure and delivery of skills, learning and training for everyone.

TECs, other institutions and learners accept that the system has lacked coherence and been a mishmash of providers and funding streams. The delivery of services locally and nationally has been fragmented. That is why we established in November the concept of learning partnerships at local level to pull together all those who have an interest in lifelong learning and why the review, which will be completed by the summer, will aim to ensure that coherence is available right across the board. It will be an opportunity to get right the delivery of skills and training for young people who are out of work, young people on work-based training schemes and adults returning to learning in further education and on more traditional adult courses. It also offers us the opportunity to bring coherence in the delivery of new skills and to extend the information age to the have-nots.

The greatest danger that we face in the decade ahead is that we will repeat the gap of the past in the investment of the future; that those who have access to information technology will forge ahead and those who do not, their families and generations to come will find themselves outside the learning age. We spelled that out in the Green Paper "The Learning Age". I am grateful to everyone who has contributed to the consultation process and responded to it. We are able from today to do something about that, with the £500 million that was allocated in the Budget on Tuesday for investment in training in information technology across the United Kingdom.

The £500 million is a tremendous opportunity to build on the £700 million of investment that will go into the learning grid to link schools, colleges and libraries with the community. It will enable us to build on the £230 million of investment in in-service training for teachers and additional investment for librarians and others which will be needed. It will enable us to build, with the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, on the digitalisation of information that is already taking place.

The £500 million will enable us initially to target the most-deprived parts of our country, such as inner-city areas and outer housing estates. We shall ensure that information technology is available in schools and colleges, cyber cafés, outlets in arts centres and imaginative programmes in shopping arcades, so that people can learn wherever and whenever appropriate. That will be linked with the provision of other basic skills.

Many people will come in to learn how to use information technology and will admit, as I do, how difficult it is to learn to use technology, but will not admit that they cannot read, write or add up. Once they are prepared to come in and be helped, we can do a fantastic job of tackling the legacy of illiteracy and equipping people with higher-level skills to help their children to learn—well, not so much to help their children to learn, as to learn from their children—about the use of technology and how best to use it at home.

Some 28 per cent. of our population now have some access to the internet. That is twice as many as three years ago, but only 16 per cent. have access at home. It is estimated that 44 per cent. of our population have access to a computer, but many do not have one at home. One part of the package of measures that I am announcing today involves, as we did with libraries and the printed word, a technology lend-and-loan scheme for families who otherwise could not afford a computer or the software to go with it.

Mr. John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings): Much of what the Secretary of State says makes great sense, but does he acknowledge that information and comprehension are not the same thing and that the translation of information into understanding requires guidance from teachers? Without good teachers and trainers, the revolution that he describes will not be effected properly. How will he deal with the shortage of teachers and trainers to assist with the process that he describes? The right hon. Gentleman mentioned public libraries. Will he comment on the fact that many of them already provide access to information systems, yet, throughout the country, public libraries are threatened with closure?

Mr. Blunkett: I am grateful for the commitment and applause of the hon. Gentleman. I think that we share an understanding that, without guidance and teaching, people will not be able to have access to and make use of the technologies of the future.

As I said, not simply using that technology, but knowing how and when to use it will be so important. Our investment of £230 million in the teaching profession is therefore critical. We must also determine how we might use the skills of teachers and of librarians—who also will be trained—outside schools, colleges and libraries, so that we may achieve the best possible value for the investment that we are making. The issues of technology use and of guidance in that use are both important.

Already, 400,000 people have accessed Learning Direct—which was launched one year ago, precisely to give people access to the information and advice that they

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need. I am so pleased that people have been able to use it. We are grateful to organisations, such as the BBC, that have helped enormously with their investment in information technology. In adult learners week, the BBC engaged 17 million people in its "Computers Don't Bite" initiative and programmes.

Mrs. Anne Campbell (Cambridge): Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is important that people should understand that information and communication technology, via the internet and other means, can bring benefits to people at all stages in their lives? He may be interested to know that, yesterday, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security visited my constituency of Cambridge and saw the scheme that I initiated there, in which young mothers are able to access information on child care, benefits, jobs and training. The scheme will give them a real boost and real help in getting back to work once their children are back at school.

Mr. Blunkett: I certainly applaud that scheme, which is forming the basis of a roll-out across the country of similar programmes that will provide real information when people need it, and in a manner that enables people to access information and support when they need it. My hon. Friend has put an enormous amount of time and energy into making the programme work, for which we are very grateful.

We believe that people will have to update their skills at every stage of their life, and that they will require information technology skills to provide them with a link in applying those skills. As I said, enabling people to apply their skills poses a considerable challenge for Government. Although many people will learn how to use the equipment, and how to play games on the equipment, we have to encourage people—including schools and colleges—to use fully the technologies that enhance learning at every stage. That is what will add value.

I stress the importance—as we link school and home, and end the divide between learning in institutions and learning in the home and elsewhere—of enabling teachers to use those technologies. We also have to link the university for industry initiative to the initiatives that we are announcing today, so that they work hand in hand—thereby enabling small and medium-sized enterprises to access not only information on the training programmes that they need, but the training itself.

Small and medium-sized companies will therefore be able to share and take part in the learning centres, which will be focused initially in inner cities, and later in a roll-out of centres in communities across the United Kingdom. I hope that SMEs will be able not only to learn from and share in the initiatives, but to add to them, so that there is interaction between individuals and the community, and businesses and learning institutions. We are also initiating a £20 million scheme for easy-lease and low-cost computers for teachers, to enable the teaching profession to participate more easily in that interaction.

I should also say that, on Saturday, *The Times* contained a totally inaccurate report which misled people into believing that the Government were about to do something that we were not planning to do. We intend to help teachers to purchase or borrow computers—as many companies do for their employees—for use at home in their work. We had—and have—no intention of doing what *The Times* said we were intending to do. I am also sorry that *The Times* has had today to publish letters in response to that article, and that people believed that the article described the true situation. I hope that *The Times* will put the record straight.

Our imaginative programme ensures that families have access to education, and we want to build on it. For example, the laptop computer programme for 12,000 head teachers and teachers has proved incredibly successful in helping people to update their skills and access information for a new age. We are talking about a public-private partnership which is making it work. We are talking about large-scale investment by both private and public sectors. We are talking about investing as a Government in the needs of a new century. What that is about is co-ordinating our activities well and ensuring that one initiative dovetails with another. Above all, it is about using imagination in investing public funds to liberate people so that they can earn for themselves. People want to have a job and a family. Achievement must be the right of every child in tomorrow's generation. That is the sign of a community, an economy and a society that is really working, and that is why my right hon. Friend the Chancellor received such applause for his Budget on Tuesday.

1.36 pm

Mr. David Willetts (Havant): We heard the truth about the Government's tax policies from the Prime Minister—not yesterday in Prime Minister's questions, but the week before, when he said:

"the tax burden will increase over this Parliament".—[*Official Report*, Wednesday 3 March 1999; Vol.326, c.1075.]

That is the truth about this Budget. A tax increase in 1999 is still a tax increase even if it was announced in 1997 or 1998.

We have now discovered that Government propaganda about the Budget is to be distributed at taxpayers' expense. We know that it is propaganda because it contains all the buzz words. The Government say that they favour a "fairer society" and refer to people paying a "fairer share". In this context, they mean that the self-employed will pay higher national insurance contributions. It is outrageous that Government propaganda should be distributed to public institutions at taxpayers' expense.

We have been told that the document will also be distributed to schools. Notwithstanding the party political arguments we advance about the Budget in the House, sending documents such as this to schools raises some fundamental questions which I hope the Secretary of State will address.

Mr. Blunkett: I will happily address that matter. We have no intention of sending such a document to schools: we do not need to. We are sending 10 million extra books—that is our message.

Mr. Willetts: I am grateful to the Secretary of State. We were told yesterday that, at first, the Treasury wanted to send 17 million copies of the document to every household in the country. The Treasury then backtracked, and we were told that it planned to send 1.2 million copies

to every public institution in the country. I am very pleased that the Secretary of State has announced that the document will not be sent to schools.

The Secretary of State is quite correct: schools want to focus on raising standards in the classroom. He claims that today, he has announced extra money for schools. However, as is clear from the Red Book, there is nothing new for education in this Budget. Page 27 of the Red Book states:

"Departmental Expenditure Limits are essentially unchanged from those set out in the CSR"—

the comprehensive spending review—

"in July 1998."

The Secretary of State has simply announced money that was allocated already in the comprehensive spending review.

The £2,000 for books is a classic example of the Secretary of State's approach: he gives little penny packets of money to schools and allocates them for specific purposes of his choosing. What will happen if a head teacher writes to him to say, "Thank you very much for the £2,000. But, rather than spend it on school books, as head teacher, I believe that it is in the best interests of my school to spend it on trying to hold on to a classroom assistant for another term or on new software for all the IT equipment that we are supposed to be getting."? Will the Secretary of State refuse that request? Will he say that the money can be used only to purchase books? Why can he not trust head teachers to exercise their judgment about what is in the best interests of their pupils? The biggest single complaint made by teachers and head teachers around the country is that instead of the Government giving them one budget and trusting their professional judgment to spend it, they give them penny packets of funding, each attached to a new gimmick that the Government want to announce.

Mrs. Anne Campbell: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that Tory-controlled county councils such as Cambridgeshire do not spend the money that the Government give them to spend on education? This year, Cambridgeshire has short-changed its schools by £1.3 million, on top of the £1.6 million by which it short-changed them last year.

Mr. Willetts: I gave way to the hon. Lady last week in the debate on burdens on schools when she made exactly the same point, and I shall give her exactly the same reply—Cambridgeshire was spending above its standard spending assessment. The criticism made by schools is that the £19 billion is not getting through to them because too much of it is being absorbed by local education authorities and the Department in spending on central initiatives. The Secretary of State likes to announce those initiatives, but they simply get in the way of the money reaching the schools, which is where it belongs.

The Secretary of State spoke about computers. We welcome anything that strengthens information technology in schools, provided, of course, that it is educationally worth while. I hope that he will recognise that in 1997, when we left office, Britain was

"well up amongst the world leaders in terms of ICT in education, both in terms of provision and in the extent to which new technologies are used across the curriculum."

That was the view of Baroness Blackstone when she spoke about this Government's inheritance on IT in schools.

All that we have heard since then are classic examples of announcements and re-announcements. The Government announced last January that they had a

"£235 million programme to prepare teachers for the information age".

The laptop announcement has been made before, on 16 April 1998, when the Government said that there was

"£23 million to provide laptops for teachers"—

which was,

"a major contribution to the information age".

We have had announcements on centres of excellence before. On 3 June 1998, the Government announced

"120 new Centres of Excellence for IT and high technology to boost local skills training throughout the country."

We have had announcement after announcement, but there has been no rigorous implementation of them. Instead, there has been confusion on the ground about training and support. That has continued until this week. The Secretary of State may dismiss the headline in *The Times* on Saturday, which said, "Budget to give every teacher a computer", but the source for that story was the Prime Minister. He said in Scotland that

"to complete that plan by 2003, every teacher in Scotland will be equipped with a modern computer."

Mr. Blunkett: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Willetts: I shall be happy to give way to the Secretary of State, but first I make it clear that I was reading a quote that appeared in *The Times* and was attributed to the Prime Minister. When the No. 10 press office was asked why, if Scotland could receive those computers, England and Wales could not, it replied that perhaps they would be available in England and Wales. The No. 10 press office encouraged the story that the Secretary of State is now so keen to dismiss.

Similarly, we were told by the Chancellor in the Budget statement that there would be 1,000 computer learning centres. In the Department's announcement today, that figure is down to 800 new IT learning centres.

Mr. Blunkett: The difference is that my Department is responsible for England, and the figure of 800 applies to England, while the figure of 1,000 applies to the United Kingdom.

Mr. Willetts: If we are to have equality across the United Kingdom, why does not that equality apply to the computers that the Prime Minister announced last week as part of his election campaign for Scotland? He is willing to use the generality of British taxpayers' money to finance computers for teachers in Scotland, but he is not, when he is asked, willing to offer the same provision for teachers in England and Wales.

Of course, as we know from the press notice, there will be at least 30 learning centres in the first phase. The reality is that there has been massive hype, but very little will happen on the ground in any feasible time scale. That is why the Secretary of State has sceptics on his own side.

I shall quote from an article by the hon. Member for Sittingbourne and Sheppey (Mr. Wyatt), which is headed

[Mr. Willetts]

"Derek Wyatt takes the Government to task for failing properly to plan funds and put into effect the National Grid for learning."

The hon. Gentleman is one of the few Labour Members who has practical experience in the use of IT in communication. He referred to a paper with an

"enormous black hole—no budget attached and no strategy for implementation."

The article goes on:

"Headteachers and governors do not want large Internet bills one year hence, when the initial "free" trial is over. Teachers should not have been issued with laptops; you cannot see the screens in the classroom and therefore they cannot be used as teaching aids, except by a small number of pupils."

The Secretary of State's hon. Friend made the problem with the Government's strategy clear in that article: a lot of hype and very little practical implementation.

I checked with the Library how we were doing on computers in schools. The Library's response on the reality of access to computers to schools stated:

"the number of pupils per computer has remained relatively unchanged since March 1996."

Despite all the hype, and nearly two years of announcements, there has been virtually no improvement in what schools have to teach with.

I turn to employment and the new deal. There was no reference in the Budget or the Secretary of State's speech to a revealing little footnote on page 159 of the Red Book, which explains in Treasury gobbledegook that social security benefit expenditure has been

"Adjusted since the PRB to take account of the new NAO-audited assumption for unemployment-related social security spending, which raises social security spending by an estimated £1 billion in 1999–2000, £2 billion in 2000–01 and £2¼ billion in 2000–02."

Those figures are in the Secretary of State's Budget document.

The National Audit Office independent forecast expects a steady rise in unemployment over the next three years. It is no use Treasury Ministers shaking their heads. I shall read out the figures from the NAO report, which was also released on Budget day, but not as part of the Budget documents. It says of unemployment:

"1.55 million in Q4 99, 1.69 million in Q4 2000 and 1.73 million in Q4 2001."

That is what independent forecasters, on whom the Government's Budget arithmetic rests, say. The Government tell us that, compared with the pre-Budget document, we should expect a steady rise in unemployment. There was no reference to that in the Secretary of State's speech.

We heard about the new deal, but not about the fact that three in 10 people leaving it do so for destinations of which the Government are ignorant. Nobody knows what happens to such people. We know that another one in 10 people leave the new deal for another benefit. We know that the gateway is increasingly causing concern as people are trapped. I presume that that is the reason for obscure references in the Budget to intensifying the gateway. The Government's labour force survey shows that, despite an overall fall in unemployment in the past year, one of the few areas where it has risen is among young people who are unemployed between six and 12 months. We know that, in the last quarter, there was a 20 per cent. quarter-on-quarter rise in unemployment among young people unemployed between six and 12 months.

Mr. Vernon Coaker (Gedling): Will the hon. Gentleman answer a couple of questions? Would he scrap the new deal? In response to constituents of mine who say that there are sometimes one or two problems with the new deal—to be blunt, there are—does he accept that at least we have a Government who are determined to make the new deal work and to try to get people who were abandoned under the previous Government back into work?

Mr. Willetts: It is no good saying that the Government are determined to make the new deal work if it is not working. Our objection to the new deal is simply that it is not working. Evidence of that is that unemployment among the very group that it is most supposed to help is rising, when for other groups it is falling.

Look at what is happening on the options. We were told that 45 per cent. of people leaving the gateway to go on to an option would be going on to the employment option. In fact, only 24 per cent. of people are going on to the employment option. We know that 49 per cent. of people leaving the gateway for an option are going on to the education and training option.

That development may explain the extraordinary change in the pattern of expenditure on the new deal, which we see in table 4.1, where the expenditure this year is way below the level that the Government forecast, and expenditure next year is significantly higher than they forecast. However, we know that people who leave the education and training option do not seem to perform any better than the people who leave the new deal before they go on to any of the options.

Mr. Christopher Leslie (Shipley): What would the hon. Gentleman do instead of the new deal?

Mr. Willetts: We would not have had the new deal, because we would not have had the windfall tax on the public utilities. We believe that the new deal is making no improvement on what would otherwise have happened. It is making no improvement to the job opportunities of young people.

Perhaps the most arrogant statement in the Red Book is in the discussion of the new deal, where we read on page 54 that

"The New Deal for 18-24s has already secured 58,000 jobs for young people."

That assumes that every young person who was unemployed for six months and who found a job did so because of the Government. Do not the Government realise that people were finding jobs before the new deal came along? Do they not know that 80 per cent. of young people who had been unemployed for six months were leaving unemployment benefit anyway in the course of the following year?

The new deal cannot be claimed as the reason for any young person finding a job. The Government must show that they are doing better than would have been the case anyway. On that, the evidence is simply unavailable.

Mr. Barry Gardiner (Brent, North): If, as the hon. Gentleman says, he would not have sanctioned the £5 billion worth of fiscal tightening—

Mr. Dominic Grieve (Beaconsfield): Tax rises.

Mr. Gardiner: Indeed—that the new deal entails, what would have been the consequences for inflation? How would the Opposition have moved to counter those? What effect would that have had on manufacturing industry—an issue on which they have been desperate to attack the Government?

Mr. Willetts: Taking £5 billion off British industry made no contribution to Britain's economic performance. The taxation of the utilities must involve either higher prices being charged by them, or a fall in returns on their shares, which are owned by the pension funds that serve all of us.

The new deal is not doing any better for young people than they were achieving anyway. Youth unemployment was falling by 100,000 a year before the new deal came into effect. The fallacy that the Government are trying to exploit is the claim that anyone who has been unemployed and finds a job does so because of the new deal. That would be true only if no one who had been unemployed for six months ever found a job before the new deal was introduced. That is an insult to the young people who have been finding jobs as a result of their own initiative and efforts, and the many schemes that we introduced to help them.

The Secretary of State referred to individual learning accounts. Let us be clear about the reality behind the hype. We have never had the White Paper that we were promised. We have had only a Green Paper, and years of dithering and delay since it was published.

The individual learning accounts are financed by taking £150 million off training and enterprise councils. They are merely a redistribution away from TECs, which were in any case going to spend money to help in a targeted way with training and employment needs in their areas.

Although the Secretary of State mentioned the new tax reliefs announced in the Budget, he did not refer to the overall picture shown in the Red Book on page 13, which reveals that the cost for employers and employees of the abolition of vocational training relief—a tax relief specifically to help with training costs—matches the value of all the new tax reliefs for training that he is introducing. All those are zero-sum games—individual learning accounts financed by taking money from TECs and new tax reliefs financed by getting rid of a training tax relief.

What about the administration of ILAs? The Institute for Fiscal Studies green book states that

"it is questionable whether the administrative costs of setting up completely new accounts for the sole purpose of training are justified."

The hon. Member for Amber Valley (Judy Mallaber) asked a pertinent question—sadly, she is no longer in the Chamber—which echoed the IFS criticism. The IFS stated:

"It is unclear how much of the £150 million subsidy to account-holders will result in new training which would not have happened in the absence of the scheme, rather than just being a dead-weight transfer to people who would have done the training anyway."

In respect of training, the new deal, ILAs and the so-called extra expenditure on schools and on books for schools, the story is the same: announcement and re-announcement; launches and re-launches and a large amount of hype. However, the hype runs far ahead of reality—the reality in the classroom and the college; the reality of the burdens facing employers and of the performance of unemployed people in finding work. The Chancellor of the Exchequer claimed that 1999 would be the year of delivery, but 1999 will be the year of disappointment.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord): Order. I remind the House that there is a 10-minute limit on Back-Bench speeches.

1.57 pm

Valerie Davey (Bristol, West): I want to celebrate a single line in the Budget which announced that £2,000 would be given to every school for books. That is generous and unconditional, and will be welcomed by every school. As we enter the 21st century, there will be a need for more computers and for greater understanding of science and technology, but that will never entirely replace books and libraries.

I grew up in a flat above a bookshop which, in those days, was also a library. It was natural for me to have books everywhere and to value and love them, and to value libraries. In every school that I visit, I gravitate first to the library, which I believe to be the educative heart of any school. It is there that children begin to make choices and begin self-learning. It is there that they discover, in what I trust will now be a greater choice of books, what they want to learn. Through books, they understand more about the world, the environment and all the things that excite them. Let me take hon. Members, in their mind's eye, to my favourite school library.

Mr. Nick St. Aubyn (Guildford): Does the hon. Lady agree with the recent finding by the Office for Standards in Education that most of the problems of finding enough money for books in schools result from poor management of resources by the heads of those schools?

Valerie Davey: I dispute that. We have just heard from the hon. Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts) how good management is and that schools want more scope. This wholly generous and unconditional gift from the Government should be accepted in that spirit.

Come to that library with me—to the middle of a sprawling redbrick estate in Bristol, up the steps of a nursery school and down a small, colourfully decorated corridor with two classrooms ahead of us. Turn right and right again through a door which, in the original building,

[Valerie Davey]

was the entrance to a large walk-in store cupboard. Now, with the help of parents and the construction of a window in the roof, that cupboard has become a library: an oasis in that school and that community.

Children find sanctuary in that library. One day when I was there, a small boy came in. He was a three-year-old who knew instinctively that, if he could not cope in the classroom and things had got on top of him, he would find in the library a place where he could calm down, find his own way and, even at the age of three, instigate his own learning.

This beautiful little library has books at floor level, a nice carpet, bean bags and a welcoming atmosphere. It is very special to the school and to the community, and I trust—indeed, I know—that the money will be welcome and well spent. When the school received its first £1,000, it could not believe its luck: it could not believe the Government's generosity in giving it what it knew that families and youngsters needed most. I am sure that pattern will be repeated throughout the country.

Given the generosity and unconditionality of the gift, I shall not presume to dictate, or even suggest, how the money should best be spent—

Mr. Robert Syms (Poole): There is no such thing as Government money. There is the people's money, which comes from the taxpayer. Will the hon. Lady acknowledge that?

Valerie Davey: What I acknowledge is that the party in power has a way of dictating, or deciding, how money should be spent. In this instance, the Budget has been generous to education in providing money for books. As I was about to say, I hope that some of that money will be spent on poetry books, because I feel that poetry gives the English language an extra dimension.

A book to which I often refer—not every day, but on some days—contains "poems for the day". The poem for today, 11 March, has a title that is not easy, but is nevertheless important. It is by Arthur Clough, and Churchill quoted it several times during the war. It is called "Say not the struggle naught availeth". We would hardly use the word "struggle" today, but we would use the word "challenge"—and the present Government face the greatest possible challenge: that of ensuring that education standards rise, and that every child has a choice in education, receives an excellent education and achieves the highest possible standards.

I trust that the allocation to education will bring real joy to children now. None of us can know how much it will enable children to attain in the future as a consequence of the excitement and expectations that it will instil. Let the children enjoy it; let schools, teachers and parents ensure that it is well spent.

2.3 pm

Mr. Don Foster (Bath): I thank the Secretary of State for the note that he sent me—and, no doubt, the Opposition spokesman, the hon. Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts)—explaining why he would not be able to stay for the whole debate.

I must confess that, having had to follow the hon. Member for Havant on a number of occasions recently, I experience a sense of nausea when I hear him criticise what the Government are doing. It strikes me as hypocrisy, given the state in which his party left our schools and education in general. I therefore think it rather appropriate that, while the hon. Gentleman was speaking, the Secretary of State's dog was sick.

I hope that, if I am somewhat critical of aspects of the Budget, I shall not be considered hypocritical myself. My views are at least consistent with what I have, for some years, considered to be necessary to education and employment.

Although undoubtedly well-intentioned, the Budget was spoilt both by gimmicks and by unnecessary complexity.

There are some very good measures in the Budget—measures that we of course support—such as those to help small businesses or to improve competition. There are many other measures that we support but which we feel are too timid. For example, the Government are being far too timid in the extent of their support for pensioners, although the improved support is welcome.

The Government have also been unduly timid in relation to the environment. Nothing in the Budget will do anything to improve public transport in our country. It is therefore hardly surprising that I read today the results of an opinion poll showing that only 3 per cent. of people believe that the Government are doing a good job in relation to transport.

Dr. George Turner (North-West Norfolk): Did I mishear the hon. Gentleman? I thought that he said that there was nothing in the Budget to help transport. I distinctly heard the Chancellor mention an extra 20 per cent., especially for rural areas; will the hon. Gentleman acknowledge that? *[Interruption.]* Twenty per cent.—£20 million extra in the Budget.

Mr. Foster: The hon. Gentleman says that he heard the Chancellor say all those things. Of course he heard that, but he fails to take into account the additional costs that will be imposed on public transport because of the changes that have taken place in the fuel levy. If he studies the Red Book, he will see that the net effect is zero additional support for public transport.

The hon. Member for North-West Norfolk (Dr. Turner), who is obviously interested in these affairs and in environmental matters, may agree that the Government were right to reduce vehicle excise duty, but I hope that he also agrees that it was rather timid to reduce by £55 the VED for vehicles below 1100 cc. The Liberal Democrats would have much preferred the complete abolition of VED for vehicles of 1600 cc and below.

We welcome several other measures. The introduction of the energy tax is welcome—we had proposed that for many years—but it is a great pity that, in the same Budget, the Chancellor of the Exchequer did not make good the Government's general election pledge to start a wide-scale home energy insulation programme.

I said that the Budget was marred to some extent by gimmicks. The biggest gimmick is the 10p income tax rate. Liberal Democrats believe that it is absolutely right to provide more help for the poorest in our society—indeed, we might go even further than the new Labour Government and argue that there is an urgent need to redistribute wealth, and that that can be done through the tax system. However, the introduction of the 10p rate of

income tax is certainly not the most efficient or effective way to do it. It would have been far better to raise personal tax thresholds. That would have been more tax-efficient and would have helped more people.

I should have liked the Chancellor to make a long-term pledge to impose a starting threshold of £10,000, which, once fulfilled, would have meant that 10 million people no longer needed to pay income tax. That would really have helped the least well off in our society and would—I am sure that the Secretary of State will agree—have had a direct impact on educational standards, because we know that there is a link between low educational standards and poverty.

The view that I have just expressed is not without support elsewhere. The Institute for Fiscal Studies has said:

"In terms of the key goal of improving work incentives, it is clear that the introduction of a 10 per cent. tax rate is an expensive way of achieving little. The tax system could be reformed for equivalent cost, yet with more progressive results and without the introduction of additional complexity, by an increase in personal allowances."

I therefore believe that the announcement of the 10p tax rate was a gimmick. There are better ways of doing what I believe that the Chancellor wanted to do, which is to help the less well off. He could have helped more people, with less complexity, without that gimmick.

I shall now discuss issues of education and employment. I shall criticise some aspects of the Budget, but as I have said many times, I want it to be understood that I give the Government credit for many of the things that they have done. I therefore hope that my criticisms will not lead the Secretary of State to accuse me—as he has allegedly accused other critics—of being a sneering cynic or a miserable sod. The Secretary of State is said to have called people that, but he can tell us for himself whether that is true.

The House ought to welcome the additional £100 million for the research infrastructure fund, the second round of university challenge, the tax incentives for companies to invest in research and development and the development of individual learning accounts, which we have already discussed. It is right and proper that employers are given an opportunity to contribute to individual learning accounts.

My party was the first political party to propose the introduction of individual learning accounts. We are delighted that the Government belatedly accepted that idea. We also proposed that businesses should be able to contribute to them, and we are delighted that, at long last, the Government are following our lead. We are concerned that current individual learning accounts are minuscule and will not deliver the learning revolution that we want, but at least they are a step in the right direction.

The hon. Member for Amber Valley (Judy Mallaber) intervened on the Secretary of State about the importance of ensuring that individual learning accounts are made available to all. I was delighted to hear him assure the House that he will consider that carefully in the light of Sir Claus Moser's report. I hope that when he does so, he will also look into the position of those students who have no qualifications and who are currently barred from access to individual learning accounts. I hope that he will ensure that that is reversed.

We welcome many other measures in part. We welcome, as did the Secretary of State, the Chancellor's announcement of a boost for the nation to improve its skills in information and communication technology. I am delighted that the Secretary of State has at last acknowledged that, if we are to get our pupils on-line, it is vital that we also give teachers the opportunity to get on-line. That is a change of heart for the Department. A senior spokesman for the Department was quoted in *The Guardian* last year as saying:

"There's no reason to buy teachers computers. They are being trained in how to teach ICT, not how to use a computer."

At least the Department now acknowledges that teachers need to be given computers, so I am pleased about that improvement.

The Secretary of State can wrap up any announcement in various ways, but today's announcement does not go very far. After all, we now know that, under the original scheme to give teachers laptops, only 2.5 per cent. of teachers have so far received one. At that rate, it would have taken 40 years for all teachers to get a laptop. The announcement of additional resources is welcome, but sadly it will only increase that percentage to 6.5 per cent. of teachers, so there is a very long way to go. I hope that in the winding-up speech we will be told whether trainee teachers, who will need access to laptops, will be eligible under the scheme—a point raised by the hon. Member for Havant.

We welcome the additional money for ordinary computers in schools, particularly inner-city schools. I hope that the Secretary of State will acknowledge that the current announcement does not go very far, particularly when we bear in mind the fact that, according to his Department's figures, 64 per cent. of primary schools and 57 per cent. of secondary schools have computers that are more than three years old, and 44 per cent. of computers in primary schools are over five years old. The vast majority of them will not be millennium compliant, and additional funds will be needed fairly rapidly.

The hon. Member for Bristol, West (Valerie Davey) praised the Secretary of State and the Chancellor for the £2,000 for every school for books. I agree with her in principle: any additional books for our schools must be welcomed. However, I suggest that that is not the most effective way of carrying out that operation. It looks like a good idea and it will grab the headlines, but one wonders whether it is a sensible way of providing more books.

Schools will not have the freedom to decide how best to use that money. They could perhaps make more effective use of the money through the purchase of CD-ROMs or software. Moreover, in a small group 1 primary school with 50 pupils the measure will look good, because it will have £40 per pupil for books. However, for Banbury school in Oxfordshire, which is a group 6 secondary school, the amount is merely £1 per pupil. One has to question whether it would not have been better to have a per capita system.

I want to show support for the new deal for the over-50s, although I have some concern about it. That Government initiative has not been mentioned today. I believe that it is an important measure, but it may flounder unless the Government are prepared to take tough action on age discrimination. If employers are not willing to take on people over 50, the scheme will come to naught. *[Interruption.]* I note that the Secretary of State is nodding. I remind him that the 1997 Amsterdam treaty requires European Union countries to take appropriate action to tackle discrimination on the grounds of age.

[Mr. Foster]

During the last election, the Government made a commitment that they would do so, yet sadly so far they have been lukewarm on this important issue. I hope that the new deal for the over-50s will rapidly be matched by positive action from the Government on discrimination.

Mr. Willetts: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that one of the reasons why the Government are so wary about addressing the problem of discrimination by age is that the new deal discriminates by age? The new deal would probably fall foul of any significant legislation banning such discrimination.

Mr. Foster: I suspect that the hon. Gentleman, in asking that question, is well aware that that may have been one of the motivations behind the Government's introduction of this new element of the new deal. Although he and I may disagree about the mechanics and some of the details of the new deal, surely he would accept the broad principle of trying to provide additional support for that age group, who are particularly badly hampered in the jobs market and who find it difficult to get back into work if they lose their jobs. There is an urgent need to do something about the problem.

I should like to comment on the issue of money. The Secretary of State and the Chancellor seemed to be providing new money for education and employment. The sad fact is that nothing could be further from the truth. No new money was announced for education and employment.

Mr. Blunkett: It was.

Mr. Foster: The money for education and employment that was announced in the Budget came predominantly from the modernisation fund. It was money that had been previously announced in the comprehensive spending review. Opposition Members have a problem with that because the comprehensive spending review was intended to be an opportunity for people to plan over a three-year period. That is what the Chancellor said when he announced it. In practice, however, the Government are drip-feeding announcements about different bits of the money that have already been allocated.

Mr. Blunkett *rose—*

Mr. Foster: I shall give way to the Secretary of State in a moment.

We a getting a drip feed of information from Departments about how the money is to be used. If the Secretary of State does not mind, before I give way to him I shall make one further point, because I am sure that he will want to respond to it. If proof is wanted of my claim that the money is being drip-fed so that the Government get double the credit for it, I suggest that, over the next few weeks and months, hon. Members look out for announcements from the Department for Education and Employment on what it will allege is additional money for the national grid for learning, for the university for industry, for special educational needs provision, for travellers' children and for adult education, higher education and further education. I predict that we shall hear announcements over the next few months about alleged new money in each of those areas. That money has already been allocated in the Department and it could and should be announced immediately so that the organisations responsible can prepare.

Mr. Blunkett: I am not sure whether I am asking or telling the hon. Gentleman about the issues that he has raised. We have announced £1.5 billion extra for further and higher education and there is more money to come. There is a crucial flaw in the hon. Gentleman's argument, which I should like him to acknowledge. We have announced a comprehensive spending review with departmental totals. That is part of the departmental expenditure limits. The cumulative total for education over the three-year period is £19 billion. The Treasury has allocated an additional £561 million this week. That is not part of the £19 billion departmental expenditure limit; it is new money. It is no more not new money than any other Treasury allocation above departmental budgets in our history. It happens to come from the capital modernisation fund, which was not part of the departmental expenditure limit of £19 billion—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Foster: I am sure that the House is grateful for the Secretary of State's detailed response. He failed to point out that the capital modernisation fund to which he referred and from which the money that he has just said is new money for education came was part of the announcement at the time of the comprehensive spending review. No additional money is being made available by the Secretary of State.

I give the Minister for School Standards credit for at least being prepared to acknowledge from time to time the way in which the Government attempt, somewhat tongue in cheek, to re-announce sums of money. If hon. Members have nothing better to do, I advise them to get hold of the *Hansard* report of the 6th Standing Committee on Delegated Legislation on 9 March and look at column 10. I recommend it to the entire House, because it contains one of the most honest responses from the Government about how money is cycled and recycled time after time in their announcements.

The key task for all political parties is to try to raise standards in education, not to have arguments about which council spends more money than another or which Governments do better than others. What matters is what is delivered. The hon. Member for Cambridge (Mrs. Campbell) talked about what particular councils are doing. I have a list of Labour-controlled councils that will be making cuts in the education service next year, but I also have similar lists of Liberal Democrat and Conservative-controlled councils. The issue for all of us is to find ways of ensuring that money is properly targeted to raise standards in those important areas.

Because class sizes are still rising in primary schools, because we are still not giving appropriate support to part-time students in our further and higher education institutions and because we have still not got rid of the scourge of bad buildings and shortages of books and equipment, more money is still needed in our education service—more than the Government are putting in. That is why it was wrong of the Chancellor to announce in his Budget that next year he would reduce income tax by

1p in the pound. The money that could be raised from that should be committed to the education service. For that reason alone, we shall vote against that measure.

2.24 pm

Mr. Ivor Caplin (Hove): I should like to say how much I enjoyed the speech of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. I hope that, (Mr. Willetts), Lucy is now feeling better, having had to listen to the hon. Member for Havant.

I almost agreed with a lot of what the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) said—until he got close to the last 20 minutes or so. I should like to begin by telling him about my experience at one of the smallest primary schools in my constituency on Monday morning. St. Peter's school in Portslade is a well-run school with a roll of just over 100. The centrepiece of the school is the library. Every child goes in the library almost every day. Because of the size of the school and the way in which the education system operated under the previous Government, until the first £1,000 came from this Government, the library was underfunded. The school will now be celebrating the chance to double the number of books in its library over the next few months. Nearly £100,000 is being spent on books alone in schools in my constituency. I have not heard a word against that from teachers, heads or pupils. I do not know what schools in Bath are up to.

Nearly £1 million of new deal money is going on school buildings. That is already having an impact and helping to drive up school standards. The literacy test results for schools in the Brighton and Hove local education authority have improved considerably this year, with figures up by 7 or 8 per cent. since 1996. School buildings are a central aspect of that improvement.

It would be foolish of a Member of Parliament to say that he did not want computers in classrooms. On my visit the other day, I saw a series of computers that had been installed as part of the national grid for learning. The head teacher of the school, which is in a deprived part of the constituency, told me that children there had never had the opportunity to see and deal with a computer. They were discovering an education and learning experience through those computers. If having more computers in classrooms means teachers needing a laptop at home to help them prepare, I am all for that.

I want to talk briefly about the environment and the escalator, because there seem to have been some double standards in evidence in the past couple of days. The Leader of the Opposition said on Tuesday that the Government had

"increased the so-called fuel escalator from 5 to 6 per cent."—[*Official Report*, 9 March 1999; Vol. 327, c. 197.]

What on earth did he mean by "so-called"? The fuel escalator was introduced when the right hon. Gentleman was a member of the Conservative Government. Did he not know what the Government of the right hon. Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major) were doing? That was an astonishing phrase to use.

The fuel escalator is about trying to improve the environment. I am happy for the Conservatives to vote against it on Monday, because that will show which party truly cares for the environment. Maybe their spokesman will tell us later whether they intend to vote against it. Many people will wonder what the Conservatives are about if they introduce an escalator in one Parliament and then vote against it in the next. They cannot face both ways. I know that some local Liberal Democrats like to do so, but they cannot do that in national politics.

Mr. St. Aubyn: Will the hon. Gentleman confirm that this Government, with three Budgets in two years, have had a dramatic effect on the escalator, not only by increasing it, but by increasing the number of times that it has been applied? That is why motorists in this country are complaining. The hon. Gentleman has made it clear that his party is against motorists.

Mr. Caplin: As a motorist, I am certainly not against them. I was privileged to serve on the Standing Committee on the first Finance Bill of this Parliament, in July 1997. That Budget was primarily about putting right some of the ills that we had inherited from the Tories and implementing the windfall tax, to which I hope to return shortly if time allows.

I welcome the increase in the winter fuel allowance, which along with the minimum income guarantee represents a significant change to pensioners' funding. The £100 has been widely welcomed throughout my constituency. I am very much looking forward to speaking at the meeting of Age Concern in my constituency next week, given that organisation's long-standing campaign on winter fuel payments.

I shall refer briefly to the windfall tax as I find it rather disingenuous of the Tories to include the windfall tax in the figures that they continually quote. The shadow Chancellor tried to do so last night on television, but his broadcast persuaded me only that we were about to spend £40 billion on health and education.

The windfall levy was in our manifesto. Before the election many Conservative Members said that it would be challenged in the courts. Some companies said that they would challenge us in the courts, but no such challenge ever occurred. The companies affected by the windfall levy knew that it was right and accepted the democratic principle of a general election. It cannot be described as a tax, as it was freely given. I am pleased that it was accepted by all the companies concerned.

I have three final points. First, I am an officer of the all-party football group. One issue that has not yet been raised in the Budget debate is nevertheless very good news for football—the change in the pools betting duty, which will allow the Football Trust to continue for another three years. I very much welcome that funding, which could amount to £20 million; and I make the plea that the FA Premiership should match pound for pound the Government's new funding for the Football Trust to provide support for grassroots football.

My second point relates to smuggling. I was pleased to hear that the Government intend to take action on tobacco smuggling. When the Financial Secretary to the Treasury replies to the debate, perhaps she will reassure me and other hon. Members with constituencies in the south-east about the white van trade in alcohol which causes considerable problems in Sussex and Kent. There are several small breweries in the region, so the smuggling trade has a double-whammy effect. The small breweries very much welcome the freeze on alcohol duties, but I wonder whether the Government's approach to tobacco smuggling can be extended to the illegal trade in alcohol

[Mr. Caplin]

so that we can make some real inroads into a disgraceful trade that is imparting an imbalance to the tobacco and alcohol industries.

Finally, I welcome the extension to 2002 of the film taxation benefits announced by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor. Although films are no longer made in Hove, 102 years ago Hove was the birthplace of British cinema.

2.33 pm

Mr. Christopher Chope (Christchurch): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Hove (Mr. Caplin). I am sure that his constituents will be most interested to read about his priorities in this year's Budget. I suspect that many of his constituents, like many of mine, are enjoying their retirement on the south coast and will be most concerned about the Budget.

The Budget gets an alpha plus for presentation and marketing but a gamma minus for honesty and content. It is a dishonest Budget; it is bad for business and for many individuals. Indeed, it is a Budget of missed opportunities. The Government could and should have rectified some of their past mistakes. As the former Minister for Small Firms, Trade and Industry—now the Financial Secretary to the Treasury—is on the Front Bench, let me say that I was particularly disappointed that the Government did not have second thoughts about the capital gains tax retirement relief. Why will they not admit that they are wrong, and withdraw the penalties that are being imposed on those who sell their businesses on retirement after a lifetime of hard work?

The second missed opportunity is the tax on the dividend income of non-taxpayers. It is outrageously unfair that those with incomes below the tax threshold should have to pay income tax on the income from their savings. Why should they be forced to rearrange their modest portfolios and put them into individual savings accounts, which seem to be the Government's answer?

The Government should also have second thoughts about abolishing personal equity plans and tax-exempt special savings accounts. The idea that ISAs will increase savings has been disproved by projections that show that they will further harm the savings ratio. The Government are damaging the savings culture in Britain.

The Government should have realised with experience that they made a big mistake when they removed from the over-60s the tax relief on health insurance premiums. If that were reintroduced, it would encourage many more people to help themselves as regards the provision of health care. Its abolition is one of the factors that has contributed to the increase in national health service waiting lists. My constituents are saying that as a result of the increase in premiums by something like 23 per cent. they can no longer afford private insurance, so they are now placing an additional burden on the national health service.

My strongest criticism of the Budget relates to the so-called environmental taxes—the taxes on fuel oil, diesel and petrol. The taxes on fuel oil are very much in the small print and involve relatively small sums of money, but what can be the justification for a 21.5 per cent. increase in the duty on fuel oil? For the most part, fuel oil is light heating oil which is used by householders, mainly in rural communities, who do not have access to mains gas. It is also used by small industrial and commercial undertakings. To impose such an increase is petty and spiteful. It will produce £30 million a year for the Exchequer. I am concerned that it will produce a further £30 million every year for the next three years. In other words, it is an escalator of 21.5 per cent. per annum on those who choose, or have no alternative but to have, central heating systems that use light oil.

The increases in fuel duty at three times the rate of inflation every year until the end of this Parliament are a tax not on a luxury but on a necessity. Why are we imposing so much pain on the motoring public and our road transport industries? The money is not being reinvested in the transport infrastructure, which is crumbling, and it is certainly not being invested in new roads. The Government have slashed the new roads programme, even compared with the reductions that were made by the previous Administration. The money is certainly not being reinvested in public transport. Some Labour Members may be satisfied with the thought of collecting an extra £2 billion in tax and giving back £10 million to rural motorists and bus users, but Opposition Members do not consider it in the least bit fair.

What is the purpose of all those increases? The hon. Member for Hove said that they would produce great environmental benefit. According to the small print in the Red Book, the gain is that the Government estimate that, in 11 years' time, in 2010, there may be a reduction of some 5 per cent. in carbon dioxide emissions from transport—what a price to pay for such a paltry reduction.

Reducing carbon dioxide emissions by the price mechanism is extremely unfair and inefficient. The environmental justification for every fuel tax increase is specious. The Government are acting on that basis only because they achieved such a bad deal for Britain in the share-out of the Kyoto targets last June. When one considers the European target of an 8 per cent. reduction in carbon dioxide emissions, it is clear that the Government took pride in giving Britain a larger burden than almost all other European countries.

We accepted a 12.5 per cent. reduction; the Netherlands accepted 6 per cent.; Finland and France did not accept any reduction; Sweden is allowed to increase emissions by 4 per cent.; Ireland by 13 per cent.; Spain by 15 per cent.; Greece by 25 per cent.; and Portugal by 27 per cent. Is it any wonder that fuel is much cheaper in those countries?

The gap will widen between now and the end of this Parliament, resulting in a lot more cross-border shopping for fuel. There is already a loss of revenue of probably £1 billion a year because of what is happening between Northern Ireland and the Republic, and increasingly hauliers are driven to take their businesses overseas to the continent.

Why are motoring taxes being increased? I suggest that it is part of the Government's vendetta against the motorist and the motor car. They are using the Kyoto summit as an excuse for doing something that they relish. Why is the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry making much of the price of new cars, when most of our constituents are finding the burden of driving their used cars too great? Why do not the Government think about the burden of extra taxes on the ordinary car user?

Much is emerging from the small print in the Budget. A newspaper article today suggests that the Government are saying that the abolition of the married couple's

allowance is a reduction in public spending rather than an increase in taxation. That logic misleads the public and suggests that the Government are reducing taxes when in fact they are increasing them.

The other day, my children introduced me to an ice lolly called a "Twister". It is a superficially attractive ice lolly: it is green on top, but when one licks it one finds the red underneath. The Budget is modelled on a "Twister" and it has been introduced by a Government of twisters. The people will enjoy their revenge when the truth is out.

2.42 pm

Ms Bridget Prentice (Lewisham, East): I am delighted to speak in a debate on a Budget that is recognised by the people, if not by the Opposition, as radical, forward-looking and good for those in need, in work and with families.

I have listened carefully to what Opposition Members have said today and throughout the week, both here and in the media, and I am somewhat perplexed by some of their responses. They ask why we do not use the money for teachers and nurses. It strikes me, if it has not struck them, that teachers and nurses are taxpayers, too, and will benefit from the tax decreases announced in the Budget.

Teachers and nurses are members of families. Their children will benefit from the huge increase in child benefit, the children's tax credit and the extra money for books in schools. They will also have parents who are pensioners and will benefit from the huge increase in the winter fuel payment as well as from other aspects of the Budget directed specifically at them.

As someone who is not a parent, I, too, welcome the fact that money has been targeted in that way. I happen to be a smoker. My hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge (Mrs. Campbell) will now frown at me. I am happy that the taxes that I pay as a smoker will help to provide books for schools, the minimum pension guarantee and all the other help for those who are most in need. The Budget is radical: it targets those in need and it makes work pay.

Several Opposition Members, and one or two of our national newspapers, have mentioned the married couple's allowance. They seem to think that its abolition is, as I believe the *Daily Mail* said, the breaking of the last fiscal prop to marriage. I have yet to meet someone who married because of the prospect of a £1,900 tax-free allowance. I honestly know of no one who has waltzed down the aisle saying, "This is the happiest day of my life, because tomorrow the Chancellor is going to give us £1,900 tax free."

Mr. Graham Brady (Altrincham and Sale, West) *rose—*

Mr. Caplin: Is this a proposal?

Mr. Brady: I wonder whether the hon. Lady has ever heard of a married couple whose marriage has broken down because of financial pressures.

Ms Prentice: Many marriages break down because of financial pressures. My hon. Friend the Member for Hove (Mr. Caplin) was hoping that the hon. Gentleman was about to propose to me. Unfortunately, it was not to be, but we live in hope.

Mr. Philip Hammond (Runnymede and Weybridge) *rose—*

Ms Prentice: I am sorry, but I have only 10 minutes in all, so I will have to move on.

It is a bizarre concept to suppose that people marry for such a reason, and that is hardly the rock on which a marriage should be founded. It is not for the Government to pay people to marry. Marriage is a moral and spiritual decision. Of course the Government are right to advocate it as a way of life and to support married people and parents, and many aspects of the Budget are about much more productive ways of doing just that. We should welcome the working families tax credit, the provision of child care, the improvement in standards in schools and the new deal for young people.

I am extremely pleased about the help and support for the British film industry, which my hon. Friend the Member for Hove mentioned. We have a wonderful, dynamic and internationally successful industry of which we should be proud. It is heartening that at last we have a Government who recognise that and take it seriously. I hope that our support for the industry will mean that talented young people will be able to use and develop their talents here rather than going abroad where the incentives have been more attractive.

I hope that my hon. Friend the Financial Secretary will be able to tell us that the changes will help our entrepreneurs and creative talents to make more films here in Britain. I am delighted to see that my hon. Friend the Minister for Tourism, Film and Broadcasting is here, because I want to congratulate her on the way in which she has advocated the change to help our film industry. I hope that others will also be encouraged to come from abroad and make films here. It is tragic that films that could and should have been made here were made elsewhere because of a lack of incentives to invest in Britain.

I welcome the use of the capital modernisation fund for the network of learning centres, and I look forward to the opening of the first cyber café in Lewisham; but my particular delight is in the provision of £170 million for the fight against crime. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has rightly emphasised the need to curb youth crime and to target ways of preventing young people from getting involved in crime and of tackling criminal behaviour as early as possible. That is the best way of preventing young people from ending up with a string of offences and a belief that not much will be done about it.

I do not know exactly how that £170 million is to be spent, but I have a couple of suggestions. Will local communities, councils, police and other agencies working together make bids for the money, and on what basis will an area qualify? Will money be made available when the police or local community identify an aspect of criminal activity that needs a rapid response?

I am glad that Departments will work together on that—what we call joined-up Government. The initiative will have been effective if we can make communities safe. That involves improving street lighting, better environmental care and so on. If street lighting

[Ms Prentice]

is improved, more people go out, especially women and the elderly, and if more people are around, less crime is likely to be committed, so it has a double effect. The same applies to the environment generally. Graffiti, litter and general dereliction give the impression of a community that is not interested in being safer. Environmental improvements make for safer communities. By giving people pride in their community, we give them a stake in keeping it safe, and that applies to the young as much as it does to the old.

I hope that the Government will bear those points in mind when they implement this excellent, radical and unifying Budget. I am delighted to support it.

2.51 pm

Mr. Christopher Gill (Ludlow): I doubt whether any hon. Member disputes the fact that good communications are essential to a strong and vibrant economy. I wish to examine the effects of the Budget on the transport industry and, as a former naval person, I shall start with the shipping industry.

Last February, I received a letter from the British Chamber of Shipping, which stated:

"Within weeks of taking office at the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, John Prescott established a Shipping Working Group to find ways in which the Government can work in partnership with the shipping industry and the maritime unions to boost training, employment and investment. The Group will soon be reporting to the Deputy Prime Minister."

I was encouraged that another former naval person was taking an interest in the future of the British shipping industry. The upshot was the publication of "British Shipping: Charting a New Course". It looked as though we were on course to making some progress in the direction in which both management and the unions of British shipping wanted us to go. Indeed, the National Union of Marine, Aviation and Shipping Transport Officers wrote to me recently about the tonnage tax, which it called

"one of the most important recommendations made in the Charting a New Course report."

However, all that the Chancellor had to say in the Budget on that point was:

"the shipping industry has put to me the case for enhanced training incentives and for a lower rate ring-fenced tonnage tax. While I am attracted to these options, I have to be satisfied that lower tax rates will not become a vehicle for tax avoidance".—[*Official Report*, 9 March 1999; Vol. 327, c. 177.]

In two years, we have made no progress. However, over many years, we have seen the increasing tendency of British shipowners to flag their ships out to other nations.

Mr. Gardiner: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Gill: I shall not give way, because the hon. Gentleman knows that we are limited to 10-minute speeches, and I have a lot to say.

What has happened in the British shipping industry will now almost inevitably happen in the road haulage industry. We read in our newspapers about the serious plight of the British road haulage industry. As a result of the Budget, it will be possible in Belgium to fill a 1,000 litre tank on a diesel-engined lorry for £300 less than in this country. That is before one takes into account the huge discrepancy between vehicle excise duty on the continent and in this country.

I cannot stress too strongly the importance of a good transport infrastructure. I am concerned that the Budget does not contain an increase in expenditure on road, railway or shipping projects. The Government say that they will allocate £1.7 billion extra, but that is less than the extra tax that they will take from those industries in future years. Since taking office, the Government have cancelled several road projects. Hon. Members from the west of England who drive to London will know that, after the M40 becomes the A40 Western avenue, at the intersection with Old Oak Common lane, it ceases to be a dual carriageway. The improvement to that section was cancelled by the Government, because they thought that removing that bottleneck would encourage people to use the road. That is the stagecoach mentality. When will the Government realise that people need, want and will continue to use vehicles, either private or commercial? Failing to carry out a road improvement to try to stop people using vehicles is a luddite approach.

The chairman of the Automobile Association, Sir Brian Shaw, has noted the lack of investment in Britain's transport infrastructure. Earlier this month, he was reported as saying:

"The only European country with worse traffic congestion than Britain is Poland . . . yet British drivers pay more in motoring taxes than any other European road users . . . Other countries spend 40-50 per cent. of road taxes on transport, but in Britain £100 billion has 'effectively been stolen from its proper purpose'".

What is the Government's answer to that point? The article continues:

"Roads minister Lord Whitty . . . restated the Government's commitment to road charging and its determination to introduce taxes on business parking."

We hear much about the Government's integrated transport system. I heard on the "Today" programme this morning that somebody had come up with the bright idea that, in future, people should be encouraged to take taxis to bus stops. The Government are anti-road, anti-motorists—which affects me as the representative of a large and sparsely populated rural area—and anti-progress.

The Government crow about the volume of freight that they have transferred to the railways, but I want to put the record straight. That has happened only since the railways were privatised. Before privatisation, which occurred under the Conservative Government, there was no increase in the volume of freight on railways, but this Government want to take credit for the increase in rail freight. The Labour party criticised the Conservative Government for selling the railways too cheap. Labour Members opposed privatisation at every turn and did their level best to destroy market confidence in the flotation. They threatened to renationalise the railways, and it is hardly surprising that, at the time of the flotation, it was impossible to sell the railways at the price that we would have liked to achieve. Labour Members should stop being so hypocritical on that subject: they know that the railways were sold for less than their full potential because of their opposition and threats.

Every hon. Member will have received in advance of the Budget a circular from the Automobile Association in which it was pointed out that £8 of every £10 spent on

road fuel was tax. The figure is now £8.50 in every £10. On diesel fuel, the situation is even worse. The increase in duty on diesel oil is 11.6 per cent., which adds nearly 28p to a gallon of diesel, or £60 for every 1,000 litre tankful.

I want the Government to realise the serious impact that those taxation measures will have on rural areas. They have a serious impact on the road haulage industry, and a consequentially serious effect on our whole economy. Any business—be it manufacturing or road haulage—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I am afraid that the hon. Gentleman's time has elapsed.

3.1 pm

Mrs. Anne Campbell (Cambridge): I am pleased to be able to speak in the debate on a Budget that is good for children, pensioners, business and self-learners. It is very good for entrepreneurs, and it is even good for cyclists. It is especially good for my constituents.

The hon. Member for Ludlow (Mr. Gill) spent some time on the difficulties of living in rural areas and the extra taxes that people there must pay as a result of the Budget. Many of the taxes introduced by the Chancellor will, however, be revenue neutral. For example, the increase in fuel duty will be balanced by a reduction in vehicle excise duty. The Chancellor is also introducing additional support for public transport through the rural transport fund and other measures. That will help people to use their cars less often and to use more public transport. All of us will benefit from the resulting improvement in air quality and from the reduction in congestion.

Mr. Gill: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Campbell: No, the hon. Gentleman did not give way, and nor shall I. I have made my point to him.

We are fortunate to have a Government who have recognised—as none before ever did—the importance of a strong science base and of the innovation that links that science base to the industrial base. We also have a manufacturing industry that recognises the important contribution that can be made by scientists, entrepreneurs and people who have ideas.

We have a world-renowned university in Cambridge and a strong scientific output which is probably the best in the world. We have recognised the importance of linking the development of high-tech services and products to the science base. There are around 36,000 high-tech jobs in and around my constituency, and industrial leaders there are delighted with the Budget.

The Cambridge *Evening News* carried the headline "Big boost for region's biotech companies" and the amusing sub-head "Measures to help high-tech firms which almost match 'wish list'". We all know that no one expects a wish list to be satisfied, but the Budget contains proposals warmly welcomed by industrial leaders. Research and development tax credits are important to the high-tech sector. Expansion of the university challenge fund will help universities to produce better laboratories and equipment. The removal of tax from share option deals is designed to lure the high-flyers from the big companies to risky start-up companies.

Tax cuts are good for small business, and the 40 per cent. extension on capital allowances will also boost the high-tech sector and others. The recognition that an extension of employee ownership is good for both business and employees is also welcome.

However, having said many good things about the Budget, I hope that my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary to the Treasury will forgive me for mentioning one concern raised at a business breakfast yesterday. I fear that the raising of stamp duty will have an effect that the Government do not intend, given their strong support for science-based industry. The fear is that the value of most knowledge-based industries rests not in physical assets—typically, they do not have a lot of freely movable plant or machinery—but in intellectual property rights. Dealings in those rights are hardest hit by the increase in stamp duty.

There are several reasons why one might wish to acquire assets of a company rather than its shares. For example, part of the business—the intellectual property rights relating to a particular computer programme or drug discovery—might be for sale, rather than the whole of it. In some circumstances, stamp duty might be payable on licences of intellectual property rights.

I hope that my hon. Friend will reconsider that point, examining how transactions may be affected when the assets of a company are transferred, rather than the shares, which are subject to lower taxation rates. That concern was one of very few voiced by my constituents yesterday. It is unusual for a Budget to be so universally praised.

I welcome the extra £19 billion for education, and the further £560 million added by the Chancellor on Tuesday. Will Treasury Ministers consider, however, how to ensure that county councils pass the money on to schools? Cambridgeshire was given an extra £9.4 million last year for education, but the county council spent only £7.8 million, cheating schools of £1.6 million. This year, Cambridgeshire had an extra £10.7 million for education, but the council plans to spend only £9.4 million, cheating schools of a further £1.3 million.

If the intended increases over the past two years had been passed on fully, Cambridgeshire schools would have benefited by an additional £2.9 million. Many of their problems simply would not have occurred. The hon. Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts) has suggested that the money has been withheld because of increased bureaucracy, but that is absurd, and schools simply do not recognise that argument.

One way around the problem would be to tie money to specific objectives. The recent money for the reduction of infant class sizes could not be spent on anything else, and it was warmly welcomed. Cambridgeshire benefited by almost £1 million, and that will create 69 additional teachers' jobs. It will reduce the number of children taught in classes of more than 30 from almost 7,000 to just 227.

The Government are trying hard, but they are constantly thwarted by local Conservative politicians. I was slightly surprised to receive a letter from the leader of the Liberal Democrats on the county council. She is the chair of Mayfield primary school, one of the largest in the country, which has, sadly, decided to ask parents to contribute towards the cost of keeping a teacher in place. Schools should not be doing that. It would not be necessary if the county council were spending the whole of the money allocated by the Government for education.

[Mrs. Campbell]

Cambridgeshire has a low standard spending assessment, largely because of historical factors: when Baroness Blatch was running Cambridgeshire county council, she did her best to cut education to the bone.

I welcome individual learning accounts and the emphasis on computing courses. I know from experience how much information technology has increased the efficiency of my office. I pay tribute to my staff, Dick Robinson and Rosie Turner, who have improved my office's efficiency many times over by increasing their IT skills and experience, updating my web page and using e-mail for 30 per cent. of my correspondence. I wish all hon. Members success in training their staff.

3.11 pm

Mr. Michael Fallon (Sevenoaks): The Chancellor of the Exchequer gave a self-confident performance on Tuesday. I do not entirely share his confidence, and certainly not in respect of the economy. If he has enjoyed a benign six months since the pre-Budget report, it has not been down to his judgment. Japan and South Korea have been recovering, the American consumer remains remarkably buoyant and our economic cycle is clearly out of kilter with that of the rest of Europe. If he is going to enjoy a soft landing, it will not be due to his judgment, but to the framework that he inherited from my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke). It was he who took the key decisions on interest rates and tight public spending, and who started to foster the climate of low inflation which, I suspect, lies behind some of the benign economic indicators.

It is often said that Budgets that are cheered on the day disappoint six months later. I cannot recall one where the gloss has come off so quickly. The newspapers that cheered it yesterday are discovering the reality behind the hype: most taxpayers will be worse off, and they will be worse off at the end of this Parliament. It is the wrong time in our economic cycle for the Government to increase borrowing and taxes.

Let me begin with borrowing. Careful examination of the Red Book shows that the net cash requirement is going up from £2 billion to £4.5 billion. Net borrowing will be £3 billion in each of the next two years. It was only in the March 1998 Budget that the Chancellor chirped about the budget being in surplus. There was much talk of repayment of debt in the interests of our children. Now we are back to old Labour borrowing. The Government are not only borrowing more; they are taxing more. They are taxing marriage, taxing home ownership and taxing car driving. The Chancellor did not make much of the fact that he is increasing national insurance—wages tax—for those in self-employment.

Why are the Government having to borrow and tax more? Of course, they have to fund the stealthy redistribution round the edges, but there are two fundamental reasons. First, they have failed in their promise to tackle the increase in welfare spending. Secondly, they have failed to realise the receipts that they envisaged from privatisation.

The Red Book shows that social security spending will rise from £93.5 billion to £106.4 billion. The Government have failed to use their mandate and the majority that they command. They had one row, over lone parent benefits, which was a reform that we left for them. They persisted with that, and then the great welfare reform campaign fizzled out into chatter about anti-fraud measures. Even unemployment benefit continues to be paid without any sanction other than that the recipient should turn up for interview.

On asset sales, I warned the House last July that some heroic assumptions had been made. The former Chief Secretary, my right hon. Friend the Member for South Norfolk (Mr. MacGregor), also questioned the Red Book entries. The Government have pencilled them in again: £4 billion every year from privatisation. However, for the first time, the Red Book is silent about exactly where those privatisation receipts will come from. We know now that London Underground privatisation is being postponed. The air traffic control privatisation seems more complex than the Government first thought. The national asset register was a good idea. It has been compiled, but is now forgotten. In the Command Paper on public service agreements, the sections on assets are the weakest part of every departmental agreement. There are no sanctions. If Departments fail to yield asset sales, their budgets remain unaffected.

Some measures in the Budget were worth while. There are some things that some small businesses will welcome, but they are a long way down the track. Flicking through the Budget press releases shows that the full effect of some measures will not be felt until 2002 or 2003. Like the hon. Member for Cambridge (Mrs. Campbell), I attended a Budget seminar yesterday, at lunch-time in Sevenoaks. I found little enthusiasm for the 10p corporation tax for small businesses, research and development tax credits or the computers that companies would probably buy any way. Such measures are welcome but de minimis.

What matters to small business as much as taxation is red tape. In two years, the Government have introduced a wave of employment legislation, an increase in social costs and the national minimum wage. They all burn up management time and make it more difficult for the small businesses that the Government say they want to foster to employ more people. In this Budget, more taxes are being piled on. There are the environment taxes, the energy taxes, and the cold climate change levy—a weather tax for the first time. This is a tax-and-take Government. Already the press is waking up to the reality of an old Labour Budget. Borrowing and taxation are up, there is redistribution by stealth and there is over-regulation of businesses. It will not take six months for the public to see through the Government.

3.18 pm

Mr. Ian Pearson (Dudley, South): People and businesses across the borough of Dudley welcome this Budget. It is a Budget for the future, for success and for fairness. There is something in it for everyone. In the borough, more than 40,000 families will benefit from the increases in child benefit and child care tax credit. Around 50,000 pensioners will benefit from the £100 winter fuel allowance. Many of them will also benefit from the increase in the minimum pensioner income guarantee and the continuation of the married couples' allowance.

Patients and staff at Russells Hall hospital will welcome the money for the accident and emergency department because improvements are still badly needed.

Parents and teachers will welcome the £2,000 for school books for each school in the borough. I was particularly pleased that the over-50s who have been out of work for six months or more will get new hope and practical financial support when they look for employment. That measure will be warmly welcomed by them.

The whole community across Dudley borough will welcome the extra money to fight crime. People everywhere in Britain will welcome the cut in the basic rate of income tax to 22 per cent. and the cut in the starting rate to 10 per cent. I hope that, over a period, the Government will have the opportunity and resources to move to four rates of tax—0, 10, 20 and 40 per cent.

Businesses will welcome the cuts already announced in corporation tax, which will bring the rate down to 30 per cent. for large businesses and 20 per cent. for small and medium-sized companies, and the new 10p starting rate. I welcome the extension of 40 per cent. capital allowances, which is timed exactly right at this stage of the economic cycle. I welcome, too, the tax credits for research and development. They will have a significant impact and will help to build a more enterprising and dynamic economy.

I believe that it is sensible to align income tax and national insurance rates. That is something that businesses of all sizes will welcome. Businesses have also given a warm welcome to the formation of the small business service. We look forward to seeing the detail of how that will operate.

I do not know exactly how the British economy will perform in the next 12 months. I do not know anyone who does, but I believe strongly that the Government have the balance right in their overall fiscal and economic policy. I am certain that investment in skills to make the economy more enterprising, and investment in our infrastructure are vital to our economic success.

I believe that the Budget will go down as a landmark Budget. It embraces the role of government in supporting economic growth and driving productivity in a modern economy. I am also glad about some things that are not in the Budget. I am glad that there was not an aggregates tax. It would have been damaging to industry, and I hope that one will not be introduced in the future. Although I welcome the anti-avoidance provisions in the Budget, I am disappointed that there seems to be no great willingness to proceed with either a general anti-avoidance rule or a mini GAAR.

Inevitably, there are some areas on which we want to know more and need to see some of the detail. Pensioners will be disappointed that no announcement was made about the dividend tax credit, which is still an issue with non-taxpaying pensioners. I do not believe that it will go away. Similarly, there is some uncertainty about the fact that it seems as if pensioners will start to pay tax at a rate of 20 per cent. on their savings while all other individuals in the community will start at 10 per cent. That is something that we might want to consider when we examine the Finance Bill.

On manufacturing, it is important to welcome the introduction of the energy tax. I am glad that the Government have decided that it will be revenue-neutral overall. However, we have to be very careful to make sure that manufacturing industry is not hit. I do not want to see the introduction of a tax that will benefit supermarkets but harm our manufacturing sector. We need to think carefully about how it is introduced so that we do not penalise capital-intensive, relatively low-employing sectors such as the forging industry, and reward less capital-intensive sectors such as retail.

While manufacturing will welcome the announcements about share schemes and encouraging employees to buy shares in their companies, incentive schemes are much more difficult in unquoted companies, which form the vast bulk of manufacturing companies in my constituency. I warmly welcome proper incentive schemes from which small and medium-sized companies can benefit.

I have to raise the issue of road hauliers. If as a Government, we believe in modern growth theory, which says that skills and infrastructure are important, we must recognise that the road infrastructure is highly significant. There is no doubt that the road fuel duty escalator imposes an additional cost on business. That is obviously a significant problem for the road haulage industry, but it is also a problem for business as a whole. The escalator is increasingly making our industry less competitive than businesses outside the United Kingdom.

Mr. Grieve: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Pearson: If the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, I have only two minutes left. I think that over time, we need to do something about the road fuel escalator. Over the next three years, we shall raise about £8 billion as a result of the road fuel duty escalator if we do not change our policy, and we must consider the effects on our industry and what we can do to ameliorate them. When we look back in five or 10 years' time, we will ask whether we should not have put more money into researching clean fuel technology rather than penalising our road haulage industry. A balance needs to be struck, and there is more for the Government to do on that.

On science and technology policy, I must declare an interest. I am a visiting fellow at Warwick university, and I am writing an article on universities and innovation. I warmly welcome the boost to the science and engineering budgets in the past two years, the extra £100 million that has been invested in the infrastructure fund and the £15 million extra for the university challenge fund, but we are only scratching the surface. Far more needs to be done, and far more radical action needs to be taken. We are spending £6.1 billion as a Government on research and development, of which less than 2.5 per cent. is going to experimental development. We have a development gap. If we are to get better at turning inventions into innovations and commercially exploiting them, we must reconsider the main funding streams in the United Kingdom. When less than 10 per cent. of the research councils' budget is spent on experimental development, we need to do better.

This is a forward-looking Budget which lays the foundations for future prosperity. I have every confidence that it will boost productivity—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I call Mr. Nick St. Aubyn.

3.28 pm

Mr. Nick St. Aubyn (Guildford): The hon. Member for Dudley, South (Mr. Pearson) told us that this was a landmark Budget. It was so much so that some of us on the Conservative Benches observed the Prime Minister

[Mr. Nick St. Aubyn]

nodding off in the middle of it. We heard this afternoon how the Secretary of State's dog is sick of the whole thing. Many will be sick as a dog when they hear the details of the Budget and how it affects them. There should be a warning not to be a saver under a Labour Government, a warning not to live in the countryside and a warning not to work in manufacturing industry. The savings ratio has fallen by a third. Petrol tax has gone up to £8.50 for every £10 spent on fuel, which penalises those who live in the countryside. Manufacturing is in recession and jobs are being shed.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Mr. Charles Clarke): I wonder whether the hon. Gentleman is trying to become the Joe Biden of the Conservative party by stealing other people's speeches.

Mr. St. Aubyn: I am not sure whether that was an attempt at flattery but I will ignore it, given the prospects of that former member of the Opposition.

We must remind ourselves that when the Government talk about a strategy for transport, they are really talking about raising taxes on running a car or a lorry until the brakes squeak. They are really talking about making a smash-and-grab raid on the majority of the British people. So much for the party that claims to rule for the many, not the few.

If the Government were serious about their transport strategy, we should today have heard the Secretary of State for Education and Employment tell us how he will encourage more people to walk their children to school or to give their children a bicycle to go to school. Last summer, I went with the Select Committee on Education and Employment to Switzerland. One of the striking features of Switzerland is how many—almost all—children bicycle to and from school. At peak travel times, roads in Switzerland are relatively free of cars, unlike in Britain where roads are congested. Reducing traffic congestion would be a strategy worth pursuing.

We should be encouraging schools to have their own budget for special educational needs. At least in my own constituency, too much of the schools' budget is spent on transport. However, enabling schools to manage their own budgets would go against the grain of a Government who like to dictate and run everything from the centre, with all the inefficiencies and waste that that involves. We have a Government who want to control from the centre and take more out of our pockets so that they—not the individual—may decide how to spend it. Central control is at the heart of the Government's agenda and at the heart of this week's Budget.

Let us leave the magic world of the conjuring Chancellor and return to the real world—in which jobs are on the line and businesses are at risk, and in which families have budgets of their own to prepare, children of their own to raise and hopes of their own to fulfil. When those families examine the Budget, they will be asking what kind of Government take away the married couples allowance and mortgage relief this year, but provide them with no help in the form of the children's tax credit until a year later. They will be asking what type of Government think that they should help business by helping something called the serial entrepreneur.

The Government think that the modern economy is composed of high-rolling, risk-taking business enterprises, that all should go to those who brave all, and that those who risk all win all. That is not the economy that the Government inherited.

The Government inherited a Conservative capitalism that believes in saving, in investment and, above all, in commitment. There was nothing in the Budget for the vast majority of medium-sized firms in middle England which underpin our economy and form its bedrock—the many thousands of firms employing millions of people who work hard and save hard simply to secure a decent living, and who are risk averse, not risk takers. There was nothing for those businesses or employees in the Budget. But there was something for them in Conservative Budgets.

The previous Government inherited an economy that had far too few such businesses—but we built them up. From 1986 to 1997, the number of firms with an annual turnover between £250,000 and £5 million rose by 70 per cent., and the number of firms turning over between £5 million and £10 million rose by 80 per cent. The number of businesses turning over less than £250,000 barely increased. Yet the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry announced yesterday that the Government will target the 10p tax relief at the bottom end of firms—at the 250,000 firms which will undoubtedly appreciate the benefit but which are not the firms that will deliver the growth, jobs and stability that our economy needs.

What have the Government done to the bedrock of our economy? They have, for one thing, imposed stamp duty—which is a tax not only on expensive housing but on the typical premises of the typical British business. Recent research has shown that, for every 1 per cent. rise in stamp duty, there has been about a 3 per cent. fall in the value of that property.

How do those businesses grow and how do they raise money? They do not seek out serial entrepreneurs: they seek their bank manager. When their bank manager lends them money, he asks, "What is the value of your business?" The value of their business is tied up in their property. Therefore every time the Government hit the value of a property, they hit the business occupying it, the business's growth and the jobs that might have been created. I tell the Financial Secretary to the Treasury—who was recently the Minister with responsibility for small business—that the Government are doing that damage to small business.

Mr. Phil Willis (Harrogate and Knaresborough): Is the hon. Gentleman essentially offering an abject apology from the Tory party to the House—and to all the people, businesses and householders of Great Britain—for what happened on Black Wednesday in 1992?

Mr. St. Aubyn: I should declare an interest: I have a small business. I also had a small business that went bust after black Wednesday. I know well the suffering of a modern economy. However, there is also gain. Under the previous Government, some of us suffered, but we fought back and won back. Ultimately, we were all winners. The Government are stopping the possibility of such an outcome. They are taking away, with higher taxes and more regulation, the ability to create wealth.

We now have a minimum wage. Someone earning just above the minimum wage will benefit from the Government's Budget by just 1p an hour. Introducing the

minimum wage creates a problem of wage differentials. This Budget was the one in which the Government should have alleviated the problem by targeting any tax breaks on those earning just over the minimum wage and up to £1 an hour above it. But the Government completely lost the point and the plot, just as they will lose the next general election.

3.36 pm

Helen Jones (Warrington, North): I should like to confine my remarks to the Budget's provisions on education. Earlier in the debate, when I heard the speech of hon. Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts)—who is no longer in the Chamber—I realised that the Tories have still not grasped the realities of education in the United Kingdom. I had hoped that we might have a serious debate on the way forward for our schools. Today, however, Conservative Members are again only indulging in political opportunism. For 18 years, they were guilty of the culpable neglect of our children's education; now, they want to convince us that they have had a Damascus road conversion.

Apparently struck by a blinding light, Conservative Members have become the enemies of centralisation and bureaucracy and want to tell us that they are the teacher's friend. I am sure that the entire teaching profession will be touched by that concern, particularly when they remember that, for 18 years, those same hon. Ladies and Gentlemen supported a Government who increased bureaucracy and centralisation in schools as never before.

We should remember that their Government introduced an unworkable national curriculum, with over 1,000 individual learning targets. Their Government changed the secondary science curriculum three times, so that school books had to be thrown away. They were the Government who left teachers and children to work in crumbling schools, with a repairs backlog of £4 billion. The provisions in the Budget and the way in which we are structuring spending in our schools are necessary to tackle the failures of the previous Government.

Last week, the Opposition had the brass neck to initiate a debate entitled "burdens on schools". The only burden that the previous Government did not impose on schools was the burden of success. When they left office, almost half our 11-year-olds did not reach the expected standards in English and maths, and two thirds of 16-year-olds could not even achieve a grade C at GCSE in those subjects. Even worse, the United Kingdom was second from the bottom in the international league survey of mathematical achievement.

We believe that tackling that failure in education is not only an economic necessity but a moral imperative. A Government who leave their people ignorant stunt their people's lives. A Government who deny people the tools to understand, control and master their world deny them power. The Victorians said that knowledge is power, and they were absolutely right. By insisting that all the efforts in our schools be devoted to raising standards, we are in a very real sense giving power back. The Government are giving power back to all our children because we will no longer tolerate a system in which a child's chances of getting a decent education depend purely on luck.

We believe that all children deserve the best. We are investing an extra £19 billion in education over the next three years to demonstrate a commitment that begins the moment a child enters the system. Our commitment begins with a £540 million sure start programme, which is designed to tackle disadvantage at the roots. All teachers know that some children come to school already disadvantaged, and that disadvantage must be eradicated.

We have already spent £62 million reducing class sizes at key stage 1. The Government's commitment extends to lifelong learning and to the £470 million that we are spending to improve access to new technology and establish 1,000 IT centres. The truth is that, by failing to make that investment, the previous Government profoundly disadvantaged areas such as the one that I represent. Schools in my area could not raise money voluntarily for the computers they needed and people did not have computers at home. As a result, people were cut off from the skills that they needed and from a vast pool of knowledge. They were denied the skills that would make them more marketable in the future. People who were disadvantaged as children would have been disadvantaged as adults if it were not for this Government's actions.

That is why I welcome the £2,000—which is additional to the £2,000 that schools have already received—that the Government are giving to every school in the country to buy books. I know that Opposition Members will say that that funding is centrally directed and is a burden on schools. I assure them, as a former English teacher, that I would rather have carried that burden than the burden of not having enough books, of children having to share books or of books falling apart. We cannot expect to expand people's minds, hearts or spirits when they are working in crumbling buildings without adequate equipment—as they were under the previous Government.

To accuse this Government of over-centralisation is to ignore what is happening on the ground. I have seen the books going into schools and I have seen the literacy hour working—not as a straitjacket, but as a tool for teaching and learning. I have talked to the children who benefit from it and the teachers who use it, and they enjoy it. I do not believe that any Government should apologise for making it a priority that our children leave school literate, numerate and conversant with new technology. That is a basic duty of government. It is Conservative Members who should apologise because they neglected that duty for 18 years and sold our children short.

The real difference between Labour and the Conservatives is that we do not just talk about raising standards: we commit the resources to make that a reality. I can already see the results of that strategy on the ground in my constituency. My local education authority has received more than £1 million to cut class sizes. Schools are to receive eight extra teachers and 10 additional classrooms. Eleven schools in my area have received money for energy efficiency schemes. Two schools used the money to remove outside toilets, and it is a disgrace that those conditions had been allowed to persist for so long.

Last week, the Under-Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, South (Mr. Clarke) and I visited a school in my constituency where we saw a room full of computers, installed as part of the national grid for learning. I had seen the same thing in another school the previous week. When one considers the three summer literacy schemes in my constituency and the new money

[Helen Jones]

that has been devoted to after-school activities, one begins to get a sense of the real enthusiasm and enjoyment that the Government's policy is re-introducing to schools.

Mr. St. Aubyn *rose—*

Helen Jones: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, but I cannot give way as time is limited.

Our teachers and our children are valued. In this and in previous Budgets, we have allocated the money to underpin the high standards that we require. We will not write off the majority of our children as previous Governments did.

We recognise that there is a long road ahead. I would like to see many more resources allocated to researching the effectiveness of different teaching methods. We could, for instance, examine the relative effectiveness of generalists and specialists in primary school. I would like to see proper research into how new technology will change teaching styles and approaches—because it certainly will. I hope that my right hon. and hon. Friends will consider those issues in the future.

We must also continue our policy of attracting the most highly qualified graduates to teaching so that it is the first career choice of our best students. We are beginning that process with the Green Paper, which will reward good classroom teaching—something that teachers continually called for when I was in the profession. I hope that that process will continue.

Most important, this Budget and our previously announced spending plans have changed the focus on education so that it is seen not as a drain on resources but as a basic investment in the future. Education is a source of experience and emancipation for people. It is the source of their future well-being, and we must view the money that we allocate to education in that light. I hope that we shall continue to change our focus on education in the future; and I commend the Budget resolutions to the House.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Before I call the next hon. Member, it may be helpful if I remind the House that, under our current arrangements, the clock is stopped if an intervention is taken. Hon. Members are thus not prejudiced and do not lose any speaking time if they take an intervention.

3.47 pm

Mr. Phil Willis (Harrogate and Knaresborough): The hon. Member for Cambridge (Mrs. Campbell), who is no longer in her place, referred to a school in her constituency that had agreed, with the support of the Liberal Democrats, to pay for an additional teacher. I think it is fair to put it on record that that agreement—which many of us regret—was supported by all parties, including the Labour party in Cambridge.

In my 10 minutes, I do not intend to waste the time of the House by rehearsing the comments made by other hon. Members, either for or against the Budget. I come from a practical education background, and I wish to explore how the Budget will affect people on the ground. I have spent a fair amount of time in the past two days consulting the local education authority in North Yorkshire and schools in my constituency to discover what the Budget means to them. The reality is that, from the director of education downwards and upwards, the Budget will have little, if any, effect on them.

North Yorkshire has passported all £12.9 million into schools, as it did last year. It has seen a provisional increase in its tax rate of 9.6 per cent., which is a significant figure, on top of 14 per cent. last year. Despite that, every school in my constituency and throughout the LEA area will lose at least 0.75 per cent. of its budget. The Budget proposals may sound marvellous in the House and in some of the press releases, but they will make absolutely no difference to the vast majority of schools in North Yorkshire. I challenge Ministers to contradict that statement.

As a result of the Budget, libraries, which are part of our education service in North Yorkshire—I know that that is not the case elsewhere—will face real cuts. It is no use saying that the odd library will have computers when most libraries are able to buy fewer and fewer books—another major resource that some people quite like—to lend. More important, libraries are having to cut staff—the very people who will be needed to teach people to use the computers to access the internet and the learning age initiative.

I want to raise the major issue of a group of people who were not mentioned in the Budget, or by the Secretary of State or other hon. Members. They are the army of people who support our local authority and school services. They include special needs assistants, those who work in the music service and library and office staff. The single status agreement, which was made in 1997 under this Government, will cost the local authority in North Yorkshire £2.27 million. The net result is that the Tory administration in North Yorkshire has decided that it cannot afford that cost and it will therefore be paid by the very poorest people in our system—the care assistants in local authority homes and the teaching assistants in our schools, who will lose 24 per cent. of their pay as a result of the agreement.

I ask the Financial Secretary, when she winds up the debate, to address that issue. How can a national agreement such as the single status agreement, which impacts on every local authority in Britain, be ignored in the Budget and the departmental totals when some of the most lowly paid staff in the country are having to pay for the agreement with their jobs?

Another issue that has not been mentioned today is the further education sector. Baroness Kennedy called it the Cinderella service, and there was to be a revolution in FE. It is the engine room of lifelong learning, but did the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, in his statement, or the Chancellor, in his Budget, announce a single extra penny for information and computer technology in FE? Is there not to be a learning revolution in our colleges? There is no money for the infrastructure, or to deal with the chronic debt that so many of our colleges have.

Mr. St. Aubyn: Will the hon. Gentleman agree that, compared with the increase in the numbers of people going through further education that was achieved in the previous Parliament, this Government's claims and ambitions are [illegible]

Mr. Willis: I am coming to your lot in a minute.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is not coming to my lot in any way, shape or form.

Mr. Willis: I apologise, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for that unfortunate slip. I shall answer the hon. Gentleman's question in due course.

The hon. Gentleman has hinted at one of the issues for FE—the growth in the number of students. The Government are making available an extra £1.1 billion for FE and HE and most of that will be used to cope with the 700,000 extra students whom FE colleges are asked to deal with during this Parliament. The Budget and the Education Secretary's statement completely ignore the plight of FE staff and lecturers. Since incorporation, they have been utterly demoralised.

There were 60,000 full-time FE lecturers in 1993, and 21,500 have either been made redundant or taken early voluntary retirement packages. We now have an army of agency staff working in our colleges. They do not have the same commitment to those colleges and to delivering their programme as do the full-time staff. Yet there is nothing in the statement to deal with the huge problem of demoralisation.

The hon. Member for Guildford (Mr. St. Aubyn) referred to the success of the previous Government. They were successful in productivity terms because they got rid of a third of the staff and increased the number of students by a third, but they also wrecked the FE system.

Mr. St. Aubyn: The hon. Gentleman will recall that the report of the Select Committee on Education and Employment, of which the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) is a member, agreed with recent findings that there was no significant change in the quality of teaching as a result of those productivity gains. There was a real saving, and a real increase in the numbers being taught.

Mr. Willis: I have to disagree with the hon. Gentleman and point him to the Further Education Funding Council inspections. The council's latest report makes it absolutely clear that the poorest-quality teaching in our colleges is by part-time staff. Why is that? The hon. Gentleman knows the answer. So highly valued were FE staff under the previous Government's regime that one in five full-time permanent FE staff now have no teaching qualifications, and 60 per cent. of the part-time agency staff—the bogus self-employed staff, as the Secretary of State once called them—have no qualifications at all. That is an absolute disgrace. The Secretary of State today had no answers, no proposals and no funding to deal with the under-qualification of our FE staff or to rebuild their morale by investing in them.

Finally, Liberal Democrat Members make a plea that the pay and career structure in the FE sector should not continue to be ignored. If FE is to be the engine room for lifelong learning, we must recognise that people have to want to enter FE, just as they want to go into teaching, and they should feel that they have a career that is worthy, recognised and valued.

3.57 pm

Dr. George Turner (North-West Norfolk): There is much to welcome in the detail of the Budget, but I am made, and the earlier commitments being accentuated and continued, to education. We have heard much this afternoon to which I say, "Hear, hear" but which I will not repeat. In particular, my hon. Friend the Member for Warrington, North (Helen Jones) said much with which I entirely agree.

I was delighted to hear about the better deal that the Budget delivers for the more than 20,000 pensioners in my constituency, for children and for business. I entirely endorse the modernisation theme and the Government's attempt to encourage and coerce people, throughout society, into making better use of new technology.

At Budget time, we look more broadly at the direction that the Government are taking. Although I understand that the role of the Opposition is to whinge and to find details to complain about, we must occasionally stand back from the detail of the Budget.

It was no accident that the Chancellor referred to measures that are being introduced over a period of at least three years. The right hon. Member for South Norfolk (Mr. MacGregor) made much of the fact that the Chancellor was in his statement discussing three years of Budget changes. The Chancellor should be congratulated on that, rather than condemned for it. Having spent many years in local government, I know that the greatest problems were caused by lack of certainty and the fact that only from year to year did one know what it would be possible to achieve within the budget.

Mr. Grieve: I certainly share the hon. Gentleman's view that projecting budgetary proposals over three years may have a great deal to commend it. Is it not therefore incumbent on the Chancellor clearly to spell out in his statement and accompanying documentation the year-by-year impact on total tax over the same period?

Dr. Turner: As one who spends no more than the average amount of time on these issues, I must say that I am much less confused than some Opposition Members tell us that they are. I heard the confirmation of previous announcements. I knew that it was confirmation because I had heard the earlier announcements. I heard the Chancellor refer to confirmation of some of the detail, and have seen it in the documentation.

The Chancellor and the Government are displaying a welcome element of vision. They are saying, "We intend to introduce reform". They are acknowledging that they cannot reform in one Budget but that telling people where they will be in a year or two's time is helpful, and are saying, "We do not want to be pulling rabbits out of the hat on Budget day." That is a helpful development in the running of our nation's finances.

The reforms that we are introducing are necessary. We inherited an unacceptable situation. When Opposition Members refer to some golden inheritance, they entirely ignore the reality of the problems that the nation faced when this Government were elected. It was necessary to change the direction of the ship of state, and when one is changing direction, one faces problems and difficulties. The Government have none the less been right to do as they have. It would not have been right to continue with a business taxation system that was not in the best interests of the future of business—despite the difficulties that that change caused, particularly in the pensions

[Dr. Turner]

which they have withstood the flak over such changes. It was essential in the long-term interests of business that we reformed the taxation system under which it operated.

As a constituency Member of Parliament, I should like to raise with the Government two points on more detailed issues. I know that the Chancellor has recognised that the impact on the rural environment, from which most of my constituents come, of changes in the fuel escalator is dramatically different from that on more urban environments. That has been accepted by the Government, and was acknowledged in last year's Budget by the introduction of special measures to encourage better provision of rural transport, which was very welcome.

As I have told the House before, however, a problem remains for many of my constituents, who count the number of buses by the week rather than by the hour. One cannot encourage better use of public transport that does not exist. I therefore welcome the extra money in the Budget, to add to last year's, to address those issues, but suggest to my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Front Bench that there is a limit to the public money that can be used to improve public transport without being wasteful. The Government must acknowledge that, in their effort to reduce car emissions, more stick than carrot is being applied in rural areas.

I ask the Government to consider a related issue which ought to be addressed. My constituents find that 6p or 7p a litre is being imposed on prices at rural petrol stations, over and above the prices paid more routinely in London, for example. Given yesterday's announcement by the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry on the Government's commitment to looking at competition, we ought to be asking at least national chains, such as supermarkets, how they can justify adding a rural tax to petrol. I hope that the Government will consider at least taking that issue on board. Given that high petrol prices have much to do with national policy and protection of the environment, will the Government consider obtaining voluntary agreements from supermarkets and others on fairer prices for rural service users?

Mr. Grieve: Might not the reason for higher rural prices be the cost of transporting petrol to such petrol stations?

Dr. Turner: That may be the answer, although the research that I have seen suggests that it is not. I suspect that it often costs less, depending on where the fuel is imported from. Fuel can be imported in King's Lynn in my constituency. We must look at prices of other products. I do not find the same variation in the prices of bread, sugar and other commodities in Tesco. The Government could look into that. As we perhaps head towards further increases in the price of petrol, the Government ought to consider whether the stick—however necessary that might be to protect the environment—should be accompanied by a carrot, by other initiatives to help those who live in my constituency and those like it.

I know that, like me, the Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment, my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, South (Mr. Clarke) takes a personal interest [illegible] use of information technology. My concern is the sheer scale of the problem—although perhaps I should say "challenge" rather than "problem". I know that my hon. Friend is a "can do" member of the Government, and will see that we must address the issue as a challenge—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

4.8 pm

Mr. John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings): The Budget has all the characteristics of cheap fiction: it contains assault, deception and betrayal.

There is no question but that the assault is on rural Britain. The increase in petrol duty and the 11.6 per cent. increase in diesel prices will be a blow to domestic car users and the haulage industry, which is a substantial employer in my constituency.

The deception is to suggest that there is substantial extra spending in the Budget on public services. Very little extra spending on public services is detailed in the Red Book: there is some recycling of money, and there are some reannouncements, but little extra money, and I will come to that later.

The betrayal is of married people and home owners. I make no bones about the fact that I am a substantial loser as a result of this Budget. Because my wife and I are without children, have a mortgage and both have a car, we will probably be about £600 a year down. For myself, I do not mind a great deal, but that burden will also apply to a great number of my constituents.

I feel particularly for elderly and disabled essential car users in my constituency. People in rural Britain must often travel many miles to social services, schools and shops. It is cold comfort for elderly or disabled car users to be told that they should be pleased because other people will get money at some time in the future because they have children, or that people who are earning substantial wages will get the benefit of some future cut in taxation. There has been a substantial betrayal of disabled and elderly car users.

Business has been mentioned several times in the debate by Labour Members with—I choose my words carefully and generously—varying degrees of business experience. When the Chancellor speaks of businesses with a declared profit of less than £50,000 taking real risks, he is speaking about the very narrow band to which he is giving additional support. As my hon. Friend the Member for Guildford (Mr. St. Aubyn) said, many businesses are typically risk averse, not risk takers.

When the Government talk about business, they sound like a child with a new toy. They are unaware of businesses' virtues or vices. Those of us who have been in business regard the Budget, in the context of all the other burdens that have been imposed on business since the Labour party came into office, with a great deal more scepticism.

I shall address my main remarks, however, to the speech of the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, which in many ways was a good speech. He made some valid points. It is sad that we never hear such generosity from those on the Labour Back Benches. They will never acknowledge that the 18 years of Tory rule delivered some benefits. When will they grow up and acknowledge that all Governments do some good things and some bad things, that all Governments have good

I am the first to acknowledge that the Secretary of State for Education and Employment said some sensible things in his speech. He was less sensible when he was parroting Blairite soundbites. The Secretary of State never sounds good when he tries to imitate the Prime Minister, but then the Prime Minister does not sound terribly good when he tries to imitate himself. When the Secretary of State speaks his own mind and uses his own words, he is far more impressive. I draw attention to three things that he mentioned in respect of information technology and schools.

I ought to declare an interest, as I am still a non-executive director of an IT company, so by design my comments will be very general. The first point is the confusion between information and knowledge. There is a worry that, because people have finally acknowledged that the ways in which we gain, exchange and use information are expanding so rapidly, they assume that information is automatically translated into greater understanding and wisdom. However, information and wisdom are not the same thing. It may be possible to be wiser with fewer facts, and less wise with more facts.

As G. K. Chesterton suggested through one of his characters, Basil Grant,

> "Are you still so sunk in superstitions, so clinging to dim and prehistoric altars, that you believe in facts? Do you not trust an immediate impression? . . . this world may be founded on facts, its business is run on . . . impressions and atmospheres",

as well as understanding and experience, of course. We must not run away with the idea that simply providing children and adults with more information will necessarily make them wiser, happier or more employable.

The second point is that the role of the teacher is changing radically. Teachers will need to be better prepared to deal with the new challenges facing them, and the Government have acknowledged that in some of the work that they have done since the election. It is not enough to provide technology and train teachers; the Government must go one step further and work with teachers to apply that to the curriculum and blend it with existing good practice. Information technology is not just a bolt-on to what we do already; it is intrinsic to the teaching and learning process.

That brings me to my third point. The relationship between the teacher and the taught is changing. It is unfortunate that the debate on class sizes has taken place outside that context. By focusing on class sizes, the Government have reinforced the out-of-date notion of teaching as essentially didactic—a traditional pedagogy, rather than self-paced learning or any of the developments about which the Secretary of State spoke. The Government will have to update their rather primitive views of class sizes to make them consistent with what they are saying about the changing world of information, understanding, teaching and the relationship between the teacher and the taught.

All that raises the question of where people will be taught. I refer hon. Members to the McKinsey report on IT and education, produced last year, which is arguably the definitive study of IT in schools. It raised exactly those points in its conclusions. Specifically, it identified the need to blend an educational philosophy—a view of teaching—with the use of information systems. Too often in schools and colleges, the blend is not successful.

The money allocated in the Budget is insufficient to deal with the current challenges in education. There is a [illegible] Member for Bristol, West (Valerie Davey) waxed lyrical about books. What she said was rather sweet, but, if the £2,000 were translated into computers, it would mean one computer per school. One extra computer per school would be virtually meaningless. The extra money is valuable, but it is not the be-all and end-all. When there is a crisis in the number of teachers, when schools are unable to employ experienced head teachers and department heads because of a lack of funds, it is an insult to tell them that, instead, they will be able to buy some new poetry books.

That is even more of an insult in the context of the widespread closure of public libraries. I am sure that the hon. Member for Bristol, West will share my concern, although I have not heard her express it in the Chamber. The Government should be thoroughly ashamed of those closures, which are taking place mainly, but not exclusively, in Labour local authorities. Unlike the hon. Member for Cambridge (Mrs. Campbell), I do not blame the local authorities for that. I know that they have been obliged to channel money away from those essential services, because of Labour cuts in the funding of local government.

This Government are probably more hostile to local government than any other Government in recent memory. The settlements that rural local authorities have enjoyed over the past two years—*[Interruption.]* Labour Members laugh. Perhaps they could tell me why Labour local authorities are closing libraries, why they do not consider libraries an important priority, and how they marry that with their enthusiasm for books and literacy, and the Prime Minister's much-vaunted visits to schools? Perhaps they have not checked the record, but I have read every speech that the Prime Minister made when he was a Back Bencher, and I do not think that he mentioned education even once.

4.18 pm

Mr. Barry Gardiner (Brent, North): It is an honour to be called to speak in the Budget debate. I have listened carefully to the speeches in the Chamber over the past three days. The contributions that I have not heard, I have read in *Hansard*. Many of the speeches show great knowledge and economic understanding. Many have been sharp and politically incisive. Occasionally, a speech has been both.

I have no doubt that my speech will be neither. My adversaries will say that I am no great economist, and my friends, I hope, may say that, by nature at least, I am no politician. I hope that the House will understand if my remarks depart somewhat from the consensus of the debate.

The consensus seems to be that the question that arises from the Budget concerns the level of taxation. Has it risen or has it declined? What was promised and what was delivered? The Leader of the Opposition—for the sake of clarity, let me say that I am referring to the right hon. Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Hague), not the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown)—stated that it was no good the Chancellor claiming that taxes were not rising. He said that, the previous week, the Prime Minister had finally let the cat out of the bag. He went on to misquote the Prime Minister selectively, saying that that was a betrayal from a man who had said at the general election that there would be no tax increases at all.

[Mr. Barry Gardiner]

The hon. Member for Mid-Bedfordshire (Mr. Sayeed), who may well be a better economist than the Leader of the Opposition, but is only half the politician, made the cardinal mistake of quoting the Prime Minister correctly, saying that Labour had

"No plans to increase tax at all."—[*Official Report*, 9 March 1999; Vol. 327, c. 251.]

The shadow Trade and Industry spokes-Martian returned to the Opposition's theme yesterday. He said:

"we know their true priority—it is tax, tax, tax."—[*Official Report*, 10 March 1999; Vol. 327, c. 391.]

Are the British people really concerned about whether the fiscal burden is rising or falling and, if so, whether in cash terms, in real terms or as a proportion of gross domestic product? I make no claim to be a great economist, but even I understand that, when the Office for National Statistics tells me that the tax and prices index has risen by 4.9 per cent.—a good deal more than inflation—the next figure that I need to look at is in the average earnings index for the same period. When that shows a rise of 8.2 per cent., my poor politician's brain tells me that the people of Britain will not be following Mr. Hague and Mr. Maude to the barricades.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman has been a Member of the House long enough to know how he should address other Members of the House.

Mr. Gardiner: I thank you for that correction, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Economics is the scientific study of the allocation of scarce resources, but Budgets are not simply about allocation; they are about ensuring that that allocation achieves specific policy objectives. In other words, people do not mind paying money to the Government as long as they think that it is spent wisely on projects of which they approve. When we spend money in a shop, we want to feel that we have obtained good value for it. When the British people spend money on taxes, they want to feel that they are getting good value for their money as well.

Mr. Grieve: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Gardiner: No, I will not.

If the Leader of the Opposition is proved right and there has been a betrayal of the people of this country, that betrayal can have happened only if the Government have failed to deliver the new politics that the people of the country elected them to deliver. That new politics has been characterised by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister as the third way. If we are truly to examine the merits of the Budget, we should do so against the values and objectives of the third way.

What are those values and objectives and what does the Budget do that relates to them? The values are human dignity, opportunity, responsibility and community. Human dignity is the equal worth of all our citizens, irrespective of their background, their religion, the colour of their skin, their age or their disability.

We must assess the Budget on what it has done for pensioners. It has provided a £3 billion package to give people dignity in old age and the £100 winter allowance, which increases the previous payment fivefold; the minimum income guarantee of £78 a week, and £121 a week for couples; and the linking of that guarantee to earnings, which makes average pensioner households £240 a year better off.

Another of those values is opportunity, which means the ability to shape one's own life free from either the overbearing interference of the state or the stifling bonds of poverty and inequality. Here we must assess the Budget on two distinct fronts. For children and the poorest in our society, the Budget has brought real relief. It has eliminated the poverty traps, which produced the obscenity of people losing money when they took up a job, through marginal rates of more than 100 per cent. The new national insurance contributions structure will raise the starting threshold from £64 to £87 a week and 900,000 people on low pay will be relieved of NIC payments altogether.

Child benefit rises mean just that—children will benefit. That measure, taken with the new children's tax credit and the working families tax credit, means that families will receive the financial help that they need at the time they need it—when they have to meet the expense of bringing up children. As a result of the Budget, no family with children will pay any income tax until it is earning more than £235 a week.

I said that the Budget should be judged on two fronts against the value of opportunity. Opportunity is not only freedom from poverty; it is freedom for people to shape their lives without excessive interference from the state. I admit that my party's record in that area is less than perfect. Before being elected to the House, I ran an international business for 10 years, and I will judge the Budget by its encouragement for small and medium-sized enterprises. The 10p rate of corporation tax for small companies is a real boost and, combined with the 20 and 30 per cent. rates for small and larger corporations, amounts to the best fiscal climate for business anywhere in the industrialised world.

However, most business decisions are not governed solely by the fiscal system. They are front-loaded, not end-conditioned. That is why the incentives for research and development through tax credits and the £100 million to upgrade our university laboratories are part of the Budget's delivery of opportunity to business. The Government could do more at the front end. Although I welcome the extension of 40 per cent. write-offs in the coming year, I must add that making a real difference to business investment will depend, in my view, on the Treasury considering capital allowances of up to 100 per cent.

Finally, in this respect, I cannot help but record my disappointment that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor did not adopt a tonnage-based tax for British shipping. In Holland, such measures have boosted employment in the industry by 23 per cent. and boosted GDP by 19 per cent. Such measures would provide a wonderful boost for United Kingdom jobs and prosperity, particularly in the north-east and in other traditional shipping areas, and would maintain the pre-eminence of maritime London. I look forward to Lord Alexander's report and trust that it will give the Chancellor the necessary background to introduce a tonnage tax next year.

Responsibility is our third value of the third way. It means recognition that the benefits that society brings come at a price. That price is our obligation to care for

ourselves if we can, and to care for others where we can. Nowhere is that better illustrated in the Budget than in the measures to reward work. The 10p rate of tax and the new 22p basic rate do so proportionately more for the low-paid. Our new deal has made it clear to the young unemployed that there is a responsibility on them to get work. That expectation will be backed up by practical help and advice through the gateway.

I am delighted that the Budget is extending provision for the over-50s. Those people have tremendous skills and experience to offer, and the £60 a week employment credit will help them to assume control over their own lives once again. The working families tax credit, guaranteeing a minimum income of £200 a week, is another encouragement to people to take responsibility for their lives and reap the financial benefits.

Responsibility, though, works in two directions, and society must also behave responsibly towards the future. There has been no greater cant in this Chamber over the past few days than the Opposition's synthetic anger about the fuel escalator, which is required to meet our Kyoto emissions targets. Responsibility is about building a safe environment for the future and for our children and investing in our children through books and computers to give them the skills and the wisdom to use that environment wisely when they assume responsibility for it. The £295 million for capital programmes to replace crumbling portakabins, classrooms and outside toilets, the extra £100 million for information technology in schools and the extra £2,000 to every school for books are the best expression of that responsibility.

Mr. Hayes: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Gardiner: No, I will not.

The final value by which we should judge the Budget is that of community. How does the Budget strengthen our sense that we depend, quite properly, on one another and that we are not individuals pitted against one another in the colosseum of the economic market. We are co-contributors to building a society in whose prosperity we all share.

The Institute for Fiscal Studies response to the Budget shows that every decile of the population gains from the Budget, but, critically, the richest decile benefits least and the poorest deciles benefit most. That means that the Budget has begun to reverse the widening gap between the rich and poor. The Rowntree Foundation report on inequality showed that that gap was growing faster in this country than in any other country during the 18 years of Conservative rule. The £430 million extra put into our health service accident and emergency departments, the extra £170 million to combat crime and the doubling of child support since May 1997 are all part of—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman may not quite have won his race against time.

4.29 pm

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Surrey Heath): I must tell the hon. Member for Brent, North (Mr. Gardiner) that there is nothing synthetic about the anger felt by Conservative Members on behalf of their constituents. My constituents are well aware of the Government's propaganda, although some hon. Members may not have realised that the Government have been found out, as recently as this lunchtime. I am not used to hearing the BBC attacking the Government for their duplicity, but as I listened to "The World at One" today as I returned to the House to take part in the debate, I realised that the BBC had done this country a signal service.

The BBC had been investigating what was being provided as a commentary on the Budget; apparently, it has been written by civil servants. That commentary was described as deliberately misleading. The hon. Member for Bolton, West (Ms Kelly) had been put up by the Government to try to defend the indefensible on "The World at One" today. She is Member for whom I have great respect; she is well known in the House for having come from a serious position in financial matters with, I think, the Bank of England. Nevertheless, she found it difficult to deny the suggestion by the BBC journalist that misleading information had been provided by the Government on the internet. It was apparent from this lengthy interview that the BBC recognised the position. Not only was all the bad news being edited out; not only were all the figures on the Government's website misleading; there was a whole page of Labour party political propaganda which had no relevance to the Budget.

I may be the first to break the news of that particular discovery, but I have no doubt that considerable concern will be expressed during the remainder of our debate on the Budget—and, perhaps, in points of order next week—about the scandalous misuse of taxpayers' money that has been involved in the Government's presentation of misleading propaganda. Even worse, the Government got civil servants to write the propaganda for them, pretending that it was in some way a factual analysis of the Budget.

As several of my hon. Friends have pointed out, this Budget is, in fact, nothing better than a scandalous conjuring trick. Misinformation has been deliberately given. As recently as yesterday, at Question Time, the Prime Minister deliberately failed to respond to my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition, who repeatedly pointed out that, over the three Budgets delivered by the present Government, there had been a huge increase in the tax burden. On each occasion, the Prime Minister deliberately failed to answer the question: he tried to talk only about this Budget.

We are becoming aware of one aspect of even this Budget, as it unravels. It involves a further tax hike. In his attempt at a music hall act—his attempt to turn Question Time into a pantomime, which he does so often—the Prime Minister did not make any effort to answer my right hon. Friend's real question, which concerned the tax hike that had taken place in the three Budgets added together.

In fact, that came as no surprise. When the Prime Minister appears on Wednesday afternoons—he is now prepared to face questioning only once a week, rather than twice a week as before—he never answers a question. He reminds me of the late Lord Olivier in his great performance as Archie Rice in "The Entertainer", portraying a down-at-heel, sad, failing music hall artiste. That is how the British people will see our current Prime Minister. He never answers a question, he betrays parliamentary democracy, and he has no interest in telling the British people the truth.

[Mr. Nick Hawkins]

Some in the business world, however, have already seen through the Budget. Ian Peters, deputy director of the British Chambers of Commerce—quoted in *The Times* yesterday—says:

"The sting in the tail may be that the Bank"—

the Bank of England, that is—

"may have less room to reduce interest rates than we would have wished."

Ruth Lea, head of policy at the Institute of Directors and one of our most informed economic commentators, was quoted in the same edition of *The Times* as saying:

"We wanted to see looser monetary policy and tighter fiscal policy and it looks as though we're getting the opposite."

My main concern, however, lies with small business. My constituency contains many thriving small and medium-sized businesses, and I am one of the vice-chairmen of the Small Business Bureau. All the small business organisations have seen through the Budget. Brian Prime, chairman of the policy unit of another small business organisation, the Federation of Small Businesses, estimates that the increased contribution rates for class 4 national insurance from 6 per cent. to 7 per cent. will hurt about 500,000—half a million—self-employed people. He says:

"The real entrepreneurs and risk takers—the sole traders—will miss out on the corporation tax changes, but will be hit by increases to national insurance contribution."

Ian Hanford, chairman of the federation, says that the Budget

"completely missed the target where the majority of small firms were concerned."

The gloss has already come off this Budget, and the truth behind the Chancellor's attempted conjuring trick has emerged.

Quoted in *The Daily Telegraph* yesterday, Patrick Stephens, a partner in Ernst and Young, said that the Budget was

"not going to make a difference where people are looking at starting a business or not."

We realise that Labour Members have little understanding of small business. The hon. Member for Brent, North said that he used to run an international business, but he is a rare figure on the Government Benches. Most Labour Members have never had to work in a business.

Mr. Hayes: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Hawkins: I hope that my hon. Friend will forgive me if I do not. Time is limited.

Before coming to the House, most Labour Members have never had to worry about the bottom line. Hardly any have had to run a work force, or look at a balance sheet. Most have come from the public sector. A number of other sectors have been hard hit. I used to work in the insurance and financial services industry, and I should have thought that a Government who claim to be caring would recognise that it is a good idea for people to take out insurance. Not a bit of it. Not for the first time, the Chancellor of the Exchequer regards insurance as a cash cow to be milked whenever he wishes, so that he can balance the books in a particular Budget. This year, he has hit insurance premium tax; in the past, he has regarded travel, holiday and tourism businesses as a cash cow, and has raised airport passenger duty.

Mark Boleat, director-general of the Association of British Insurers, says:

"The increase in insurance premium tax is regretted. It will result in higher premiums and could further encourage some people not to insure. It will hit people on the lowest incomes hardest and those starting up new businesses."

So much for this caring, family-friendly Budget. This Budget makes it more difficult for people to take out insurance. It means that more people will not take out insurance, and will not protect their families, homes and businesses.

The Budget has a nice, easy, soft target. The increase in insurance premium tax is rather like the Chancellor's earlier raids on pension funds. This is a soft target, and a stealth tax. As my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition has said, this is a pick-pocket Chancellor, who proves time after time that he believes in stealth taxes.

Even some Labour Back Benchers have referred this afternoon to the difficulties in controlling smuggling to which the Budget will lead. Certainly, the Budget has done nothing to reduce smuggling; in fact, the incidence of smuggling will increase. The hon. Member for Hove (Mr. Caplin) referred to the "white van trade"—a black economy in white vans. That is the black and white truth of this Labour Government.

The hon. Gentleman also expressed concern about the implication of his own Chancellor's Budget for small breweries. There is one in my constituency—the Hog's Back, an excellent real ale brewery whose product I take great pleasure in sampling whenever I am in my constituency. Such small breweries will certainly be hit, as will the entire brewing industry. I declare my interest as joint treasurer of the parliamentary beer club. I am very concerned on behalf of those who buy and enjoy beer. I want them to enjoy British beer lawfully rather than smuggled beer, and the same applies to wine and spirits.

Labour Members have raised concerns about shipping and hauliers. My constituency contains several hauliers' firms, most of which cannot afford to take their businesses abroad. Earlier, a Labour Member said that he feared that some hauliers would indeed take their business abroad. The small hauliers whom I represent—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman's time is up.

4.38 pm

Mr. Gareth Thomas (Clwyd, West): I welcome the Government's broad strategic approach, which is consistent with their desire to create a society that is both enterprising and fair.

I want to concentrate on two issues. I want to discuss what the Budget does for pensioners, and its ground-breaking efforts to promote environmental objectives through the tax system. I shall make particular reference to the climate change levy, which represents a radical departure.

My constituency contains more pensioners than any other Welsh constituency, and is among the top 20 in the United Kingdom in that regard. The announcement of a substantial increase in the winter fuel payment to

£100 has met with universal acclaim. It is indeed a generous measure. Pensioners may look forward to a warmer winter, thanks to that increase.

The Budget has improved the position of the poorest pensioners with the introduction of a minimum guarantee on tax, and the minimum income guarantee, which introduces an above-inflation increase. A commitment has also been made to link the minimum income guarantee to earnings. Those measures are very welcome.

The Chancellor has agreed to extend the new deal to the over-50s. I agree with Age Concern that the measure is

"a welcome recognition of the particular problems experienced by many in this age group".

However, I concur with many groups involved with older people that it is important to tackle age discrimination and make job opportunities available to older people. Older people are an increasingly powerful force in society. They represent an increasing percentage of the population; it is highly significant that the Budget acknowledges that.

More needs to be done to tackle the plight of pensioners in poverty. I should have liked the Government to say more about the need to tackle fuel poverty. There should be a cross-departmental integrated strategy to deal with the scandal of fuel poverty. According to objective research, no fewer than 8 million households in the United Kingdom cannot afford to heat their homes properly. Perhaps we may look forward to future announcements in that regard, because something needs to be done.

The climate change levy on the business use of energy is a radical measure. It conforms with the recommendations of the Marshall report on using economic instruments to promote environmental protection. It shifts the burden from economic goods, such as jobs, to environmental bads—pollution, waste and inefficient use of energy. Significantly, the proposal is revenue-neutral in so far as it has been offset by savings in employers' national insurance contributions.

I agree with the Chancellor that this important measure will improve energy efficiency. It will enable the United Kingdom to meet its crucial international commitments in combating climate change and it will encourage employment opportunities, especially in sectors dealing with the new environmental technologies. Crucially, it will do so without affecting UK firms' competitiveness. I congratulate the Chancellor on having squared that circle, and on having achieved a balance between the need to maintain economic competitiveness and the need to take significant strides towards environmental sustainability.

I welcome the reform of company car taxation, the reduction in vehicle excise duty for small cars and the increase in landfill tax to promote sustainable waste management. Money raised by the landfill tax is of special advantage to many people in my constituency. One scheme, in Old Colwyn, is known as the "Fairy Glen". Money from the landfill tax has been used to improve the environment in that locality, by improving amenities such as footpaths; that work is to be welcomed. I congratulate the people involved in that scheme.

Mr. Roy Beggs (East Antrim): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Thomas: I am afraid that I will not because, with respect, I am coming to the end of my speech.

The Budget is to be welcomed. It provides a substantial boost to enterprise and fairness; I welcome it wholeheartedly.

4.45 pm

Sir Peter Lloyd (Fareham): I am grateful to you for calling me, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am afraid that I did not manage to hear the two opening speakers in today's debate. As they are not present to hear me, I suppose that honour is in some ways satisfied, but I apologise to the House.

Naturally, I heard the Chancellor make his Budget address. He has been very fortunate. He inherited an inflation rate on target, in a world where inflationary pressures were subsiding fast. He had the sense to continue, for his first two years, with sound Conservative spending policies and reap the benefit. But, behind the screen of election promises not to raise personal taxation, he has, since 1997, contrived systematically to increase a battery of other taxes and imposed, in the process, heavy extra costs on industry and commerce, in no way offset by the decrease in corporation tax.

The Prime Minister was wrong to say, in the House yesterday, that this was a tax-cutting Government, not a tax-raising Government. The way in which the Government have chosen to raise the extra money has reduced the ability of industry and commerce to invest and create jobs. What is worse, by abolishing dividend tax credits for pension funds they have diminished savings and future pensions.

The Chancellor has with some ruthlessness—and, as my right hon. and hon. Friends like to say, with stealth—built up a very tidy balance, a part of which he is giving back in this Budget. To give credit where it is due, he gave it back last Tuesday with such a commanding flourish that, at the time, hardly anyone appeared to notice that they were being treated with their own money—and with only a part of it at that, and a good part of that part filched from their future pensions.

Despite the Chancellor's prudence in hanging on to so much of that money, the growth forecasts on which his Budget is based look very optimistic. He expects lower growth in the coming year, but his figure is higher than most informed commentators expect and he predicts a rapid bounce back to trend in the following year.

With Asia in recession, Japan stuck fast, Europe struggling and the world kept going by a dazzling performance in the United States—which surely cannot be sustained at that level indefinitely—it is difficult to see how the United Kingdom can be expected to be so buoyant while the pound is so high and we are so dependent upon exports. I hope that the Chancellor is right, but the Budget speech would have been a good place to justify his confidence, as it is essential to his whole Budget strategy. Perhaps one of the Ministers winding up today or on Monday will do so before the Budget debates end.

It is very difficult to see what the Chancellor has actually done in the Budget, especially from his speech. He constantly uses figures for one year, two years or three years; cumulative figures or figures for the period of the whole Parliament; last year's tax changes are sometimes included and sometimes not; and sometimes next year's changes are included. It depends on what point the Chancellor is trying to make. The aim is presentation, not

[Sir Peter Lloyd]

clarification. That is not setting the Budget in context, as the hon. Member for North-West Norfolk (Dr. Turner) suggested. It is not a contribution to open government and serious debate. It is too often a public relations exercise in obfuscation and spin.

It is possible to get near the truth from public documents, but that takes time. No doubt by the time the objective position is laid bare, the Budget debate will be over, the headlines will have been written, and public attention will have moved on to other matters. However, I expect that the minds of more people than the Chancellor cares to admit will return to those headlines when they look with disappointment at the various stoppages that continue to be made in their pay cheques. I also suspect that a good many pensioners who caught the words "increased in line with earnings" will be a little downcast when they find that their pension increase continues to be in line with inflation.

Similarly, it is difficult to weigh up the merits and the real effects of the multitude of tax changes that the Chancellor has proposed. Despite the green Budget discussions and the leaks—which would have obliged Hugh Dalton to resign 50 times over—most of the changes have not been properly weighed and discussed. Now that the Chancellor has nailed them to his mast, they will no doubt eventually arrive on the statute book, whatever their merits. It would be good to hear from the Minister in her winding-up speech that, if effective argument is deployed against any of the proposals, the Government will not feel unmanned by dropping or changing the measure in question.

I welcome the ending of MIRAS—although not all my hon. Friends do. It has served its Conservative purpose most triumphantly by creating a property-owning democracy. It had been much reduced by Conservative Chancellors in the interests of simplicity and neutrality in the tax system, and it is time that it went.

Unlike even more of my hon. Friends, I also welcome the end of the married couples allowance. It did absolutely nothing to sustain marriage. It is absurd to argue that a husband or wife are kept out of the divorce court and away from the warm embrace of the Child Support Agency, or were originally propelled into church, by the lure of a £200 tax advantage. One cannot buy a sound marriage in that way, and it demeans such marriages to pretend that one can. Indeed, if it is possible to bribe a family unit to stay together—which it is not—child tax credits might be more effective. Therefore, I guardedly welcome their appearance in the Budget, although it seems that they are being introduced with a built-in anomaly in the taper, which means that, unlike child benefit, they will disadvantage the many families in which the wife chooses to stay at home and look after the children.

Too many of the other changes look like window dressing. There will be a 10p tax band: how much better if the threshold had been raised and more people had been taken out of tax altogether. No doubt the scheme for tax-free purchase of shares by employees is well-intended, but it is not a good idea for people to put much of their savings in the company on which their livelihood depends. It would have been much better if the Chancellor had left PEPs alone and had sought to devise workplace schemes to promote them.

I do not have the time to mention other changes, but I fear that it will be accountants who will prosper from many of them, while management will find them a time-consuming distraction, and the intended benefits will not materialise.

The Chancellor has been less than frank with this Budget. There was no need for him to be disingenuous, as in many respects he had a good story to tell of the performance of the United Kingdom economy in a troubled world. He has been busily increasing taxes rather than reducing them, and the electors will find that out. Where he has reduced taxes, he has made a little seem to go a long way. The reductions are spread far more thinly than he has persuaded people to expect, and they will not be pleased. Where he has made reductions and given incentives, he has often made the system more complex and time consuming—especially for business and the Revenue—than is justified by any likely benefit.

The Budget is a strange mixture of new Labour spin on the macro side and old Labour intervention and manipulation on the micro side. I do not think that it will wear well.

4.54 pm

Mr. Dominic Grieve (Beaconsfield): I have found the debate fascinating, especially the speech by the hon. Member for Brent, North (Mr. Gardiner), who started by making some sensible points and then disappeared into a peroration designed to beat the clock, and was unwilling to participate in a debate. However, he made a compelling point. He said that those who pay taxes want to know, above all, that the money will be spent wisely. It was noteworthy that he did not say that one of the aims of prudent taxation is to so engineer the matter, if it is humanly possible, as to enable wealth creation to continue, so that funds are made available for the better provision of money to the Government in subsequent years. The Government consistently fail on that. Indeed, a succession of Governments have shown themselves unable to deal with the issue.

One of the problems that faces a Labour Government is that they cannot get away from the belief that those people who may have money are not justified in having it and that the Government can make better use of it. All the evidence suggests that those who have money are the best redistributors of wealth, because they make use of it to better their fellow men by investing it in business—their own or other people's.

What are we to make of what the Government have done? I shall take just one example, because I want to have time to move to another topic. We are told that stamp duty will be raising £340 million per annum by 2001. It is an easy tax, but it is a straightforward capital tax. It started under previous Governments as a modest charge on the conveyancing of property and leases, but it is rapidly being transformed by the Chancellor into a substantial fiscal instrument.

Those who carry out business will suffer the most. As my hon. Friend the Member for Guildford (Mr. St. Aubyn) rightly said earlier, those who have the most need of houses as capital assets are those who conduct small business. It is a particular disaster that they will suffer the most when they are unable to use such assets easily as collateral, by which they run their businesses. If ever one wanted an example of a form of

taxation that was easy and tempting to the Chancellor, but bad and nefarious in its effects, raising stamp duty as he has done fits the bill. When I see such policies, I start to view with considerable suspicion the entirety of what the Chancellor had to say.

In one respect, I awaited the Budget with some excitement. I am a member of the Select Committee on Environmental Audit and I am mindful of the fact that fiscal instruments are one method by which we may achieve changes in people's behaviour to promote environmental goods and prevent what are commonly called environmental bads. However, one has to be careful. If we start inhibiting wealth creation, we have to ask seriously whether we are getting the balance right and succeeding in securing environmental benefit rather than simply putting an extra burden on those who are being taxed. The proposals in the Budget are, I suppose, intended to put the environment at the heart of government, as the Government promised, but the results are exceptionally disappointing.

I commend the Government on the climate change levy. It is a difficult matter, but if the Government get it right—we shall have to wait and see whether they do—they will have taken an important step towards promoting the efficient use of energy in industry and preventing wastefulness. I am happy to welcome that and to congratulate the Government on introducing it. However—I hope that hon. Members will excuse my cynicism—I see that the Government have said that the measure will be fiscally neutral and that there will be no extra burden on benefits by the cutting of national insurance charges. A 5 per cent. cut has been suggested. I am not in a position to judge whether that will be sufficient to balance out the impact of the levy, but the measure had better be fiscally neutral, because otherwise business will see it as a betrayal. Subject to that caveat, I am happy to welcome the measure.

The picture is far less happy on the other instruments that are designed to achieve environmental improvements. Let us consider the levy on fuel. There is absolutely no evidence that raising fuel taxation is having any impact on diminishing motor car use. The reasons are simple. Motor cars are ubiquitous, they are essential in modern society and for millions of people there are no reasonable alternatives to their use. The point has been made about rural areas, but the same applies in many urban settings.

Viewed as a separate item, the decision to raise taxes on petrol appears to be simply a device for raising money. I do not believe that it will create any of the environmental good that the Government say they desire. We are told that it will be balanced by a reform of vehicle excise duty, but it does not require much intelligence to see that if raising petrol taxes has no impact on motor car use, reducing vehicle excise duty as a compensation is nonsense. The truth of the matter is that unless one is using one's car on a limited basis, a reduction in vehicle excise duty will come nowhere near removing the extra burden that the fuel escalator will place on individuals. There is no point in putting escalators in place and encouraging people to climb higher and higher in their transport costs if there are no proven environmental benefits in doing so. Only when the Minister can persuade me that there are will I be willing to consider that measure, but there is no evidence that it works, and on that basis it is seriously flawed.

Similarly, I have some anxieties about the landfill tax. It is not that I disagree with the principle of trying to reduce landfill—heaven knows, landfill takes up a major part of the acre[illegible] of my constituency and anything to reduce it would be welcome. However, the evidence from my constituency is that fly tipping is increasing. I also find it difficult to see that landfill is in less demand. The reason for that is that the Government do not have a strategy for waste disposal. It is all very well to raise the landfill tax to discourage people from landfilling, but landfilling remains the easiest way of disposing of waste. Until the Government produce concrete suggestions and say whether they support the growth of waste incineration on a grand scale, for example, increasing tax does nothing except raise money to go into the Chancellor's pocket. That brings me to my final conclusions on the matter.

The Budget is an ingenious piece of money raising. All the decoration that is placed upon it—the promises that it will produce all kinds of benefit—does not convince me otherwise. In reality, it is a tax-raising Budget and it is a great pity that the Chancellor has failed to be frank with the House and the nation about its underlying intention. The best I can say about the Budget, looking at its environmental aspects which I had hoped to welcome, is that it is a real beta double minus Budget. As such, the Government should go away and think again. If they wish to impose environmental taxes they must produce a total package instead of nit-picking, which serves only to conceal tax raising by the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

5.4 pm

Mr. Robert Syms (Poole): Having listened to the Budget debate this afternoon, it is a pleasure to contribute to one of the most important debates of the year. It provides an opportunity to discuss matters about which our constituents care deeply.

Let me start with inheritance—the Government's inheritance from the previous Administration, which was a golden legacy in terms of the economic management of the country. In 1992 the economy emerged from recession. It grew consistently year on year and when the present Government took office, they inherited a growing economy, falling unemployment, stable inflation and a situation that most Governments since the war would have considered well blessed.

As a result, our economic outlook and ability to withstand shocks are far better today than 10 years ago, or 20 years ago, before the Thatcher Government. The previous Government took many tough decisions that were not popular but were for the national benefit. That is reflected in the fact that we are now the world's fifth largest economy.

From the moment they came to office, the Government started raising taxation: an extra £40.7 billion in this Parliament. One of the major areas of increase was in advance corporation tax and dividend tax credit, hitting pension funds. One of the previous Government's greatest achievements was the development of private pensions and private responsibility. At the end of that Government, there were more private sector pension funds here than in all the other European countries put together; but one of the first acts of the Labour Government was an act of political vandalism, taxing many of those funds and taking £5 billion a year out of them.

The changes in dividend tax credit have hit many pensioners. I have had letters from pensioners, many of them too poor to pay tax, not believing that the

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Government, as a deliberate policy, had changed the tax system so that their income was cut. I am afraid, as the hon. Member for Dudley, South (Mr. Pearson) said in an interesting speech, that the Government have not addressed that problem, and that many thousands of poorer pensioners are struggling because of the changes to the tax system.

We have heard about the Government's stealth tax. This year, an extra £7.2 billion will be raised in taxation; next year, £10.5 billion; and the year after, £9.3 billion. There are certain matters for which collective action and raising money through taxation for the common good are justified, but as a general principle, taxing people, families and businesses takes choice out of their hands and says that Whitehall or the council chamber spends money better.

I have always believed that people spend their own money better when they make choices for themselves, their families and their communities. If we continue to raise the tax take as a percentage of gross domestic product, and to raid people's budgets, we will take real choices and decisions out of families' hands, which is not good for a nation.

One of the headline topics over the past six to 12 months has been the problem with manufacturing. Hardly a day goes by without jobs being lost in manufacturing, but the Budget did not really tackle the problem. It is expected that manufacturing output will drop by 1 to 1.5 per cent., and the National Audit Office report said that the presumption is that unemployment will rise over the next two years by 400,000. That is very bad news, and I do not feel that the Government have taken the issues on board, especially in the west midlands, where I fought a seat in 1992.

Mr. Hayes: My hon. Friend mentioned the National Audit Office prediction on unemployment. That is supported by the Chancellor's estimate in the Red Book of an increase in welfare spending, principally because he knows—in my judgment—that the Government will have to bear the extra cost of unemployment.

Mr. Syms: My hon. Friend makes a good point. Despite what the Chancellor said, welfare spending is still growing strongly, and I am sure that he will have to eat his words as the consequences become clear over the next year or two, especially when we consider the trajectory of the economy, see how fast it slows, and learn whether the Government's prediction of 1 to 1.5 per cent. growth is realistic or whether the private predictions of less than 1 per cent. are realised.

The Budget certainly increased taxation. MIRAS was scrapped, and I am afraid that I cannot agree with my right hon. Friend the Member for Fareham (Sir P. Lloyd), who welcomed that. MIRAS helped those who were on the margin of being able to buy a property and wanted to get on the property ladder. By scrapping the relief, we are restricting people's choice to own a property, which many aspire to do.

Married couples allowance was abolished. I agree that in its current state it did not mean much, but that is after a systematic reduction, for which the previous Government must bear some responsibility. As a state we should give a signal to the public about what we believe in. The fact that the tax system is neutral on marriage is not a good thing.

Company cars have been hit. Little has been said about that, but many people will pay substantially more for their company cars after the changes in the Budget. We hear much about the Kyoto summit, but as my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Grieve) rightly said, there is no evidence that increasing fuel taxes reduces motoring use. However, it does take money away from people who have to use cars, especially those in rural counties such as Dorset. If parents have to take children five miles to school, they do not drive four miles and make the children walk a mile because the tax has gone up. People still have to go all the way to Sainsbury's, and to see the doctor. Many rural dwellers have to visit local towns to use services because those services are not available in the villages.

The Government are cynical about fuel taxes, as they are about the smoking tax. They know when they put petrol tax up that it will raise the revenue and that is why they do it. Before the Budget changes, £9 billion was raised and, according to the Automobile Association, £8.50 of every £10 now spent on fuel goes in tax to the Government. Almost all the food that is sold in supermarkets and all the other goods we buy travel by road. If the Government keep on putting up diesel and petrol taxes, the cost of living will increase.

If the Government were really serious about Kyoto and reducing pollution, they would tackle the issue through the tax system by making people buy newer and more fuel-efficient cars that had better technology, such as catalytic converters. They would not do it by raising fuel taxes. The other problem with raising fuel taxes is that it is regressive. If someone is wealthy and drives a Jaguar—

Mr. Hayes: Or two Jaguars.

Mr. Syms: If someone drives two Jaguars, he can probably afford fuel taxes, but for many less-well-off families living in rural areas—who need a car—it is a large part of their family budget. When fuel taxes are raised, other parts of their budget suffer. They may have to go without a family holiday or trainers for the children.

The landfill tax was increased and that will affect the budgets of local authorities. Poole borough council is struggling to pay that tax. It has not had the best standard spending assessment settlement from the Government, and rising landfill taxes are a constant annoyance. In effect, the landfill tax is a tax on local authorities which have a limited amount of money.

Mr. Grieve: Has anyone suggested to Poole council how else it should get rid of its rubbish, with the Government's approval?

Mr. Syms: The council is examining all options, but sometimes it does not have a great choice. The landfill tax is costing my constituents dear.

The Chancellor said in his Budget statement that enforcement measures on smuggling would be increased. However, market forces are at work. If people can travel to the continent, buy beer and cigarettes cheaper, sell them back here and make a profit doing so, they will. The way

to combat that is not to have more customs officers, but to address the problem of price. That means not a freeze but a reduction.

This is a consequence of the single market. If people can cross boundaries, the Government have to address differential pricing by introducing a competitive price structure for tobacco and drinks; otherwise rolling tobacco and beer will be smuggled in large quantities and cost us billions of pounds a year. The consequence is that British jobs are lost and British companies are affected.

I am sorry that this Budget has been introduced. It is not good for Britain and I shall vote against it on Monday.

5.14 pm

Mr. Derek Wyatt (Sittingbourne and Sheppey): I apologise for having been in and out of the House this afternoon, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but as I am sure you will understand, I have had one of those days.

Private Eye may give me the order of the brown nose for this, but I should like to say how brilliant the Budget is, and to congratulate my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer and his Front-Bench team on it. Around my kitchen table, we believe in two things—stability and fairness. Stability and fairness seem to shine from all that the Budget has introduced.

We want low inflation and low borrowing, and those are being delivered. We want a child-centred approach to the United Kingdom's future, and that is being delivered. We have been unreasonable to our old age pensioners, and that is being addressed. My family wants good schools, better health services, a friendlier business attitude and a better environment. The Budget stimulated me, and it will stimulate the country. I congratulate the Treasury team once again on the Budget.

The most sensational announcement was about the 1,000 computer centres, which beggars belief. I wonder, however, whether the Treasury team might reconsider the proposal because it may be that different communities will establish different centres with different practices, different technologies and perhaps even different purchasing systems or teaching mechanisms. My right hon. and hon. Friends might join Peter Fanning at 4PS in considering a private finance initiative system.

Such a system might include Tesco, which has a long history in the area, and McDonald's, which has a long history in the internet and computing. It could create a kind of public service company that might be the buying and delivery agency for the 1,000 centres without taking away from local authorities the opportunity to design something to suit their libraries, post offices, village halls or schools. It would give purchasing power to the centre, which might achieve better value for money.

A few weeks ago, I was the first Member ever to have an Adjournment debate on libraries, and it is fantastic that our schools are being given £2,000 for libraries. Many schools are information poor, even before we start talking about computers or the internet. I have been to 33 of my 44 schools. Some have no librarian, one or two have libraries in halls and aisles on the way to classrooms; and some have books that are 20 or 30 years old. That is not fair or reasonable. The gift of £2,000 is most generous, and my schools are thrilled about it. I congratulate the Treasury team on that gift.

Giving teachers an opportunity to get on the net at home, through laptops, is a terrific idea. It is a real sea change. Teachers do not find technology easy and they are sometimes uncomfortable with it. It is not life-threatening, but they do not find it easy to deal with. The opportunity to get on the net at home and to upgrade their skills is a double plus.

May I ask Treasury Ministers to reconsider the risk element mentioned in relation to the university fund for venture capital? Some books and economic forecasts name the UK as the seventh largest economy, with California the eighth. However, 0.5 per cent. of our economy is driven by venture capital, while in California the figure is more than 35 per cent. Of the 0.5 per cent. in the UK, most is accounted for by mergers and acquisitions. It is not risk capital.

Although we have put more money into universities, I wonder whether we might do so differently. Would Ministers consider creating a fund that could be shared between chambers of commerce and universities? The amount could be increased, and we could say—as with the £2,000 for libraries—that a set amount of £1 million or £2 million should be given to each chamber for venture capital. Then they, in association with the universities, could develop brand new, scientifically based software industries to increase at a local level our knowledge of how capital works and our understanding of the modern business world—its model is set by California, not Europe. In that way, we could improve our whole knowledge base.

A good example of how that might work is the Prince's Trust, the only fund in the UK that has given small amounts—£2,000 or £5,000—to kids who understand pop music, design, internet access, web architecture and much more. Three of their companies were so successful that they sought listings on various markets. That is a sensational success story. We should build on what the prince has done and borrow from that model so that, at the bottom level, sums of £5,000 or £10,000 get to the community and to the sort of garage entrepreneurs who created companies like Apple and Intel in America 25 years ago.

Lastly, I make a plea. I have a port in my constituency, Sheerness, which is the fifth largest in the country. North Kent is affected by the tunnel and the ferry and by the differences in the prices of two commodities: alcohol, and diesel and petrol. The new 40-tonne lorries from France have flat-bed petrol holders. Instead of holding the petrol in a designed area at the back, it is held flat along the bottom. That has more than doubled the amount of petrol that they can take. In consequence, they come to Kent, and instead of going back, they can take business off us.

I understand that it is a competitive world—but hang on. Our hauliers have to pay a licence of £10 a day in France and Germany to travel on their roads. Their hauliers pay nothing, but they add to our pollution, and now they are taking our business away. It is a serious problem. I was briefed by one of my companies, WH Hunt, whose turnover is £8 million. However, that is at the margins; it is making not a 10 per cent. return on capital but 4 or 5 per cent. It is a family company and it will get through; but many people are involved in road haulage in every constituency. It does not matter what party one is in; the problem affects the way in which they do business.

Mr. Hayes: I hear what the hon. Gentleman says about haulage. His point has been made by hon. Members on

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both sides of the House. The Government knew about this before the Budget. The hon. Gentleman described the Budget as marvellous and wonderful, but why did the Government not do something about this? They have exacerbated the problem.

Mr. Wyatt: I agree with much of what the hon. Gentleman says, but I am trying to mark the Chancellor's card for the next Budget.

In the same way, it is ironic that the £6.50 bottle of Chapel Down wine that I bought in Tenterden on Saturday costs £1.90 in Calais. There is no logic in that. People will go to Calais to buy it. It is the same with beer. Shepherd Neame, a family company, is in a neighbouring constituency but has 60 pubs in mine. It has gone on and on about a level playing field for beer tax. It is ironic that its beer is cheaper in Calais than in Sittingbourne or Sheppey. It has tried hard with its lobbying and may get permission to go to the House of Lords to appeal.

The business of Britain is with family companies. In Germany, they do not go to the market; it is the middle stratum companies that make the wealth in communities. We must enable middle order companies. It is important to reconsider on haulage and on the beer and wine trade. Despite what the hon. Member for South Holland and the Deepings (Mr. Hayes) said, this was an otherwise cracking Budget.

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Have you had notice from the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food that he will make a statement to the House about the important announcement that has been made on European Union farm reform?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: That is not strictly a point of order. The answer is no, but the hon. Gentleman might have regard to the usual practice in these matters, and it is possible that a statement may be volunteered in due course.

5.24 pm

Mr. Donald Gorrie (Edinburgh, West): I apologise to the House for not having been unable to attend the whole debate, but I have heard many speeches. I will not follow the hon. Member for Sittingbourne and Sheppey (Mr. Wyatt) in his eulogy of the Budget. It is good in parts. I take the position of the curate rather than the enthusiast.

My first point is perhaps naive. Can we have practical action to put into effect all the rhetoric about transparency in Budgets and clarity about figures? The habit of recycling figures and confusing the public, whether deliberate or not, does not help people. It creates such confusion that the Secretary of State had to intervene in the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) to satisfy him that some of the money involved was new money. It would be helpful if we could have some arrangement such as a letter N beside a figure so that we knew what money was new and what was recycled.

Surely the essence of civilised debate is that we agree on the facts and then argue about what they mean and how we achieve what we want. If we are confused about the figures, we will not have a civilised debate. I urge the Government to set out the figures in a consistent way so that we know whether we are working on one or three years, what baseline we are working from and whether the money is new.

Members of the Government do not yet accept that, despite the welcome improvements in some areas of funding, there is a big black hole at the centre of local government expenditure, not only on education but on many other services. There were fairly persistent cuts for the many years of Conservative Government and they have continued in most cases in the first two years of Labour government. To take one example, the welcome increased expenditure on books, as far as I can find out from the figures, which I am still exploring—getting accurate figures is very difficult—does not fill the gap in expenditure on books caused by cuts year on year. The increased expenditure helps a bit, but it does not recover the many losses of the past. In many areas, there is still a major reduction in education and associated services. By funding attractive individual programmes, the Government have still left a big black hole in the core funding of councils.

For example, the Government do not adequately fund pay increases. It is a shibboleth—if that is the right word; it is a false notion, in any case—to say that pay increases can be funded out of productivity or improved efficiency. If pay increases are not adequately funded, it merely means that councils sack some staff or are compelled to fight fiercely to keep pay increases down. So the pay of teachers and those in further education, whom my hon. Friend the Member for Bath mentioned, has been held down. Welcome improvements are being made in some public services based on the slave labour of those employed therein. That is not a civilised and acceptable practice. The Government should adequately fund pay increases. If the resulting Budget means that there must be a cut, it should be a clear and open cut. The failure to fund pay increases adequately is, to use a Conservative word, a sneaky or stealthy cut.

There are ways in which the Government could achieve good value for money. The Scottish Accounts Commission has said that if both human and computer administrative support was better in schools, we could save the equivalent of 1,500 full-time teachers. So if the Government invested—it would be a substantial investment—in more administrative staff and more computers, it would cost less than the salaries of 1,500 new teachers, but they would get the equivalent. Surely such well-targeted investment would be profitable.

The Treasury should set up a bumf-busting committee, or anti-bureaucratic paperwork committee. Wherever one goes—schools, colleges, local authorities or enterprise companies—one hears complaints of too much paperwork. I am sure that other hon. Members have heard such complaints.

Mr. Hayes: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that paperwork has increased because of the initiatives, particularly in schools, that the Government have taken in their two years in office? Teachers tell me—as I am sure they have told him—that they have initiative fatigue. So

many initiatives and bits of paper are coming from the Government that the paperwork problem has been exacerbated during Labour's tenure, not countered.

Mr. Gorrie: I partly agree. However, the Tories seem to think that all evil things started with the election of the current Government. The Conservative Government, too, produced masses of paperwork. Nevertheless, setting aside any party points, paperwork is an issue. If the Government could have a task force—if that is the language that they prefer—to reduce paperwork, they would receive huge financial benefit, and we would get more bangs for our buck.

As my better-informed hon. Friends tell me, even with the new computers, over 90 per cent. of teachers will still not have a computer. It is also most important that the Government should fund the charges for computer access to the internet. That issue has not yet been properly addressed. Although we welcome the Government's interest in computers, and obviously everything cannot be put right in a year, help with funding computer access charges would be very helpful.

The cuts in local authority funding made by both the previous Government and the current Government have reduced expenditure in the community on services such as community education and social work, and especially on the services provided by voluntary organisations that provide the type of support and help needed by families who live in deprived areas and suffer from social exclusion. If we could put more money into supporting the community and supporting those people in the community, we should do a great amount to improve pupils' attitude when in school, and thereby achieve much better results in schools. Most education happens outwith, not within the school. The cuts have had a very serious effect on youth clubs and other excellent activities that help to create the right frame of mind in pupils.

On a technical point, the Government persist in treating local authority self-financed expenditure as within the control total. The Government are therefore preventing councils from developing enterprise in spending their money sensibly.

The Budget has also neglected the issue of student finances. Many students are experiencing a real crisis in their finances. The Government have to address the issue, either by putting more money into altering the student fees regime or by putting more into helping students with living costs, which could be done simply by giving universities and colleges more for hardship and access funds.

The 1p income tax reduction that we have been promised for next year is not what is wanted by most people in Scotland. They would prefer to keep tax at the current level, and to have the money invested in better services. It will be very interesting to see whether the Scottish Parliament addresses the last two issues: student poverty and using tax money for investment rather than for a small tax rebate.

5.34 pm

Mr. Tony McNulty (Harrow, East): It is a great pleasure to follow the usual Liberal Democrat whinge of the hon. Member for Edinburgh, West (Mr. Gorrie). I have not heard the hon. Gentleman—either when I was watching the debate on television, or since I have been in the Chamber—manage to say one kind word about the Budget, which, in line with the previous two Budgets, is yet further evidence of the direction in which the new Labour Government are taking the United Kingdom. The Liberal Democrats, who are always whingeing and dancing on the head of a pin, should know better.

It is very clear why the Conservatives do not know any better. In last year's Budget debate, Conservative Members had difficulty in grasping some basic concepts which are, in essence, completely alien to them. The first concept—I shall say this nice and slowly so that they will perhaps understand—is long-term stability. They have never heard of it; that concept is completely alien to the Conservatives, in or out of Government. They struggle with stability—even short-term stability, which, for the last Government, ran from October to October and from Blackpool, to Bournemouth, to Brighton or to wherever else the blue rinse brigade met once a year to harangue them and occasionally wave handcuffs by way of developing policy. The Conservatives, in or out of Government, have not heard of long-term stability. They do not have a clue.

The second concept underpinning this Government with which the Conservatives have great difficulty is economic prudence and responsibility. The Conservatives and, to a lesser extent, the Liberal Democrats—it is always a lesser extent with them—now come to the House and whinge about politicising the economy. It is not as though the Conservative's actions over 18 years were somehow clean, pure and independent from any vexatious notion of political intervention in the economy. This and the previous two Budgets have demonstrated a real concern for prudence, economic responsibility and competence. Political considerations have played no part.

Mr. Gareth Thomas: Does my hon. Friend agree that the decision taken early in the Parliament to give operational independence to the Bank of England has been of major strategic importance because it has engendered an environment of stability that is the absolute antithesis of the boom-and-bust cycles that were prevalent under the previous Government?

Mr. McNulty: I thank my hon. Friend for that comment because nothing could be more true. The Conservatives have no idea of the strategic economic importance of that single decision—and why should they? After all, for 18 years, they played proverbial golf with only one club in their bag. God alone knows how the Conservatives would survive in government now that the Bank of England is independent.

Mr. St. Aubyn *rose—*

Mr. McNulty: Perhaps the hon. Member for Guildford (Mr. St. Aubyn) is going to tell us.

Mr. St. Aubyn: I am very grateful to the hon. Gentleman. Does he regret the fact that the majority of City economists and commentators believe that, as a result of this week's Budget, we are far less likely to see the interest rate cuts that the economy needs?

Mr. McNulty: As ever, the hon. Gentleman—whose family I believe owns half of Cornwall—has demonstrated clearly that he has, first, more front than

[Mr. McNulty]

Harrods; and, secondly, amnesia to the nth degree in political terms. The Conservatives presided over an economy in which inflation shot up to well over 20 per cent. and interest rates rose past 15 per cent. We will take no lectures about economic competence and management from Guildford or anywhere else.

That is the key to my point about economic stability. The Conservatives have no licence to complain because they messed things up so badly—my constituents will certainly never let them anywhere near power again, either locally or nationally. The Liberal Democrats—that sixth-form debating society—have had no sniff of power since Lloyd George. They have had no chance of power, at least in a national context, for ever and a day thereafter—not least because of the endless, mindless witterings of those who parade as the Liberal Democrat economic and Treasury spokespersons, whom I would not trust with an abacus, let alone a calculator.

Mr. Caplin: I know that my hon. Friend is in touch with the Liberal Democrats about many issues. Has he had an opportunity to ask them whether 1p will now become 2p or 3p?

Mr. McNulty: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention. There was a wonderful comedy show on television the other night called, "Despatch Box", on which a certain young gentleman from Kingston, and on, and on, and Surbiton, and on, and on—or was it the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey)?—waxed lyrical on that subject but never answered the question. All he would say was, "One penny equals £2 billion and all we want is £2 billion." When it was pointed out to him that there is a £2 billion hole because we have taken a penny off income tax, and he was asked "Does not two billion plus two billion equal four billion?" he said, "No, we only want £2 billion."

The only conclusion that we can draw is that the Liberal Democrats would put up income tax by 1p to get £2 billion, but they would not fill the resulting £4 billion hole, so there would be even more cuts, which is typical of the Liberals. That is why they were so severely kicked out of Harrow last year. They did not have a clue. They are lovely when it comes to call my bluff, silly little party games and sixth-form debating, but when it comes to real power and decisions that impact on people's lives, they are utterly useless.

Mr. Gareth Thomas: Before my hon. Friend leaves the subject of the Liberal Democrats, will he tell the House whether he agrees that part of their problem is that they have not formed a Government in living memory, so have not been subjected to the disciplines of a major party in rationally formulating policy?

Mr. McNulty: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. If we have regional balance, we can say the same of Plaid Cymru and the SNP—the Scottish nobody party.

I return to my serious point about concepts. On economic stability, the Tories were found wanting. They could not even recognise that concept. The evidence of 18 years demonstrates that they have no regard for the notion of some degree of financial redistribution to poorer people, which is my third concept. They cannot contemplate that—it is sacrilege and blasphemy to them. Yet we have achieved much in the better deal for families, the working families tax credit—the Conservatives will all be up on their hind legs railing against that next week—and the £3 billion package for pensioners. They have no answer to that.

The Liberal Democrats whinge that there should have been more money and announce their own Mickey Mouse Budget—the one that they announced last week—which says nothing. As my hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd, West (Mr. Thomas) implied, that is wonderful, back-of-a-fag-packet stuff drawn up by people who think that if they call someone an economic spokesperson, he will suddenly become imbued with economic knowledge. That does not work for the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton and on and on or the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce). Mickey Mouse "Brucean" economics do not make serious economic considerations.

Mr. Don Foster: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. McNulty: I give way to the Disneyland contingent.

Mr. Foster: Is the hon. Gentleman aware that the views of my hon. Friend the Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) on the 10p rate of income tax are supported by a large number of bodies, including the Institute for Fiscal Studies? Does he ever take note of what such bodies have to say?

Mr. McNulty: I was almost going to take the hon. Gentleman seriously until he mentioned the Institute for Fiscal Studies.

My next point calls for a plague on both the houses of the Opposition. Starting with our first Budget and continuing through to this Budget, we are restoring not only public services but the professions that work within them and ensuring that their morale is second to none. The hon. Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts) had the cheek to stand at the Dispatch Box and say, "Well, there was £19 billion for education in the comprehensive spending review but nothing in the Budget." That is complete effrontery and, at the very least, does a disservice to his constituents and those of other Conservative Members. The restoration of public services in health, education and other areas that we are achieving would not have happened under the Conservatives. One has only to project their public expenditure figures from the last Budget of the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke) to realise that.

What the Liberal Democrats say about our not doing enough is equally facetious and entirely malevolent, but it is rooted in their fundamental lack of any knowledge of reality and responsibility in Government.

Our Budget takes a long-term view of the economy, works towards stability, provides money for those with less ability to enter the workplace and will achieve a fundamental revamping of public services. It is not rhetoric, and there are no back-handers or brown paper bags or brown envelopes for ex-Ministers from the previous Parliament to sit on boards of directors with fat salaries. The Budget provides genuine and substantive structural support, especially for small businesses. There

is reality behind our rhetoric about full support for enterprise. That is another concept that the Conservatives do not understand at all, not least because some of them have a perverse understanding of what are the most important sectors of business and an even more perverse background of how they earned their own money. Because those five key concepts are completely alien to Opposition Members, I feel quite sad about the paucity of any intelligence or substance in their contributions to the Budget debate. They speak empty-headed rhetoric. There is no substance, joy or pleasure in their suggestions for the people of this country. They present no genuine critical opposition.

Mr. Gardiner: Following my hon. Friend's remarks about the empty-headed nature of the Opposition, does he recall the opening comments of the shadow education spokesperson, the hon. Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts)? When asked whether he appreciated that the effect of the lack of support for the windfall tax and the £5.2 million fiscal tightening—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael J. Martin): Order. Will the hon. Member please sit down? His intervention was too long.

Mr. McNulty: I am sure that, had my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, North (Mr. Gardiner) been allowed fully to elaborate, his intervention would have been entirely appropriate. I fully agree with what he says about the Opposition's approach to the new deal, and shall end there.

5.47 pm

Mr. Howard Flight (Arundel and South Downs): I apologise to the House for not being present for today's debate. I was serving on the Committee considering the Welfare Reform and Pensions Bill.

In overall macro-economic terms, it looks as if the Budget is about right. Whether this economy stays on smooth track will—I fear—depend not on the Budget or even the Bank of England, but on what else goes on in the world, especially in the United States of America.

Many Labour Members have referred to the praise of the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development and the International Monetary Fund for the success of British economic management. As they well know—to ensure that the record is set straight—this country has been given such praise since 1992, and the recovery, which has continued to this day, got going in 1992, mainly on the back of all the major supply-side reforms of the 1980s, analogous to what has happened in the United States, and our escape from being locked into continental European interest rates via the exchange rate mechanism when Europe's cycle was different from ours. Let it be a warning to this Government that, if they proceed with their euro ambitions, they might face precisely the same problems.

Mr. Gardiner: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Flight: No, I will not give way. I have only 10 minutes to speak.

The Budget was unnecessarily complex and tinkering. A great deal of its objectives could have been achieved simply by raising personal allowances. It was clearly an electioneering Budget. The Chancellor achieved the sort of publicity the next day that he wanted and obviously felt extremely clever presenting all the good news and concealing all the bad, but I shall point to one or two groups of people in my constituency who are not so happy.

Mr. Caplin: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Flight: No, I will not give way—sorry.

Mr. Caplin: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I hope that it is a point of order.

Mr. Caplin: We are trying to engage in a debate, but the hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs (Mr. Flight) seems to be of the opinion that he has just 10 minutes to speak. My understanding of the House's rules is that extra time—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. That is not a point of order.

Mr. Flight: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am sorry that your time was wasted.

I shall comment on three groups of people in my constituency who have approached me. One is what I would call the post-war baby bulge generation—people typically aged from their late-40s to their mid-50s. When those people were bringing up their children, they suffered from the abolition of income tax allowances for children and from the fact that the last Conservative Government failed to transfer personal allowances. Just as their children are off their hands, these people are now losing their married couples allowance. They are not pleased about that. Those are just the sort of people whose votes Prime Minister Blair has been so keen to get.

The second group is pensioners of the future. The worst example of deviousness in the Chancellor's presentation was the fact that he said clearly that pensioners would continue to receive the married couples allowance. What he meant was current pensioners. People born after 1935 will not get the married couples allowance in the future.

That is grossly unfair. Many people have planned carefully for their retirement. They are not rich, and they assumed that they would get the married couples allowance. The change will cost them several hundred pounds a year. What the Chancellor did was just as bad as stealthily abolishing the widow's pension, except on a means-tested basis. People have taken the married couples allowance into account in their financial plans for the long term.

Mr. Caplin: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Flight: No, I will not be giving way.

The Chancellor will not reap the success that he had hoped for, in terms of winning votes. The Budget was supposed to be family-friendly, but the total being taken back through the abolition of MIRAS and the married couples allowance is some £600 million more than is

[Mr. Flight]

being given out in total to families through the new child credit and the increased child allowances. It is not a *family-friendly Budget.*

Mr. Caplin *rose—*

Mr. Flight: It was an act of stealth to abolish the married couples relief this year, before the new family credit comes in next year. The abolition of the married couples allowance is wrong in principle. The Chancellor brushed it under the carpet with a few feeble excuses. The institution of marriage should be buttressed by both tax and welfare facilities.

Mr. Caplin: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Flight: I am not giving way. In Britain, as elsewhere, children are brought up better with two parents in a married family unit.

Let us consider entrepreneurship and another example of the Chancellor's deviousness. It sounds extremely attractive to reduce the rate of tax on small companies to 10 per cent., but the overwhelming majority of small entrepreneurs are not companies—they cannot afford to be. They are ordinary sole traders, who will still be liable to existing standard rates of income tax, and certainly will not be paying 10 per cent only.

In my constituency small businesses are howling at me to try to reduce bureaucracy and red tape. They find that they cannot compete and comply.

Mr. Gardiner: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Flight: The introduction of the European social chapter measures was the last straw. Small businesses faced with the possibility of having to pay out £50,000 if they make a mistake in the way that an employee is dismissed will go bust as a result.

I spent part of my career in the United States of America. I welcome US-style measures to get entrepreneurship going in this country. However, those were not the measures in the Budget. The most crucial requirement is to abolish an excessive 40 per cent. rate of capital gains tax.

Mr. Gardiner *rose—*

Mr. Flight: There is clearly a regressive element in the tax on cigarettes and petrol. Speaking on behalf of rural constituents, as other hon. Members have done, I can tell Ministers that the 4p a litre increase on petrol will hit hard all levels of society in rural areas, especially pensioners.

I was interested to note that the hon. Member for Sittingbourne and Sheppey (Mr. Wyatt) began his speech by saying that he was brown-nosing. I suggest that this was a Brown-nosing Budget, designed, somewhat early, to win votes in the next general election. It was an immoral Budget, because the one thing that it did nothing about was charities.

The Government have increased taxation on charities by £500 million per annum as a result of the abolition of advance corporation tax recovery. I have been corresponding with the Treasury on this matter for some time and was assured that something would be done in the charity review that would be announced in the Budget, but what is in there? Absolutely *nothing.*

The Prime Minister prides himself on being the moral and spiritual leader of half the world and yesterday I asked him about tax changes for charities. Why is he imposing the greatest taxation ever on all the charities in this country? I suggest that Labour Members should pause to think about the morality of the Budget and all the charities that will suffer as a result of it. Yesterday, I was at a meeting of one of the charities with which I am involved. It will be cutting expenditure by £500,000 per annum as a result of these measures. It has been lobbying the Government for some time in order to achieve some form of compensation, but in vain.

Mr. Gardiner: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Flight: I am about to conclude my speech.

This Budget, like all the Chancellor's other Budgets, sounded clever and wonderful when it was announced. All the nasties were left unsaid or hidden away and there are one or two measures that it was wrong not to have made clear, such as the treatment of the married allowance for old-age pensioners. As one constituent said to me, "Well, it sounded all right, but I don't trust him at all." I believe that that, substantially, will be the reaction of the middle classes, whose votes the Prime Minister is after and, as all the papers have pointed out, which continue to be treated negatively, as they were in previous Budgets. This is not a bad Budget for the economy as a whole, but it is not nearly as clever as the Chancellor would like to think.

Mr. Gardiner: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I hope that it is a point of order.

Mr. Gardiner: Is it in order for the hon. Gentleman not to take interventions, because he fears that he will use up his 10 minutes, and then not to use his full 10 minutes? Does he not realise that the clock stops when an intervention is received?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman did not hear my response to a previous point of order, which was in similar vein. It is up to each hon. Member to decide whether to take an intervention and the reason for refusing to take an intervention is absolutely nothing to do with the Chair.

Mr. St. Aubyn: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. My point of order is slightly different. Will you clarify whether the time taken to respond to an intervention is included in the 10 minutes allowed for a Member's speech?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The time taken to reply to an intervention is taken out of a Member's 10 minutes. I might add that the clock stops only at the discretion of the Chair. The rule clearly states that the Chair may allow time for interventions.

5.58 pm

Mr. Bowen Wells (Hertford and Stortford): We all owe it to the House, to our constituents and to the country to speak the truth as far as we can possibly know it. The truth is that the Budget is very good in many aspects and we should acknowledge that.

Although we would have liked to have achieved an inflation rate of 2.5 per cent. much sooner than we have, it is a matter for congratulation that the Government have managed the macro-economic situation in this country and conducted tax affairs in such a way that we are able to keep to such a rate. However, our inflation rate is twice that of France and of Germany, and I should have liked the Budget to have aimed at a rate lower than 2.5 per cent.

The hon. Member for Harrow, East (Mr. McNulty) criticised the Conservative Administration for not aiming for a stable macro-economic framework in which to conduct the public finances. In fact, that is the reverse of what the Conservative Government aimed to do when they came to power in 1979. The introduction of a medium-term strategy was one of the measures that were designed to reduce inflation and interest rates, and to keep the economy stable and predictable so that there could be growth in the economy, along with real, sensible, non-inflationary investment, to increase our productivity and output—in other words, our gross domestic product.

The Conservative Government succeeded in their aim for a large part of their 18 years in office, but did not do so during the late 1980s and early 1990s, when the economy—not just in this country, but throughout Europe and indeed the world—was stricken by recession. Counter-cyclically, the Government introduced extra spending, and had to raise interest rates by much more than they would otherwise have done.

Unfortunately, the hon. Member for Harrow, East has disappeared, having had his rant. He did not even show the normal courtesy of staying for the duration of the speech that followed his. I hope that such traditions will nevertheless continue in the House. The hon. Gentleman was, however, right in saying that we should all be aiming for a stable financial background to our Budget, and, by extension, to the Government's tax and spending plans.

I congratulate the Government on keeping the macro-economic framework under control. Interest rates are lower, and I hope that they will fall further before long: they need to do so. I also hope that we shall aim not for the Government's objective of a 2.5 per cent. inflation rate, but for the rate of between 0 and 1.5 per cent. which obtains on the continent and in the United States.

Having said that, I must add that I have never felt more ashamed than I did during yesterday's exchanges about the Budget during Prime Minister's Questions Time, which reduced the politics of public finance to the level of pantomime. We had to endure a vituperative and meaningless trading of statistics between the Dispatch Boxes. At one point, the Prime Minister said that everyone in the country had experienced tax cuts.

In answer to my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Hague), he said:

"There is a net tax cut for everyone—direct taxes of £9 billion."

My right hon. Friend asked the Prime Minister to explain. Two answers later, the Prime Minister said:

"There is a net tax cut of £4.5 billion."—[*Official Report*, 10 March 1999; Vol. 327, c.358.]

In the space of two answers, the cut had been reduced by a half.

The House proceeded to further unseemly exchanges, in which hon. Members swapped statistics of a totally meaningless character, which thoroughly misled the House and undoubtedly confused the public. That is no way in which to conduct public debate on these matters. Sensible inquiries should be made by the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition about exactly what statistics they are discussing; that would avoid the "No, I'm right", "No, you're wrong", exchanges.

Anatole Kaletsky explains the Budget extremely well in his article in *The Times* today. There is an increase in taxation, and I do not think that the Prime Minister, having imposed that increase on the British public, should apologise for it if that is what he wants to happen. But it is no good telling the public that there are not increases in taxes when there are.

I welcome some of the additional expenditure that the increased taxation will enable the Government to make. I welcome the increase in the international development budget over three years to—it is hoped—£3.5 billion in the final year of the increases so far announced. I also welcome the increases in spending on education and health. However, I do not believe that, when we have taken into account the effect of the minimum wage and of wage increases to nurses and teachers, the amount of money in the classroom will increase. The schools in my constituency will be worse off in real terms. The test must be: what effect does the Budget have in classrooms, hospitals and GPs' surgeries in our constituencies? At the moment, the answer is that they will receive less money, not more.

Although those increases in spending seem very great, they are not much greater than the increases that Conservative Governments managed to achieve, year on year, for much of their time in office. There is more work to be done, and more increases are needed to provide the type of public health care that the Government have promised, and which I believe we should aim for. There are good points about increasing taxation to pay for such things. If we believe in better public services, we should recognise that taxes must go up.

However, taxes have gone up, essentially, on middle-income people, who have saved and worked hard throughout their lives. My hon. Friend the Member for Arundel and South Downs (Mr. Flight) drew attention to the attack on married couples allowances, on pensions and on savings. It is important, as we consider the Budget, to note that United Kingdom savings levels have decreased significantly. That is very serious, because it prevents capital formation and prevents investment from going into productive areas of the economy. The Chancellor of the Exchequer rightly believes that investment is vital to increase the productivity of this country, which again lags behind that of its European partners. I strongly believe that we must increase productivity so that we are competitive in order to get the jobs, because the economy is starting to contract too fast and we are starting to fear—and, in many places, experience—increases in unemployment. That would be the worst imaginable outcome of the Budget.

Mr. Gardiner: The hon. Gentleman's speech has been extremely thoughtful, and there is much in it with which

[Mr. Gardiner]

I agree. I wanted to pick up his remarks in relation to middle-income Britain bearing the burden of tax increases. Has he had the opportunity to see the Institute for Fiscal Studies report that shows that every decile of the population has benefited from the Budget? Obviously, there are some losers in each decile, but every decile of the population has benefited overall, especially the lower deciles.

Mr. Wells: I admit that I have not had a chance to focus on the IFS analysis of the Budget, and if we start to talk about deciles of the population, we shall soon lose the attention of most of our constituents. I believe that our constituents must experience what happens in their schools, what happens to bus and train fares, what happens to food prices and, if they have a car or a motor cycle, what happens to the cost of petrol, before they decide whether the Budget has been a good thing for them. That is the sort of thing that they understand, although I am sure that those in the IFS will—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

6.9 pm

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Aldershot): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for calling me to speak in the debate. I apologise to the House for not having been present throughout the debate, but I have been in my constituency with the Minister for the Armed Forces. The Minister cut the first sod, which required the tearing up of the tarmac on the old Mons barracks parade ground, for the creation of a brand new, world-class swimming pool and sporting complex for the Army in Aldershot and for wider public use. I was pleased to entertain the Minister in my constituency.

It is significant that, on my return to the House about an hour ago, I was astonished to find that the Chamber was so empty. I had been reading in the newspapers about what a fantastic Budget this was and about how it was being lauded by Labour Members. The tabloid newspapers were swooning over the Chancellor's extraordinary munificence to the British people. I thought that if it was so good, there would be many more Labour Members wishing to participate in the debate. I was shocked to find that there were not.

Mr. Caplin: I understand that the hon. Gentleman had an important constituency engagement, but if he had been present at half-past one, he would have seen a much more crowded Chamber. There have been about 15 speeches on either side, so it has been a well-attended and well-received debate.

Mr. Howarth: There may have been 15 speeches, but I understand that the majority of contributions have come from the Opposition Benches.

Mr. Robert Ainsworth (Lord Commissioner to the Treasury): That is not so.

Mr. Howarth: My hon. Friend the Member for Faversham and Mid-Kent (Mr. Rowe), who has responsibilities similar to those of the hon. Gentleman, tells me that that was the case.

However, I wish to move on, because this is an important Budget. My hon. Friend for Faversham and Mid-Kent said to me on Tuesday while the Order Papers were fluttering and huge cheers were going up on the Labour Benches, "Do you remember when we last witnessed this?" It was in 1989, during the Budget of my noble Friend Lord Lawson. We had cause subsequently to reconsider the impact of that Budget. My hon. Friend said to me, "They will experience the same thing." We have not had to wait months or years for this Budget to unravel: it has done so within a couple of days. This was a Budget of presentation and appearance: it was not a Budget of substance.

I am happy to acknowledge that I agree with one or two measures in the Budget. Some of my hon. Friends felt that mortgage interest tax relief could be allowed to wither on the vine. Indeed, that was the policy of the previous Conservative Government, and we welcomed that. It was inevitable that it would disappear in the natural course of events.

However, the substance of the Budget is much more damaging. It has been presented as a tax-cutting Budget when it is no such thing: it is a tax-increasing Budget. It is old Labour coming back—the tax and spend party. It is astonishing that the Labour party fails ever to acknowledge the sound basis on which the economy was left when the Conservatives left office in 1997. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Warrington, North (Helen Jones) may laugh, but the truth is that, although we got things wrong in the late 1980s and early 1990s, my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke) did a superb job in putting the economy back on track.

It is deeply distressing when Ministers go to the City and say, "Aren't we good, aren't we prudent? We have stuck to the Tories' spending limits." When their hon. Friends ask for more public spending, they say, "I'm sorry, we can't do that, because we are stuck with the Tories' spending limits. We've inherited them." If the economy is in such sound shape, it owes a great deal to the way in which the Conservative Government, under my right hon. Friend the Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major), managed to restore it and put it once more on a sound footing. Labour Members never acknowledged the achievements of the Conservative Government, such as the conquering of inflation and the reduction in interest rates. It is about time that they did so.

Mr. McNulty: Given that the hon. Gentleman is renowned as one of the Conservatives' economic experts, will he remind us of the level of debt that the Conservative Government had got us to by May 1997 and the projected level of debt for this year? If he thought that the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke) was such a genius, did he vote for him in the leadership election?

Mr. Howarth: The great advantage of our party is that we have an extensive range of talent, of which my right hon. and learned Friend is a very good example. We had a rich array from which to choose.

I am well aware of what the hon. Member for Harrow, East (Mr. McNulty) is saying. We allowed the public sector borrowing requirement to grow. Many of us were critical of the fact that we had got to that position.

However, my right hon. and learned Friend had got the problem under control. What is happening now is the natural corollary of the policies put in place by the previous Conservative Government. This Government have continued those policies by sticking to the previous spending limits. I praise them for that, but the policies are Tory, not socialist. They said that they would stick to the spending limits because they wanted to ensure that they did not frighten the middle classes at the election. The best way in which to make themselves appear prudent was to pretend that they were Conservatives. That is how they won the election.

One of the most galling characteristics of the Government, after their lack of respect for the House, is the way in which the Prime Minister repeatedly dismisses the facts put forward by my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition as wrong—and therefore as lies—when it is the Prime Minister who is guilty of misleading the House. My hon. Friend the Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr. Wells) mentioned Anatole Kaletsky's article in *The Times* today. It would be instructive if I mentioned some of the points in it.

Mr. Kaletsky reminds his readers of the question that my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition asked the Prime Minister yesterday:

"'How much has the Government raised taxes in its first three Budgets?' Mr Hague repeatedly demanded. 'We have not raised taxes, we have cut them,' Tony Blair insisted again and again. Yet this was simply false",

Mr. Kaletsky maintains. He continues:

"As shown unambiguously in the Government's own Budget statement, taxes have risen in each of the past two years and will rise even more in the next financial year."

The Prime Minister is incapable of differentiating between the truth and falsehood. I have quoted a respected commentator who has analysed the figures and realised that the Prime Minister's claims are false.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. No Member of Parliament deliberately misleads the House or is involved in any falsehoods.

Mr. Howarth: Thank you for pointing that out to me, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I was simply pointing out what commentators outside the House have been saying.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. Gentleman cannot use someone else's words to defame another Member of Parliament.

Mr. Howarth: I am perfectly content to believe that the Prime Minister had not had time to read all the facts and figures in the Red Book. He may wish to make a correction in the House in due course, when he has had an opportunity to study the various press comments. I did not intend to suggest that the Prime Minister deliberately lied to or misled the House, but I hope that he will pay attention to the remarks of commentators.

Let me refer to one other aspect. Yesterday, the Chancellor said that the Government had cut the social security bill. However, according to table B13 on page 159 of the Red Book, social security benefits are forecast to be £93.5 million this year and to rise to £99.1 million in 1999–2000. That is an increase of twice the rate of inflation; it is not a cut in social security benefits—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

6.20 pm

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough): I speak on behalf of my rural constituents in Lincolnshire for whom car ownership is not a luxury, but an absolute necessity. Some 80 per cent. of householders in rural Lincolnshire need to own a car. My constituency, at 700 sq miles, is the same size as Greater London, which comprises some 70 constituencies. What are those people supposed to do? Many of them are self-employed or pensioners, who will now have to pay £3.13 for a gallon of petrol. They have been hit by the Budget.

I have sat in the Chamber and listened to 15 or 16 Budgets and I have become rather cynical about them. The general rule of thumb is that Budgets tend to increase public spending or the money available to consumers by about 1 per cent. in the two years running up to a general election. In the first two years of a Parliament, they tend to take 1 per cent. from consumers and give it to the Treasury. What the Chancellor gives with one hand he takes back with the other. We live in the real world and we all understand that. However, this year, we have to be aware of the particular hit that has been made against rural people who are utterly reliant on their cars. It is quite disgraceful for the Government to suggest that, in pursuit of some general environmental aim which may or may not be worth while, they can load escalators on to fuel and hit rural people so very hard.

Mr. Caplin: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Leigh: No. I have only five minutes, and I know that others wish to speak.

The next category of person to be affected by the Budget, apart from pensioners, farmers and people who live in rural areas, is the self-employed, who will be hit very hard indeed by the increase in class 4 national insurance contributions. As the Federation of Small Businesses says, this is hitting the

"real entrepreneurs and risk takers".

Road hauliers are also heavily represented in rural areas. We have all received a large number of letters from them, but the Government have ignored their representations. There is a real danger that the flagging-out process will continue apace. It has happened in the past when Britain lost its Merchant Navy. I know of a business that was based in Lincolnshire and has now moved to France because of the far lower costs there. The Road Haulage Association has calculated that, on average, the Budget will cost its members £20,000 extra a year. As fuel accounts for some 36 per cent. of a haulier's budget, one can appreciate the devastating effect of an increase of this magnitude in fuel duty. It is no surprise that the Road Haulage Association referred to the "anger and disbelief" among its membership and the death knell for some 56,000 jobs.

I apologise for having missed the earlier part of the debate, but I was in Committee all afternoon considering the Welfare Reform and Pensions Bill. It is extraordinary that the Government should argue in favour of giving people a wider choice of pensions—the stakeholder pension and the second pension—when they are attacking the contributory principle. Very few people have commented on the fact that the Chancellor is increasing the minimum income guaranteed for pensioners in line with earnings, but not the basic state pension. The basic

[Mr. Leigh]

state pension is no longer withering on the vine; the Government are pouring poison into its roots. It is a direct attack on the contributory principle. One already needs about £40,000 in a private pension fund to make it worth while continuing to invest in a pension; otherwise, one is better off on income support. As the minimum income guarantee increases, there will be less and less incentive for ordinary people to put money aside for their old age, and that is a disaster for our country.

6.25 pm

Mr. Andrew Tyrie (Chichester): One of the most important things to remember about the Labour Government's handling of the economy is that they were elected not to run an alternative economic strategy, but to continue with the one that they inherited. If they had proposed an alternative strategy, as they did in the 1980s, it would again have been rejected by the electorate. A key reason why Labour is in power is that it committed itself lock, stock and barrel to carrying on with almost every aspect of Conservative economic policy, including, for the first two years, sticking to Conservative spending plans.

Mr. Caplin: I realise that the hon. Gentleman has not been in the Chamber all afternoon, but I can inform him that Conservative Members have been complaining about our windfall levy. They cannot have it both ways.

Mr. Tyrie: I am sorry, but I missed part of that point because one or two other people were talking to me at the same time, so I cannot answer it as thoroughly as I would like.

The hon. Member for Harrow, East (Mr. McNulty) suggested that the Government had somehow miraculously brought down the huge debt that they inherited from the Conservative Government. The truth is that Britain is the only major country to have reduced the overall burden of debt as a proportion of gross domestic product in the period from 1979 to 1997. Other countries' debts have risen substantially.

Mr. Gardiner: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Tyrie: I am terribly sorry, but I cannot take any more interventions, as I am told that I have only three minutes left.

That debt reduction was a dramatic and remarkable performance by the Conservative Government over those 18 years.

When the Labour Government came in, they were given the task by the electorate of continuing broadly with the policies that they inherited. Initially, to their credit, they did so. I supported their decision to make the Bank of England independent, although they did not do it in the manner that I would want. They made a bit of a botched job of it, although it seems that they are getting away with it. Further reforms may well be needed to make independence work properly.

The Budget represents some first steps away from the Conservative inheritance and towards picking away at what has made Britain outstandingly successful in the 1980s and 1990s. In the 1960s and 1970s, the United Kingdom economy grew at about two thirds of the European Union average; in the 1980s and 1990s—on any reasonable projection for the remainder of this decade—it grew at slightly more than the EU average. That dramatic transformation in the performance of our economy took place because we got taxes down, deregulated, freed up the economy and brought in a culture of free enterprise.

I am worried that the first salami tactics on those policies are being undertaken by the Labour Government in the Budget. There are large rises in taxation by stealth. If taxes go up, there will be a reduction in our enterprise culture. If regulations are imposed, businesses will be less profitable and less successful.

The Government have introduced a raft of schemes in the Budget, allegedly to improve supply-side performance, that will simply clog up the system with distortions and excessive regulation. The spending on research and development is very hard to justify from the perspective of the economy as a whole.

The absolute heart of the Budget will be whether it promotes growth. On growth, above all other issues, it represents the triumph of hope over probability. The Government say that growth will be strong in the years ahead, when almost every other outside forecaster says something different. With astonishing cheek, the Government have published a table purporting to contain alternative economic scenarios, but it contains only one alternative which is even more upbeat than the Government's forecast of 2.25 per cent. growth in the long term. The Government should have published something more realistic and more in line with what outside forecasters have said. The Government will be judged on long-term growth, and they may well be found wanting.

6.30 pm

Mr. John Whittingdale (Maldon and East Chelmsford): This has been an excellent debate. One of the reasons for that is that 48 hours have passed since the Chancellor delivered his Budget and we have all had the chance to see past the gloss of his speech and have a look at the small print. That has been obvious from the quality of the speeches today, especially from Conservative Members. It has been noticeable that there have been more speeches from Opposition Members than from Labour Members. That point was made by my hon. Friend the Member for Aldershot (Mr. Howarth), but it was questioned by the Whip. Therefore, I wish to place on record the fact that we have heard 18 speeches from Opposition Members compared with 12 speeches from Labour Members. I understand that this is the second day running on which the Government have been unable to find sufficient numbers of supporters to defend the Budget. That is extraordinary when one considers that there are 417 Labour Members of Parliament. Only 12 could be bothered to come to the Chamber today to defend the Chancellor's proposals.

Mr. Gardiner: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that while Conservative Members wish to attack the Budget, my hon. Friends are more concerned about basking in its glory with their constituents?

Mr. Whittingdale: I would have hoped that Labour Members would have Parliament as their first priority, but recent experience shows that that is no longer the case.

Mr. Fallon: While my hon. Friend is on the subject of the morale of Labour Members, would he care to

comment on the news that the German Finance Minister has had to resign for attacking business and championing tax harmonisation? Is not that an example that might be usefully followed here?

Mr. Whittingdale: It is a good precedent, but if it was followed by the Government there would not be very many Ministers left.

My right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition did a superb job on Tuesday in highlighting some of the obvious flaws in the Chancellor's Budget, but he was handicapped by having to rely only on the actual speech delivered by the Chancellor. As we have come to expect from the Chancellor, he spent much time highlighting measures such as the £20 million start-up funding for high-tech venture capital funds, but he made no mention of the £240 million increase in national insurance contributions for the self-employed, a measure that we discovered only when we looked at the Red Book. It is in there under the heading, "Increasing Employment Opportunity". The Chancellor talked a lot about the new starting rate of 10p, which was rightly described by the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) as perhaps the biggest gimmick in the Budget. We discovered later that it will apply to only the first £1,500 of income. The raising of the rate on the next £2,800 of income from 20p to 23p was not mentioned by the Chancellor at all.

Mr. Caplin: I do not wish to stop the hon. Gentleman in full flow, but I consulted *Hansard* this afternoon on that point and my right hon. Friend the Chancellor told the House in his speech on Tuesday that income tax rates would be 10p, 23p and 40p.

Mr. Whittingdale: That is correct, but the hon. Gentleman confirms that the Chancellor did not say that the 20p rate will, from this Budget, be abolished. It would have been nice to hear that from the Chancellor's lips, instead of having to read the Red Book to discover it.

The Chancellor told us that the married couples allowance would be replaced by a new children's tax credit. However, as my hon. Friend the Member for Guildford (Mr. St. Aubyn) pointed out, he glossed over the fact that the married couples allowance will disappear next year, but the children's tax credit will not be introduced until 2001, with the result that families will have a full tax year without either relief. Even when the children's tax credit arrives, it will cost the Exchequer £1,400 million compared with £2,050 million taken in tax as a result of scrapping the married couple's allowance.

Pensioners were told that they would keep the married couples allowance. It transpires, however, that that will be the case only for those who reach retirement age before April next year. If one's children have grown up, and if one is unfortunate enough to have a 65th birthday after April 2000, one will be hit by the full tax increase with no corresponding benefit.

The Chancellor also made no mention of the 11 per cent. rise in duty on diesel, a measure that is a kick in the teeth for the British haulage industry. It will put at risk more than 53,000 jobs.

The Chancellor and the Prime Minister have tried to pretend that the Government are cutting tax. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Hague) said yesterday, and as my hon. Friends the Members for Aldershot, for Surrey Heath (Mr. Hawkins) and for Hertford and Stortford (Mr. Wells) have said today, the truth is precisely the reverse. As a result of the Chancellor's three Budgets, an extra £7.1 billion will be taken in tax this year, an extra £10.5 billion next year and an extra £9.3 billion in the year after that. According to the House of Commons Library, the total increase in tax as a result of the Labour Government's actions will amount to more than £40 billion.

As my right hon. Friend the Member for Fareham (Sir P. Lloyd) pointed out, the tax system will also be made far more complicated. The Chancellor has built on what he did last year to capital gains tax. He has made it so complex that most people believe that he will have to correct his changes in due course. This year, he has made direct taxation more complicated. The one group of people in the community who really will gain from the Budget will be the accountancy profession.

There were some notable omissions in the Chancellor's Budget. There was no help for savers, despite the fact that the savings ratio has fallen by more than 30 per cent. in just two years, a point highlighted by my hon. Friend the Member for Hertford and Stortford.

Mr. Caplin: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Whittingdale: If the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, I shall not, as time is moving on.

It is a direct consequence of the Government's attack on savings that the ratio has fallen. The Government have taxed pension funds and scrapped personal equity plans and tax-exempt special savings accounts, which will be replaced with an unattractive and inferior product. It is hardly surprising that billboards all over London are telling people to put their money into a PEP or a TESSA during the next three weeks before the Government abolish them.

Instead of encouraging saving, the Government have introduced, for the first time in 20 years, differential tax rates for earned income and savings income. I shall not use the phrase "unearned income", because the truth is that savings accumulate as a result of extremely hard work by people up and down the country. In future, the new 10p tax rate will apply only to earned income. The old 20p rate will still apply to savings income.

My hon. Friend the Member for Arundel and South Downs (Mr. Flight) pointed out that the Budget speech contained nothing to relieve charities of their extra tax burden as a result of the abolition of dividend tax credits. Nor was there anything to reverse the most mean and spiteful measure introduced by the Government—tax on dividend income of non-taxpayers. That measure will cost more than 600,000 people on the lowest income an average of £75 a year. Despite all the reassurances from Ministers during last year's Finance Bill Committee, and despite protests from pensioners up and down the country, the Government are going ahead with that measure. The hon. Member for Dudley, South (Mr. Pearson) thought that pensioners would be disappointed that nothing had been done to correct that. They will not be disappointed; they will be very angry indeed.

I shall now deal with individual measures in the Budget. Many groups in the community have been hit badly by the Budget. House purchasers were hit twice over by the abolition of mortgage interest relief and the

[Mr. Whittingdale]

increase in stamp duty. Those measures come at a time when the housing market is unsettled, and there was a fall of 0.5 per cent. in house prices last month.

As my hon. Friends the Members for Guildford and for Beaconsfield (Mr. Grieve) have pointed out, the real burden of the increase in stamp duty falls not on house purchasers but on business. Commercial property is an enormously important asset in the economy, contributing about 10 per cent. of gross domestic product. Yet the increase in stamp duty will immediately reduce the capital value of commercial properties, making it harder for companies—especially small and medium-sized companies—to secure loans to meet their needs. The hon. Member for Cambridge (Mrs. Campbell) made an interesting point when she noted the measure's damaging effect on high-tech companies dealing in intellectual property rights. That again is a direct consequence of the Budget.

Business faces a new threat in the form of an energy tax. The Chancellor claims that it will be revenue neutral, as he intends to cut employers' national insurance contributions. My hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield pointed out that it is vital that he makes it so, but the fact that it will impact most severely on manufacturing industry just when it is in recession and facing huge competition from overseas has been ignored. The additional encouragement for energy efficiency is welcome, but hardly likely to offset the extra burden that the tax imposes. Because it is levied downstream rather than upstream, it cannot affect the type of energy consumed and is likely to result in little environmental benefit. Its effect on the competitiveness of British industry is potentially devastating. The most likely consequence of its introduction is more business closures and lost jobs.

In one area, the Chancellor did not raise tax. He froze duty on beer, wine and spirits. That was a belated but welcome recognition of the huge damage done by the smuggling of alcohol into Britain from abroad, which is a direct result of the enormous differential in duty rates. A freeze will do little good. The present level of duty led to a 25 per cent. increase in smuggling last year alone. On the Government's own figures, that led to a revenue loss of £220 million, a figure which will go on increasing unless something is done. My hon. Friend the Member for Surrey Heath pointed out the effect that that will have on the brewery in his constituency. The hon. Member for Sittingbourne and Sheppey (Mr. Wyatt) recounted his experience of the differentials.

The smuggling and loss of revenue resulting from differential alcohol duty rates pales into insignificance compared with that resulting from tobacco duties. The Chancellor ignored that and increased the rate of duty by a further 5 per cent. That means that the tax on a packet of cigarettes has gone up by 62p under this Government. A packet of 20 now retails at £3.82 compared with less than £2 in France. Last November, the Government estimated the loss of revenue from smuggling at £1 billion. On Tuesday, only four months later, the Chancellor provided a new estimate of £1.5 billion, which is still only half the amount estimated by the industry.

Of course, the Minister will point out that the escalator in duty was introduced under the previous Government. However, there is now overwhelming evidence that it is not working. Tobacco is now smuggled not by opportunists filling their vans, but by organised crime, which has discovered that more money can be made from smuggling tobacco than from hard drugs. Smoking is no longer declining, and a worrying number of young people are taking up the habit. The ability to prevent under-age smoking is being undermined because those who are refused cigarettes at the corner shop can now get them for half the price in the pub car park.

The Red Book shows that despite the increases in duty, revenue from tobacco duties was £8.4 billion in 1997-98, is estimated to have been £8.3 billion in 1998-99 and is forecast to be £7 billion in 1999-2000. We have only to consider the experience with hand-rolling tobacco to see what is likely to happen. While consumption has grown steadily, the proportion taken by UK duty-paid hand-rolling tobacco has fallen year on year, so that more than 70 per cent. of the market is now non-UK duty paid. We are in real danger of the same thing happening in the market for cigarettes.

The Budget measure that has caused most anger, particularly in my constituency, was mentioned by my hon. Friends the Members for Christchurch (Mr. Chope), for Ludlow (Mr. Gill), for South Holland and The Deepings (Mr. Hayes), for Beaconsfield, for Poole (Mr. Syms), and for Arundel and South Downs. The hon. Member for Brent, North (Mr. Gardiner) said that it was synthetic anger but that merely demonstrates that he represents an urban constituency. I refer to the increase in road fuel duties.

I have no doubt that the Minister will say again that the road fuel escalator was introduced by the Conservative Government, but the Labour Government have increased it and brought it forward so that we shall have had three increases in two years. We introduced it when road fuels were cheaper than on the continent. We now have the highest petrol prices in Europe and perhaps the world. The Chancellor has made the escalator steeper, yet for many people, especially in rural areas like mine, there is no alternative to the car. Those people are an easy target for the Chancellor, who is much more interested in raising money than cutting emissions.

One particular group does have a choice, and that is people in the road haulage industry. They have suffered the most as a result of the Budget. Just a few days ago, hundreds of lorry drivers came to Westminster to express their anger at the damage that diesel duty is doing to the British haulage industry. Instead of listening to them, the Chancellor has increased the rate not by 6 per cent., but 11 per cent. It is hardly surprising that the Road Haulage Association has said that hauliers reacted to the Budget with anger and disbelief.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Sevenoaks (Mr. Fallon) said, it is an old rule of thumb that Budgets that receive the greatest plaudits from the press the next morning usually turn out to be the most unpopular and damaging in the long term. The Chancellor certainly got good coverage on Wednesday, but already the shine is coming off, and I have no doubt that as time passes more and more people will come to see that this is a tax-raising Government who achieved office only by lying to the British people.

6.46 pm

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mrs. Barbara Roche): I start on one note of agreement with the hon. Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford

(Mr. Whittingdale). This has been an excellent debate, with many good speeches from the Opposition Benches. However, I thought at one stage that we were about to have a big policy announcement. The hon. Gentleman proudly announced the number of speeches that there had been from the Opposition Benches. Of course, he forgot that three Liberal Members had spoken. Perhaps we are about to see a new Conservative/Liberal Democrat pact. He failed to mention a number of other things, such as the fact that 96 per cent. of properties would be unaffected by the changes in stamp duty.

The hon. Gentleman spoke about the escalator. It is amazing how the Conservative party has collective amnesia, as if the past 18 years had not happened at all. Conservative Members were there. The hon. Gentleman was a Member of Parliament, but he takes no responsibility. Presumably, he just trooped into the Government Lobby then without thinking. Presumably, too, he predicted that his party would lose the next election so that he could disown the Conservative Government's actions as promptly as possible.

I understand what the hon. Gentleman had to say on alcohol and tobacco smuggling. Again, let me sound a note of agreement with him. I agree that we are talking about very serious organised crime. It is worrying, and I know that it worries the police and the law-enforcement authorities. However, if one followed the hon. Gentleman's logic, we would give in to organised crime. Is that really what Conservative Members are saying? I do not think so.

We also had many passionate and good speeches about education from my hon. Friends. We had a very honest admission from the hon. Member for Guildford (Mr. St. Aubyn), whom I remember well from our university days. I think we have debated against each other in the past, although he may have been a member of a different party at the time. [HON. MEMBERS: "Tell us more."] I am well known for my discretion so I will say no more. The hon. Gentleman said that his business went bust as a result of the previous Government's failure of policy.

Mr. St. Aubyn: I am sorry to be reminded tonight that my youthful mistakes were corrected, but the hon. Lady's were not. Perhaps I can help her see the light by making it clear that when a business goes bust, the cause is to do with the business and little to do with the Government of the day. However, under the previous Government, there was always the opportunity to come back and win back, and many of us took that opportunity. There will be far fewer of those opportunities under her Government because of higher taxes and more regulation.

Mrs. Roche: I really do not want to add to the hon. Gentleman's distress. He will, understandably, have ambitions in this place and in the Conservative party, and I should not like to add any further to his discomfort because of his admission. He also mentioned in his speech the huge growth in private pensions under the previous Government he did, however, not mention that the previous Government presided over the pensions mis-selling scandal, which my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary has done so much to correct—for which I pay tribute to her.

Tuesday's Budget was another step on the road to delivering a stronger economic future for Britain. It is a Budget that builds on a strong foundation of economic stability and offers a better deal for business. It is a Budget that delivers a better deal for Britain by rewarding work and, most important, by supporting families. We are locking in economic stability to achieve those aims.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: The Minister said that the Budget will support families. In the Chancellor's entire Budget speech, not once did he mention the word marriage. Marriage and married couples are the big losers in Budget.

Mrs. Roche: I am surprised at the hon. Gentleman—and I was about to say something reasonably nice about him. I still shall. He was absolutely right when he made some very encouraging remarks about our handling of the economy.

An appreciation of families and of children was expressed throughout the Chancellor's speech on Tuesday. When the Chancellor quite rightly said that children are not 20 per cent. but 100 per cent. of our future, the resonance of the remark was felt not only in the House but across the country. The Budget promotes families. Net tax cuts—worth £4 billion—are targeted at working families. *[Interruption.]* Opposition Members may sneer, but they are sneering only because, on Tuesday—as Labour Members clearly saw—their faces dropped and dropped, becoming ever gloomier as the Chancellor continued his speech.

We heard today some very important speeches. I did not understand the point on families made by the hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs (Mr. Flight), but I should give him a little credit—he said that it was not a bad Budget for the economy overall. He made a point on charities, but I should tell him that United Kingdom charities already receive more than £2 billion a year in tax relief. The Government are extremely proud of that record.

As the debate was opened by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, there has been a great concentration on education in the debate. Some incredibly valuable points were made by my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, West (Valerie Davey) on the importance of books and poetry. Hers was a moving speech. I was glad that, at long last in our House, someone is speaking up for literature and poetry.

My hon. Friend the Member for Warrington, North (Helen Jones) quite rightly spoke about Tory failure in education and the legacy that we have had to put right.

The hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis) made some points on education. An Education Minister was in the Chamber at the time, so I am sure that the hon. Gentleman's points will be taken into consideration.

Although the hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Mr. Hayes) is not in the Chamber, I should say that he made some interesting points. I did not agree with them all, but he was very kind and courteous and paid tribute to the speech of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment.

The Government are making work pay, with a new 10p tax rate and a cut in the basic rate to 23p. We are, of course, giving more support to our pensioners, with a rise in the winter allowance to £100. In the debate, some Opposition Members mentioned pensioners. I tell them that I know, both from what I have seen in my own

[Mrs. Roche]

constituency and from what I have heard elsewhere, that our package for pensioners will be warmly welcomed across the country.

We are giving a better deal to lower and middle-income families, with a new children's tax credit and a rise in child benefit, which is very important.

There was also discussion during the debate of macro-economic policy and public finances. The Chancellor was able to deliver such a positive Budget on Tuesday because the Government have dealt prudently with public finances.

Mr. Gill: The Chancellor said on Tuesday that the employers' rate of national insurance would be reduced to 11.7 per cent. How can that be true when the current rate is 10 per cent.?

Mrs. Roche: The hon. Gentleman has misunderstood. *[Interruption.]* It is good to ask questions, but it is also sensible for Conservative Front Benchers to listen to the answers. Our national insurance reforms will help to ease low-paid workers into the employment market. As a result of those reforms, 9,000 people will no longer have to pay national insurance. The Government have implemented some of the recommendations of the Taylor report and provided a real incentive for working families in this country.

The hon. Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr. Wells) made a thoughtful speech in which he raised several valuable points about public finances, as did my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, East (Mr. McNulty)—particularly regarding macro-economic policy. The hon. Member for Poole (Mr. Syms) mentioned savings. The worst enemy of savers in this country is high inflation, which is why the Government have introduced the relevant fiscal measures.

I remind Opposition Members that the savings ratio collapsed to just 3 per cent. in 1988—that is a record of which they should be really ashamed. The hon. Member for Aldershot (Mr. Howarth) made some welcome remarks about public debt. I thought that the hon. Member for Chichester (Mr. Tyrie) would congratulate the Government on clearing up the Tory mess, but he failed to do so. *[Interruption.]* I live in hope that the Conservatives will come to their senses, realise why they are in opposition and try to improve their fortunes.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge (Mrs. Campbell) made an excellent speech about the importance of science and the science base. She raised several valuable points—she always does—and I pay tribute to her great expertise in that area.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sittingbourne and Sneppey (Mr. Wyatt) also made a valuable contribution about the importance of information technology. He referred also to venture capital and productivity. The Government are attempting to reduce the productivity gap—which stands at 40 per cent. vis-à-vis the United States. That is why the growth measures in the Budget that the hon. Member for Chichester attempted to denigrate are so important.

Mr. Tyrie *rose—*

Mrs. Roche: I am sorry, but I have only a short time left to speak. I have been generous in giving way.

My hon. Friends the Members for Hove (Mr. Caplin) and for Lewisham, East (Ms Prentice) made some interesting points about the film industry with which I agree absolutely. I should point out that my constituency is well known in London as the setting of the wonderful film "Truly, Madly, Deeply". The film "Fever Pitch" was also filmed in my constituency.

There were many contributions about the small business measures, which were warmly welcomed by my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, North (Mr. Gardiner). The hon. Members for Bath (Mr. Foster) and for Sevenoaks (Mr. Fallon) also made some generous comments. I was disappointed that the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mr. Chope), who I know takes an interest in these matters, did not welcome the measures more warmly. The hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Mr. Hawkins) cast some doubt on the business expertise on this side of the House.

It being Seven o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

Debate to be resumed on Monday next.

SCOTTISH GRAND COMMITTEE

Ordered,

That, in respect of the sitting of the Scottish Grand Committee on Monday 22 March, Standing Order No. 99 (Scottish Grand Committee (substantive motions for the adjournment) shall have effect with the substitution in paragraph (2) (b) of the word "seven" for the word "ten".—*[Mr. Robert Ainsworth.]*

Supermarkets (North Norfolk)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Robert Ainsworth.]*

7 pm

Mr. David Prior (North Norfolk): As many hon. Members will know, supermarkets have had a major impact on our environment and our way of life. They offer variety, quality and, perhaps above all, convenience. There are more than 1,200 supermarkets of over 25,000 sq ft. The multiple chains, dominated by Asda, Safeway, Tesco and Sainsbury's, control some 75 per cent. of food retailing in this country, of which over 50 per cent. is now own label. To a large extent, they also control food production. At some time, surely we shall have reached saturation point, and in some areas I have no doubt that we have gone beyond it.

The massive impact of supermarkets was confirmed by the recent report by CB Hillier Parker, commissioned by the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, called "The Impact of Large Foodstores on Market Towns and District Centres". The report is of particular interest to me because five new supermarkets are proposed for north Norfolk, and I have seen at first hand in Cromer and Fakenham how a supermarket can affect the high street and local shops and producers. The report was welcomed by the Minister, who said:

"The research firmly established that out of town supermarkets can seriously damage the health of small towns and district centres. Arguments about clawing back trade and creating jobs simply do not hold water."

Let us briefly examine the impact of a supermarket. Most obviously, it has a direct impact on the town centre and the high street, especially in rural towns, many of which are already under great pressure. The Hillier Parker report took a close look at Fakenham when Safeway opened in 1994. It found a 64 per cent. decline in the market share taken by town centre convenience shops.

It is not just food retailers that suffer. Supermarkets now account for some 25 per cent. of all petrol sales, and 2,000 independent garages are going out of business each year. Similarly, 10,000 newsagents are predicted to close over the next three years. Home delivery of milk, pharmacies and a wide range of other services are under threat. The research demonstrates that smaller towns such as those in my constituency are less able to adjust than larger town centres and that a new store can supplant the role of the town centre. In addition, the research confirms that the trade that is clawed back as a result of a new store rarely leads to any tangible benefits for a town centre.

Village shops are also threatened, and many have closed. Many villages have no community services at all. For people without a car, the closure of the shop is a disaster and can lead to social isolation because the shop not only sells goods, but is a meeting place and provides an invaluable service, especially to older people.

Local food producers are also at risk. Work by Lady Caroline Cranbrook has revealed that local traders source a surprisingly large amount of their produce from local suppliers. In a survey of 81 food shops close to Saxmundham in east Suffolk, she found 295 local and regional suppliers. It is not unusual for a butcher to buy the meat from local farms, slaughter it locally and produce his own range of sausages, freezer packs and cooked meats. Eggs, drinks, bread, fruit, honey, vegetables, sauces and jams are all typical local foods.

Mr. John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings): Does my hon. Friend acknowledge that the impact on communities of the close relationship between producer, retailer and consumer is uniquely created by the network of small shops and producers that he describes? In my constituency in Lincolnshire, communities thrive and rely on that very relationship.

Mr. Prior: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Lady Cranbrook took a particular look at farm shops. She found that eight farm shops source products from 86 local producers and 11 local wholesalers, as well as providing 22 full-time jobs, 28 part-time jobs and 100 jobs for seasonal casual workers. That well illustrates my hon. Friend's point.

There are also transport implications. Supermarkets, especially ones out of town, generate traffic. Nowadays, 75 per cent. of us use the car to do our shopping. Supermarkets also generate delivery traffic, with heavy lorries. Centralised stocking and distribution systems mean that food is transported for hundreds of miles.

There is also the effect on jobs. It is a myth that supermarkets create jobs. Research by the National Retail Planning Forum into the effect of opening 93 supermarkets concluded that each one resulted in a net loss of 276 full-time jobs. Large supermarkets inevitably increase the trend of large farms, large fields, longer travelling times, more traffic, large abattoirs and large processing plants. Is that the kind of society that we want?

Mr. Tony Colman (Putney) *rose—*

Mr. Prior: I am happy to give way to the hon. Gentleman, whose mother lives in Sheringham in my constituency.

Mr. Colman: As somebody who was born and bred in north Norfolk, I support the broad thrust of the hon. Gentleman's proposals. But, as somebody who is very concerned about the high prices in many of the shops in many rural towns in north Norfolk, may I suggest that an answer could be the smaller supermarket shops which Tesco and Sainsbury are tending to develop, which are of no more than 10,000 sq ft or 20,000 sq ft and could ensure that people who live in north Norfolk are able to enjoy the much lower prices that supermarket chains can offer, as well as real competition, without the damage undoubtedly done by large supermarkets and large out-of-town developments?

Mr. Prior: The hon. Gentleman makes a point, but it does not answer the one about local supplies from local producers.

The Minister summed up the position well in a speech in Birmingham on 5 November 1998, in which he said:

"We want to focus new development in town centres, to secure their revitalisation, to ensure greater social inclusion and to achieve environmental benefits, particularly less dependence upon the car. This is not a pious hope. We have a clear policy to focus development in town centres and we are going to stick to it."

[Mr. Prior]

In a speech in Wellington on 25 September 1998, the Minister said:

"The impact of superstores is greatest on smaller towns and where the superstores include a wide range of in-store services, such as dry cleaners, pharmacies and banking facilities. They effectively take over the traditional town centre activities and can seriously threaten the viability of existing town centre facilities. The smaller the town or district centre, the less they are able to cope with the threat.

But it is not just a question of what the store sells. If a superstore is disproportionately large compared with the amount of shopping in the centre, then it can again swamp the centre. And that applies whether the store is located in the town centre, on the edge of the town centre or out of town."

Given all that background and the Minister's comments, it is pretty hard to understand why north Norfolk is confronted with five new supermarkets in addition to the four that we already have. At various stages in the planning process, there are plans for supermarkets at Stalham, North Walsham, Sheringham, Wells and Aylsham.

I am not for one minute advocating a blanket ban on all those proposals—far from it. There may be strong arguments in favour of an individual proposal, and I accept that public opinion is never at one on the issue. That is illustrated by the excellent work of year 6 children at Millfield primary school in North Walsham. About half the children were for a new supermarket, and half against. Those against felt that it would ruin the town and create more traffic, and those for felt that they needed a wider range of shops and that it would put North Walsham on the map. Their views probably reflect those of the adult population.

I feel strongly that the planning procedure, especially planning policy guidance note—PPG—6, should be tightened up and made more effective, so that the overall impact of a supermarket can be taken fully into account prior to planning permission being granted.

Indeed, the Minister recognised that when he stated:

"Over recent years . . . assessment has become more complex about the best way to assess impact. PPG6 gives quite a lot of guidance, but it needs to be bolstered. . . The main message"—

of the Hillier Parker report—

"and one which heartens me greatly, is that they wish PPG6 to be strengthened."

Hillier Parker made a number of recommendations, which the Minister should consider urgently. First, the need for a new food store should be more clearly defined in PPG6. The method used, for example, in the Nathaniel Lichfield study in Norfolk does not have sufficient credibility.

Secondly, the distance guideline of 200 m to 300 m in PPG6 may be too wide. It is essential that people can walk from the supermarket straight into the high street. Thirdly, all new food store proposals for stores of more than 1,000 sq m should be accompanied by an independent assessment of their impact, using the CREATE methodology proposed by Hillier Parker. At present, such studies are often paid for by the retailer, and are neither independent nor comprehensive.

To those three points, I would add further suggestions. First, PPG6 should be extended to include as a material consideration the effect on the rural hinterland, as well as the effect on the town and the village. That would include farm shops and local food producers. It would also assess the traffic implications.

Secondly, consideration should be given to adopting a provision similar to the loi Raffarin in France, which requires a public inquiry into any new development in excess of 6,000 sq m. The French Minister described the law as being designed to defend

"social and economic cohesion and the fabric of society",

which shows how seriously the French take the matter.

Thirdly, high street shops affected by a supermarket development should be eligible for a rates review, and for rate relief, which has already been introduced for village shops. That should be funded, at least in part, by increasing the uniform business rate charged to supermarkets. Moreover, it is quite wrong that the new food tax should apply to all food outlets at the same rate of £90, regardless of their size.

Fourthly, supermarkets should be encouraged to develop national policies for sourcing local products, and planning permission for supermarkets should include a condition that a certain amount of floor space be devoted to locally sourced food.

Finally, the financial balance between hard-pressed district councils and supermarkets should be recognised. It is wrong that district councils can be bought off so easily by section 106 agreements, and wrong that district councils sometimes feel unable to press their case, for fear of being liable to costs if an appeal is lost.

The Minister accepts that PPG6 needs to be bolstered and strengthened. He accepts Hillier Parker's findings. He has said:

"When we revise PPG6 we will certainly take Hillier Parker's recommendations into account."

He has said that he wants to bring about a renaissance of our market towns. He has said that that should not be a pious hope. He has it in his power to do that. I hope that he will tell the House today that the time for talking and researching is over, and that the time for action has begun.

7.13 pm

The Minister for the Regions, Regeneration and Planning (Mr. Richard Caborn): I congratulate the hon. Member for North Norfolk (Mr. Prior) on initiating the debate. I fully understand why he has raised the subject, but I am sure that he will understand that I cannot comment on the merits of any case to which he referred that is the subject of a planning application. For me to do so could fetter the impartiality of the Secretary of State, should the case be referred to him at a later date.

I am pleased that the hon. Gentleman has chosen the subject, as we are concerned about what is happening in the rural economy and about the quality of life and the opportunities open to people in rural areas. We recognise the importance of maintaining the vitality and viability of market towns such as those in north Norfolk.

I am familiar with the problems of north Norfolk, and I appreciate the strong interest taken by all the local Members of Parliament. Our research on the impact of supermarkets on market towns—which, incidentally, chose Fakenham for a case study—shows what can happen. I therefore welcome the opportunity to respond to the debate and to set out Government policy.

I remind the hon. Gentleman that, under the previous Administration, 50 per cent. of all out-of-town shopping was built in five years, from the late 1980s to the early 1990s. That was unmanageable, and I am sure that he will reflect on the possible mistakes made by the Administration whom he supported, but let me assure him that the Government are committed to tackling the problems faced by rural areas and to creating sustainable rural communities. We want to make rural communities attractive places in which to live, to create more opportunities for all types of people who live there and to enable those people to take part in decisions affecting their lives.

That is why we are producing a rural White Paper; rural England is changing and we must respond to those changes. The White Paper will look at the long-term future of the rural areas and our policies, across the board, will support sustainable rural communities for the future. It will present our vision for rural areas to complement our urban White Paper. We will therefore be looking closely at how the urban and rural White Papers can complement each other to build a clear and comprehensive strategy for the future.

The hon. Gentleman may be aware that we recently issued a discussion document, "Rural England". That sets the context for the rural White Paper and poses questions on a wide range of issues, on which we invite comment. However, it is vital that a local authority's vision for its area should address specifically the needs of the rural areas, including the relationship between town and country; where and how local facilities, such as shopping, should be provided; and, in particular, the role of the small market towns. That vision must be projected in development plans.

The thrust of the Government's planning policy for rural areas, which is set out in planning policy guidance note 7, is that change through development should improve the environment, as well as yielding economic and social benefits. New developments outside the existing settlements or areas not allocated for development in the development plans should be strictly controlled. That is particularly true of supermarkets.

The Government's planning policy on retail development was set out in our response to the Select Committee's report of July 1997 on shopping centres. Our response reaffirmed our commitment to PPG6, which deals with town centres and retail developments, and aims to sustain and enhance the vitality and viability of our existing centres in urban and rural areas by focusing new development and investment, particularly for retail and leisure uses, in them. In rural areas that means getting supermarkets into town centres, but it also means protecting village shops at the same time.

We also want to ensure the availability of a wide range of shops, employment, services and facilities to which people have easy access through a choice of means of transport. We encourage local planning authorities to be proactive in planning to accommodate new retail development, which means that they should first assess the need for additional retail development as a basis for preparing their development plan strategies and policies for accommodating such development. They should aim to safeguard and strengthen the local centres and the rural economy.

Having established their need for further development, in quantitative and qualitative terms, local planning authorities should then apply a sequential approach to identifying suitable locations and sites to accommodate their need. That approach places the onus on the local authorities and the developers to develop town centre sites first or, failing that, sites on the edge of town, before looking at out-of-centre sites.

If there is no need for additional development, there will be no need to identify additional sites. Local planning authorities should adopt a plan-led approach to handling planning applications involving new retail developments. As we have recently made it clear, where retail development is proposed, but was not envisaged in the development plan, applicants should show the need for additional facilities, and that a sequential approach has been applied to the selection of the site.

When that has been established, and if an out-of-centre site has been chosen, the local planning authority is now required to take into account the likely harm to the development plan strategy, accessibility by a choice of means of transport, the likely effect of the proposals on overall travel patterns and the likely impact on the vitality and viability of existing centres, and on the rural economy. I think that responds to the claim in the report that the definition of need should be strengthened and clarified.

That last factor is especially relevant to the debate. The hon. Gentleman identified a number of problems that can result from large retail developments in rural areas, including their possible impact on the lives of local people, on employment, purchasing and supply chains, and on the local economy. Taken individually, those factors may be deemed to be "material planning considerations". As the hon. Gentleman may know, only the courts can determine the position; but, taken overall, the impact of a proposal on the vitality and viability of the rural economy is a material planning consideration that local authorities should take into account in deciding planning applications involving retail development. There is scope for local planning authorities to consider those factors, and to determine whether collectively they would have an adverse impact on their town centres and/or the rural economy more generally.

The scale of new supermarkets is another important factor, especially in relation to rural areas and market towns such as Fakenham, Stalham and Wells. That is why PPG6 advises local authorities to adopt policies that encourage appropriately sized local supermarkets, relative to the size and type of centre to be served. Authorities should discourage inappropriate proposals—proposals for developments for which the need has not been established, or for developments that are too large in relation to the centre. To do that, planning authorities will need to understand the need for additional retail floor space, in terms of both quantity and quality. They will also need a clear vision and strategy for their centres, and clear plan policies based on that.

The hon. Gentleman referred to a report published recently by my Department, entitled "The Impact of Large Foodstores on Market Towns and District Centres". The researchers looked specifically at the impact of large food stores on the edges of towns, and out of town, on market towns and district centres. The report confirmed that large food stores built on the outskirts of market towns attract people at the expense of town centres, and do not add to

[Mr. Richard Caborn]

net overall employment in food retail. The hon. Gentleman mentioned that. With fewer people visiting the town centre, trade would be lost, there would be less new investment, and closures and overall job losses could well result.

The report confirms what we already know: large food stores on the edge of market towns can seriously damage the vitality and viability of their centres. It provides further justification for the Government's policy.

Mr. Prior: When does the Minister plan to incorporate some of the recommendations of the Hillier Parker report in PPG6, and strengthen the guideline, in the way that he has talked about publicly on other occasions?

Mr. Caborn: I hope that, when the hon. Gentleman reads my speech in *Hansard*, he will see that we are strengthening the guidelines. We are defining need, and what can be considered material, in regard to planning authorities throughout the country. We have a plan-led system, which evolves through the democratic process. I hope that planning authorities take account of what I have said this evening, and that it will be "material" to their planning regimes.

I believe that the future of local shops and services in market towns is crucial to the quality of rural life. It is therefore essential to plan new retail developments, especially supermarkets, with great care. We must ensure that where there is a need for additional food stores, they are developed. We must also ensure that we carefully consider the possible impacts of additional retail development, especially on market towns and the rural economy, before we allow them.

I am committed to bringing new life into our town and local centres in both urban and rural areas—I believe that the hon. Member for North Norfolk mentioned that. Supermarkets should be located to reinforce the strength of our centres and small towns in rural areas, not to undermine them.

I believe that PPG6 enables local planning authorities to plan positively to encourage the right development in the right place, and to effectively prevent new retail development that would have adverse impacts on the vitality and viability of existing centres in rural areas, and on the rural economy. We are closely considering ways in which we may help them to implement the policy effectively, and to improve day-to-day practice.

I believe that I have very fully answered the points that the hon. Member for North Norfolk raised. His speech clearly showed that action must be taken. The Government are taking that action, and we are very clear in our minds that we shall not only drive the urban renaissance but renew our rural economies.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-six minutes past Seven o'clock.

House of Commons

Friday 12 March 1999

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Orders of the Day

Mental Health (Amendment) (Scotland) Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

9.33 am

Mr. Eric Clarke (Midlothian): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

This is a little Bill—in Scotland, we would call it a small or a wee Bill—but it will serve the major purpose of helping some of our most unfortunate and disadvantaged fellow citizens. It will address a gap in the legislation enacted by our predecessors 15 years ago. The Mental Health (Scotland) Act 1984 was a consolidation measure: it consolidated the Mental Health (Scotland) Act 1960 and later amendments. We are dealing with legislation that is 40 years old.

Time marches on, and with it changes take place. The intervening period has seen wide-ranging changes in society's attitudes to people who are mentally ill. I am glad to say that there is no longer the unacceptable stigma that once attached to the illness and to those who suffer from it. There have been welcome advances in treatment and, more relevant to the purpose of my Bill, there have been changes in where people are cared for.

The availability of good-quality community care has meant that far fewer patients are cared for in hospital: they are now looked after in the community, be it in their own home, a nursing home or a residential establishment. By and large, I welcome such developments if they are clearly shown to be in the patients' best interests.

However, the growth of community care has identified a difficulty in the 1984 Act relating to the finances of patients who leave hospital. I shall explain a little of the background. Section 94 of the 1984 Act makes provisions for hospital managers to manage the funds of patients who, because of mental disorder, cannot look after their own resources. The legislation provides that managers can do that only if a doctor states that, in his opinion, the patient is unable to manage his own affairs. If no other arrangements have previously been made—for example, a patient's funds may be managed by the Mental Welfare Commission, the local authority or a relative—the hospital managers may receive and hold money on behalf of the patient. That may be a regular income from a pension or savings in the patient's possession.

I am sure that hon. Members agree that patients should benefit from the money held by hospital managers. Their needs may be small, but they are important. Such arrangements are part and parcel of the overall effort to ensure that such people enjoy an appropriate quality of life while in hospital. They may want a particular item of clothing, a magazine each week, flowers in their room or the occasional special outing. It is important that they should be able to benefit from their own resources for such purposes. The 1984 Act enables hospital managers to spend the funds that they hold in the patient's best interest.

Hon. Members will be wondering, given what I have just said, where the problem lies and why my Bill is necessary. The difficulty comes when the patient leaves hospital and is cared for in the community. As I have said, community care is now increasingly widespread, and many patients, such as people with a learning disability, who may at one time have expected to live their days in a long-stay hospital, can now live a fulfilling life in the community with appropriate support. Similarly, elderly patients may prefer the more homely surroundings of a care home.

Unfortunately, the 1984 Act did not envisage a time when the patient would live anywhere but in a hospital. We are dealing with legislation of considerable vintage, which has not kept pace with modern concepts of care and treatment. The problem is that, when those people leave hospital, managers cannot pass the money on to the carers or spend it on behalf of the patient who is no longer in their direct care. Sometimes special arrangements can be made, but they are costly.

The Act contains no provision for those circumstances, and the money becomes stuck in the hospital, out of reach of the patient and of those who look after him. The patient cannot benefit from his own resources. We cannot allow that situation to continue, and my Bill aims to address the problem. It will enable hospital managers holding funds on behalf of patients to continue to use that money in patients' best interests when the patients leave hospital to live in the community.

This may seem a relatively minor difficulty, but it is indefensible to deny patients access to their own resources simply because they have left hospital. We want to ensure that such people enjoy the highest possible quality of life. Moreover, statistics show that many patients are affected. I am sure that many hon. Members will describe the way in which the problem affects their constituents. The position can only get worse as time goes by, and more and more patients leave hospital. We are dealing with a growing problem, but my Bill offers a means of addressing it.

It is not my hope that the Bill will, like the 1960 Act, last for 40 years. My further wish is for the introduction of comprehensive legislation to deal with the finances of incapable people, based on the consultations on the Scottish Law Commission's report, at an early stage in the Scottish Parliament. That would not only deal with this problem, but, hopefully, provide new arrangements for the management of the resources of incapable adults that are appropriate to the 21st century.

I hope that hon. Members will feel able to support my Bill.

9.42 am

Mr. Tony Baldry (Banbury): I congratulate the hon. Member for Midlothian (Mr. Clarke) on presenting a thoroughly worthwhile measure, which is doubtless supported by the Government. At least, I hope that it is. It clearly has a very good chance of becoming law.

[Mr. Tony Baldry]

Although I have a Scottish mother and many of my relations still live in Scotland, I realise that many Scottish Members wish to speak, so I promise to be brief.

Although welcome, the Bill will prove worth while only if adequate safeguards and protections for discharged patients are provided. Those who have read the Bill may have a number of specific concerns, but no doubt the hon. Gentleman and Ministers will be able to reassure us in due course.

It is impractical for hospitals to continue to manage money for any great length of time on behalf of patients who have moved to other locations. As I have said, there must be adequate safeguards, and the funds must be reviewed. The Bill can only serve as a stop-gap reform pending the introduction of comprehensive legislation, and I suspect that at some stage, the Government will want to introduce such legislation. Some aspects of the existing provision for hospital management are outmoded and unsatisfactory, and will have to be dealt with either in this Bill or, as soon as possible, in further legislation.

At present, if patients are still legally incapable when discharged from hospital—and most are—the hospital cannot hand over their money. It can no longer spend the money for them, and cannot pass it to someone else who can look after it. Under existing law, the only solution is the appointment of a curator, and that can make the situation worse, as it involves petition, formal medical certification and expensive management arrangements. No one who has considered the issue will think that such an appointment is suitable to deal with the modest amounts of savings typically managed by hospitals.

I have a few specific questions, with which I am sure the Minister will be able to deal. The Bill will allow hospital managers to spend the money that they hold on behalf of patients—the Bill refers to the "benefit" of patients—after their discharge from hospital. Section 94 of the Mental Health (Scotland) Act 1984 allows a manager to

"expend that money or dispose of those valuables for the benefit of that person and in the exercise of the powers conferred by this subsection the managers shall have regard to the sentimental value that any article may have for the patient, or would have but for his mental disorder."

First, what is the precise definition of benefit to the patient? Secondly, if the manager does spend money to the benefit of the patient, what rights have the patient's family if they disagree with that spending? Thirdly, in the event of such a disagreement, what provisions are there for arbitration?

If an incapax patient who has been discharged, and whose money is being held by hospital managers, is subsequently deemed to be able to manage his own affairs, will the Bill automatically give that patient the right to assume control of his or her assets? Would such a former patient no longer deemed to be incapax have any right of redress, against spending of his money by managers, which he subsequently believed was not to his benefit? Is there any provision for the establishment of an independent body to oversee managers' actions in spending the assets of a discharged incapax patient, and to ensure that those managers are acting in the patient's best interests? If not, should there not be such a body?

I suspect that all my questions merely require clarification. No doubt the Minister and his Department have given thought to them, and will be able to reassure us. As I have said, the Bill is clearly worth while, and worth supporting.

9.47 am

Dr. Gavin Strang (Edinburgh, East and Musselburgh): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak, and to support my hon. Friend the Member for Midlothian (Mr. Clarke). He is indeed a very good friend, who represents a constituency near to mine. It was characteristic of him to use his success in the ballot to present a measure that will bring so much benefit to a vulnerable group, although that group does not consist of many people in Scotland today.

About 100,000 people in Scotland are believed to be unable to look after their affairs as a result of mental disorder. That figure is not accurate, but it is the best estimate that has been made, and, as people live longer and more develop Alzheimer's disease or other forms of dementia, it will probably increase rather than decreasing. Medical science has not yet made much impact on such conditions.

As my hon. Friend said, a small number of these people have no legal representative, no relative, no friend—no one who can look after their affairs for them. As he also said, special consideration was given to them in the Mental Health (Scotland) Act 1984 by authorising hospital managers to hold money and valuables, and to spend money on their behalf. I know that there is concern about the fairness and manageability of the system, but I was surprised to learn that no change had been made to reflect the move towards community care. As a result, the funds of those who leave hospital can be trapped with hospital managers, and cannot be used for their benefit.

As my hon. Friend said, it is estimated that over the coming year, another 540 patients could be caught in the trap. That would bring the number of patients affected to 750, and £3 million of their property would be frozen and could not be used on their behalf. For example, should the patient or someone on his or her behalf appeal to the Department of Social Security for income support or some other type of financial benefit, that appeal could be debarred on the ground that the individual had a capital sum, although it could not be accessed on his or her behalf. That is an important matter, which my hon. Friend seeks to deal with in the Bill.

The funds can be accessed in Scotland only by petition to appoint a curator bonis in each individual case. As lawyers will know, and I am not one, that legal process can be quite costly. By allowing hospital managers to continue to hold and to spend patients' funds on their behalf even after they have left hospital, the Bill will meet an urgent need. As my hon. Friend has pointed out, it is supported by the Law Society of Scotland. In its most recent report, the Mental Welfare Commission for Scotland also came out in support of such a Bill.

My hon. Friend made the important point that it is a narrow reform which deals with a particular difficulty involving a number of people. What is desperately required is major legislation on mental health in Scotland. Obviously, we have to look to the Scottish Parliament to deliver that.

It is clear that Scottish law has fallen well behind in some areas. The fact that a so-called tutor at law—appointed to look after a patient's finances—must be the

patient's nearest male relative on the father's side brings home to us how archaic some of the components of the law are.

Tutors at law are appointed under the Curators Act 1585. I understand that 100 years went by without one being appointed. Obviously, some judge or official discovered the measure in our history and was able to start to appoint tutors at law again. Some areas of the law have stood still for 400 years, but services have changed a great deal.

There is consensus that, where possible, people with mental health problems should be supported in the community, rather than in our great old institutions. I say consensus because there has again been some debate about the matter. I was looking at the exchanges in the House on 8 December between my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health and hon. Members, when he addressed the issue of individuals who, as a result of mental problems, are a potential danger not only to themselves, but to society at large. There has been at least one tragic incident in this city where a mentally handicapped person has committed murder, so it is not an easy issue.

The issue has been thoroughly addressed. I was quite surprised that the Secretary of State said that he thought that care in the community was not succeeding, although the Opposition spokeswoman, the right hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe), and a number of Labour Back Benchers take the view—I think that it is the view in Scotland—that it is the right policy. There is no question but that we need to move people out of institutions into more friendly establishments—houses where two or three can live with adequate support, usually voluntary organisation or housing association accommodation. Without doubt, our experience in Lothian is that it is a beneficial policy.

In Lothian, we have the Gogarburn hospital, an institution that is situated in Gogar just to the west of Edinburgh. Just over five years ago, a five-year joint transfer programme was agreed, based on a partnership between the Lothian health board, local council social work and housing departments, the hospital trust and Scottish Homes. Working together, those people have organised the transfer of patients from Gogarburn to suitable accommodation in the community. About 250 patients have been discharged into care homes or housing projects, with the remaining 40 or so due to be relocated by May. When we bear in mind the fact that a few of those people had been in that establishment for more than 60 years, we can understand the trauma involved and the importance of handling these things sensibly and sensitively. I pay tribute to the staff involved.

I had a constituency case of a middle-aged person with mental health problems who had been discharged from Gogarburn. Hon. Members will understand the concern of the family who came to see me. I was tremendously impressed by the way in which that individual's needs were dealt with, by the range of accommodation that was available in Edinburgh for that person, and by the way in which the family were involved in the decision on where to accommodate that individual. I pay tribute to the way in which Lothian health board has handled the issue to the benefit of our people.

Of course, there is still much to be done in the mental health sector. We still need to erase the Cinderella-service image and remove the taboo that is attached to mental health problems. The Government have demonstrated great commitment to mental health. Under the leadership of the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland, my hon. Friend the Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden (Mr. Galbraith), the national health service in Scotland has made mental health one of its three clinical priorities for the coming three years.

In their first year of office, the Government promised a new framework for mental health services. In December, the Under-Secretary announced that he was setting up a committee to review the Mental Health Act 1983, which will report to Ministers in the Scottish Parliament by the summer of 2000. I am sure that that will be an excellent report, not least because the chairman of the committee is a certain Mr. Bruce Millan, who is probably well known to a number of hon. Members in the House. He will certainly be known to colleagues who have been here for a few years—I see my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) nodding his head. I think that a few others were in the House when Bruce Millan was here. Afterwards, he became a European Commissioner and continued to do much valuable work for the community; he is no longer on the Commission.

A major review is being carried out into that mental health issue in England and Wales. I have no doubt that, when the issues come to be addressed, and when the comprehensive legislation that my hon. Friend the Member for Midlothian referred to comes forward in the Scottish Parliament, Members of the Scottish Parliament will take into account the review that has been set up by the Under-Secretary and the report that, I hope, will be available on the studies in England and Wales.

The Bill is not only important, but a significant reminder that big legislation is required from the Scottish Parliament. The whole House will probably encourage that Parliament to ensure that, within a few years—within, I hope, two or three years—of it being established, it will deal with that big issue.

In advance of a full incapable adults Bill going through the Scottish Parliament, today's short Bill deals with a problem that faces some of the most vulnerable people in Scotland. I am grateful to have had the chance to give it my support.

9.57 am

Mrs. Ray Michie (Argyll and Bute): I, too, congratulate the hon. Member for Midlothian (Mr. Clarke) on introducing this short, but worthwhile Bill. I am glad to have my name included with those who support it. As we have already heard, it is timely because, while the Scottish Parliament is expected to introduce comprehensive legislation following the outcome of the report on incapable adults, that will take time. If the Bill goes through—I am sure it will—it will have early effect and bring early benefit for the many more patients who are being discharged back into the community.

In my constituency, the Bill has been welcomed by the physician superintendent of Argyll and Bute hospital, Dr. Angus Mackay. When he saw the draft of it, he reckoned that it was worth while and was delighted that the hon. Member for Midlothian was introducing it.

I have a couple of questions for the Minister. Does the Bill allow hospital management to hand over the patient's money to someone or some body that might have responsibility for the person once he or she is discharged?

[Mrs. Ray Michie]

If so, that person or body would have to be chosen with great care, particularly if the patient were going into a residential home.

If that does not happen, I presume that the hospital will still manage the money for the patient, but it could have considerable difficulty in continuing to expend the funds for the benefit of a former patient if that patient moved away to another area—say, to the south of England. We have to ensure also that hospital authorities are not caught up in a lot of extra bureaucracy in administering and managing former patients' funds. If it is true that any money left after a patient dies goes to the Crown, that is not good or right.

With those few remarks, I am very happy to support the Bill.

10 am

Mrs. Irene Adams (Paisley, North): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Midlothian (Mr. Clarke) for giving the House an opportunity to debate a very important issue. As we all know, when an hon. Member is fortunate enough to come high in the draw for private Members' Bills, he or she will be inundated with requests from many different types of groups and societies to champion their cause by introducing legislation expressing their point of view. I am certain that my hon. Friend's experience was no different.

My hon. Friend could have chosen almost any subject that anyone might care to mention. He could have chosen to promote a Bill of headline-grabbing proportions—dealing with a cause that would have filled the House to capacity, or caused great division, not to mention tremendous controversy. We all know that reputations in the House have often been made by championing causes that are now—so oddly—considered to be "sexy" subjects.

My hon. Friend, however, has not sought to bathe himself in glory or to seek eternal gratitude. He has chosen instead to promote an amendment to the Mental Health (Scotland) Act 1984 and, if his Bill is successful, some of the people whom he will help will scarcely be aware of how or from where that benefit comes.

The nature of the legislation that my hon. Friend has chosen to promote and to amend speaks volumes of the man himself. With this Bill, he has chosen—as he has done his entire life—to fight the corner of those in society who are least able to fight for themselves.

The Bill, as my hon. Friend said, is a small one, and is probably only the start of a legislative process on incapable adults. I am sure that the new Scottish Parliament will be only too glad to build on that process very quickly. Today, however, in a small Bill, we have the opportunity to make a big difference in the lives of, currently, about 700 people in Scotland, some 60 of whom are in the Argyll and Clyde area in which my constituency is located.

So many people take not only the big things, but the little things in life for granted, such as being able to buy a magazine, some flowers or a record—or CD. I am harking back to when we played records; I still have some 78s.

My constituency is served by two units that house incapable adults. The whole House should take the opportunity to thank those who work in such units. On behalf of us all, they perform an often thankless and under-appreciated task.

Over the years, the units have improved greatly. They are very homely now, and have been home to some of my constituents for up to 30 or 40 years. I am sure that my constituents living in the homes have felt great changes. Hospital managers have been able to hold and disperse the funds of people living in the units, and some of those people have benefited greatly.

People living in the units have been able to buy not only the little things. Their funds accumulate over the years, and some of them may have up to £10,000. They have therefore been able not only to have flowers, magazines and CDs, but to be taken on holiday to foreign parts that they might never have seen. They have become accustomed to having some of the better things in life—the things that they had never known before. Now, when they are released into the community, they miss those things.

I should like to deal with the case of one individual, who is one of my constituents. For the sake of his privacy, I shall call him John. John was born in 1928. He was the second son, with one brother, who was four years older. Both boys were very bright and did well at school. In 1943, the elder son was called up to serve this country in time of war. He was killed a year later, leaving only John.

In 1946, aged 18, after staying on at school, John went to do his national service. He returned 18 months later with—although no one knew it at the time—schizophrenia, which so often first becomes apparent when those suffering from it are aged 18 to 25. John went directly from the Army to what was then called a mental hospital, where, 53 years ago, things were not so good. He often returned home, for short spells, with black eyes and marks of having been in restraint.

Over the years, John was in and out of hospital; times were better, times were worse. He spent short spells outside the hospital. John's mother, who lived into her 90s, died only four or five years ago. For most of her life, her greatest concern was what would happen to John when she was no longer there to look after him. Very many people—not only those who have handicapped children, but those with mentally ill relatives—share that concern. They wonder who will be their loved one's advocate when they are no longer there. The House's duty is to be their advocate: to see that they have the things in life that their parents would have wanted for them.

Medical science has moved on greatly since John was first taken to hospital, and things are much better for him. He is now 70 years old. He has never lived on his own. Because of his incapacity, he has never had to struggle with the usual daily tasks. Nevertheless, he is much better now and can get by from day to day. He has therefore been released into the community, living in a community house with three other adults.

John cannot understand why, from his funds, he cannot have a new CD every month, as he did when he was in hospital. He wonders why he cannot have a little holiday once a year, as he was used to having. He has a passion for old movies. In the home where he stayed, once a month, video tapes of old movies were bought for him

and played in the video machine. Although there is a video machine in the house where he is now living now, he likes to watch his movies alone.

When John was in the hospital unit, he was bought a small video recorder for his room. Now, there are not enough funds to buy a recorder for his room. The unfortunate aspect is that John has £3,500 locked up in his hospital fund, which is managed by his hospital manager—who should dearly love to release the money to get John the things that he wants, but cannot do it.

If my hon. Friend's Bill were passed, within a few weeks, John would be able to have a video recorder in his room. He would be able to watch the movies that he likes and to have the other little things in life that he had become used to.

My plea is made not only for John, but for the other 700 people in Scotland who, like John, are out there in the community and need their funds to be released. I plead also for the parents of those 700 people. Many of those parents have died, after spending a lifetime worrying about who would advocate their relatives' cause and ensure that they—the Johns of this world—live in comfort.

This morning I take great pleasure in supporting my hon. Friend whose Bill gives us the opportunity to help people such as John, who lost his brother in the war, who has spent his life in and out of institutions, who has now lost the parents who loved him dearly and who, at 70 years old, deserves all the help that we can give him.

10.10 am

Mr. David Stewart (Inverness, East, Nairn and Lochaber): I am pleased to make a brief contribution to the debate for two reasons: first, because I support my hon. Friend the Member for Midlothian (Mr. Clarke) who has great interest and expertise in the subject and secondly, because for 17 years I was a social worker in Scotland—in Edinburgh, Dumfries and Inverness. For many years, I worked in mental health before selling out to management and becoming a mental health officer. I remember working at the sharp end—supporting GPs who had to certify patients in the middle of the night, and working with mentally ill clients and patients in the community.

I also worked hard to fight against the stigma that society attaches to mental illness. Hon. Members probably remember the Scottish health education poster in the 1980s. It showed a picture of a woman and the words:

"Six months after Jean Maclennan had a nervous breakdown her friends are still recovering."

That poster is very apt.

I support the Bill as it fills a gap in current legislation—in section 94 of the Mental Health (Scotland) Act 1984. By implication, it also strengthens the 1995 community care order, which makes provision for patients in the community to have a contract which can include financial arrangements. Unfortunately, such a contract is not enforceable. If the Bill becomes law, it will strengthen that provision.

The problem has been well described by hon. Members on both sides of the House. As I see it, the issue is that when a patient is in hospital, his or her funds are easily and well managed by the hospital authorities under section 94 of the 1984 Act. If, however, a patient is described as incapax by the mental health officer, but is discharged into the community without receiving treatment and there is no relative or friend, his or her funds can become trapped in the system. The irony is that patients in the community may face great financial difficulty, but still cannot obtain access to a lump sum which may be trapped in the hospital system. My hon. Friend the Member for Paisley, North (Mrs. Adams) made a very apt point about John and described his emotive story. I shall also use the example of a patient, whose name I shall change.

I shall describe her as Flora Macdonald; she is a patient in Craig Dunain hospital in Inverness, just outside my constituency. She is 55 years old. She was receiving electro-convulsive therapy because she suffered from acute depression. She was an in-patient and she had no relatives. Her mother had left her £9,500 which was administered by patient funds with absolutely no difficulty. However, she was eventually discharged and went to stay in a home run by Albyn housing association in Nairn, on the east coast in my constituency. Flora was having difficulty coping on her own. She had financial problems, but was unable to access her funds which were held by the hospital. If the Bill became law, it would immediately help her.

In conclusion, the at-risk patients who are currently falling into a black hole in legislation are those who are incapax as defined by the hospital medical officer and who are then discharged into the community without receiving treatment, those who have no nearest relatives or friends and those with funds of less than £10,000. That is extremely important because patients with funds of more than £10,000 can have them administered by a curator bonis. However, the Mental Welfare Commission does not recommend the use of a curator bonis for funds under £10,000 because of the legal costs involved.

I warmly support the Bill. It is a sensible and practical measure which will assist the operation of community care in Scotland, and I endorse it.

10.14 am

Miss Anne Begg (Aberdeen, South): First, I echo the tribute paid by my hon. Friend the Member for Paisley, North (Mrs. Adams) to my hon. Friend the Member for Midlothian (Mr. Clarke). I am absolutely delighted to support the Bill, not just because it is an important one that assists people who society often forgets, ignores or deems unimportant, but because in the short time that I have been in the House I have got to know my hon. Friend the Member for Midlothian very well. It is a tribute to him that so many members of the Select Committee on Scottish Affairs, on which he and I have the privilege to serve, are in the Chamber this morning to support his Bill.

My hon. Friend is a man of great wit. He provides great entertainment in the Select Committee when we take evidence and his stories amuse us all, but he is also a man of strong views. It is a tribute to him that he has introduced a Bill that will assist those who are often inarticulate and face difficulties simply because they may be unable to speak for themselves.

I am delighted to be here to support a worthy Bill. It is a wee Bill that will do a big job. It assists people who are described as incapable. I have difficulty with that word; I do not like it. Nor do I like to be described as handicapped, as people make associations. If someone is

[Miss Anne Begg]

described as incapable, he or she is often assumed to be incapable of everything. Just because people are incapable of managing their own financial affairs or looking after themselves—as many of those affected by the Bill are—that does not mean that they are incapable in all aspects of their lives. They are not incapable of feeling emotion or of enjoying life.

Ms Sandra Osborne (Ayr): Does my hon. Friend agree that the concept of community care has been extremely positive in relation to self-determination and helping people to fulfil their potential as human beings?

Miss Begg: I agree absolutely with my hon. Friend. Society needs to shift the focus from what people are incapable of or cannot do to what they are capable of and can do. As a disabled person myself, I appreciate that all too well. I am often perceived as being incapable of doing all sorts of things when that is not the case.

It is important that we appreciate that those who we describe as incapable adults have emotions, fears and desires and can enjoy life as much as the rest of us can. Part of that enjoyment is making sure that they get treats. That is why the Bill is important, because it is about enabling people to spend their own money. That may seem a difficult concept for us as we are relatively well paid and can spend most of our money as we please, but we should imagine what is must be like to want something but to be denied it either because someone else determines that we do not really need it or, in the circumstances described in the Bill, because someone else is unable to grant access to the money.

Mr. David Stewart: Does my hon. Friend agree that it is somewhat ironic that the people who suffer most are those with smaller funds as those with more money can afford to have a curator bonis to administer their funds? Those with less than £10,000 are the ones who suffer.

Miss Begg: My hon. Friend makes a good point. Those at the bottom of the scale would appreciate what my hon. Friend the Member for Paisley, North described as the little things in life. We all enjoy them. Yesterday, I had my hair done at the hairdressers in the House of Commons and I felt wonderful. When I went back to my office, at least three people commented on how nice my hair was looking. It is a small thing, but it is important. If it is important to us, of course it is important to people in homes or in care in the community. Such little things are important to everyone. Other people may prefer to buy compact discs or an ornament rather than have a hairdo. Even someone with limited ability to think rationally still has tactile feelings. They may want something soft or comforting, something that they can hold or stroke—a feel that belongs to them. They want something that is theirs and can be bought with their own money.

I take the point of the hon. Member for Banbury (Mr. Baldry) that there must be safeguards to ensure that money is not spent frivolously. Mind you, most of us spend our money quite frivolously a lot of the time. I wonder why we should deny certain sections of the population that pleasure.

I went to the Monet exhibition recently and spent half an hour looking at the pictures. Needless to say, I spent another half hour in the shop buying all the little trinkets and things that were on sale. None of them is any good for anything, except that they will give me a great deal of pleasure. I hope that my mother, who will get a present on mothers' day, will get a great deal of pleasure, too.

Ms Osborne: Does my hon. Friend agree that she may well have enjoyed spending some time at the exhibition of the Society of Women Artists at Westminster Central hall? That would not be a frivolous way of spending time, but a valuable experience that can be commended to us all.

Miss Begg: I thank my hon. Friend for that recommendation. I shall make sure that I set aside some time next week.

We get a great deal of pleasure from spending our money on ourselves. When people move from a large institution to care in the community—the time when they might want something extra to decorate a new room, even just a bunch of flowers to make the room smell nice—their funds are frozen and they have no access to them. Some think that such people should save their money for a rainy day, not spend it frivolously, but that is the rainy day. That is when they should make the most of what they can buy for themselves.

Mrs. Irene Adams: Does my hon. Friend agree that often the rainy day is the morning when someone gets out of bed and just does not feel too great? On days like that, people want to take a wander in the high street with two or three pounds in their pocket, just for a coffee or to go in a shop and buy a scarf or a pair of earrings. Why should not people who have been released into the community after spending spent most of their life in institutions be able to do the same? The Bill would help them to do so.

Miss Begg: Absolutely. I might go for an ice cream in such circumstances, but each to his own; that is the important thing. We should allow adults to spend their money as they see fit.

No one in Grampian is currently caught in the trap that we are talking about, but figures show that, over the next year, there are 24 people who could be discharged from long-term care into care in the community. Under existing legislation, patients' money in Grampian has moved from the hospital to the health board, then on to the social work department of the relevant local authority. However, even in areas such as my constituency, the potential for the problem exists. The Bill addresses that loophole in the existing mental health legislation for Scotland by reforming the Mental Health (Scotland) Act 1984 to ensure that funds that are currently locked up or could be locked up in the next year can be released to be used by the people to whom they belong.

Those who have moved into the community and are covered by the Bill are not the only ones who have difficulty accessing their money. I have a constituent whose mother is in a nursing home suffering from Alzheimer's disease. He has found it virtually impossible to deal with her finances, even though he and his sister are joint holders of their mother's bank account. She has shares that he cannot dispose of. Now that she has been deemed incapable, they cannot even get the tax back on the shares, because the tax refund has been frozen. The only solution would be to apply for the appointment of

a curator bonis, but, as my hon. Friend the Member for Inverness, East, Nairn and Lochaber (Mr. Stewart) has said, that process can be very expensive and is time-consuming and complicated. The money to pay for the legal process to get someone to act as curator bonis comes from the funds of the person who is supposed to be helped. It cannot be right to have to spend the same money on the legal process to get it released. Most of us would complain bitterly if our money was taken away to pay for a legal process that we felt was not necessary.

There is a clear need for an incapable adults Bill. It will be the preserve of the Scottish Parliament, which will give the matter due consideration. In the light of my earlier comments, I hope that the Parliament will think of a better name than incapable adult. We want words that describe such people without being derogatory to them.

I may be being a bit presumptuous, but I hope that the Under–Secretary of State for Scotland, my hon. Friend the Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden (Mr. Galbraith), will be in the Scottish Parliament to see that Bill through. I appreciate that we still have to go through an election and that it is up to the Scottish people to decide, but he would be a worthy champion of such a Bill through the Scottish Parliament.

An incapable adults Bill would address the issues that we have been discussing today, but it should also address the other areas in people's lives in which decision making has been taken from them. People who may have not wanted drugs all their life but find themselves in a home and declared incapable of making a rational decision may be given the drugs that they have resisted throughout their rational thinking life. We should consider whether they have a right to refuse certain treatment. We should also consider advance directives. Those issues are outwith the scope of this Bill, but they are important and should be addressed in the near future. I hope that the Scottish Parliament will be in a position to do so.

I am happy to support my hon. Friend the Member for Midlothian. His Bill is important and will solve an anomaly, but, as he has said, it is a stop-gap measure until more extensive legislation can be put in place.

10.28 am

Ms Sandra Osborne (Ayr): As has been said, this is a small Bill that would make a big difference to the lives of patients who cannot manage their own affairs. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Midlothian (Mr. Clarke) on his choice of Bill. As my hon. Friend the Member for Paisley, North (Mrs. Adams) said, he had a plethora of choices.

My hon. Friend the Member for Midlothian is a big man with a big heart who is used to promoting practical solutions that lead to improvements in people's lives and making the connection between the rights of individuals and those of society. It is therefore not surprising that he is promoting this Bill, which will not only benefit more than 700 people almost immediately, but—I hope—will be a precursor to more radical change, which should be considered in the early days of the Scottish Parliament.

Ironically, the Bill is quite a tribute to the concept of community care. Community care legislation has thrown up many financial anomalies and problems, which have still to be sorted out, but we should remember that, until its enactment, many people with disabilities, especially concerning mental health, were put in institutions, and the key was thrown away. Any concept of choice concerning the basic, everyday rights that we all take for granted was not on the agenda—far less the assurance that any finances could be accessed with no legal impediment for the good of the person concerned. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen, South (Miss Begg), who articulately described the right to spend one's money in the way in which one chooses.

When one thinks of the many forward-thinking and far more appropriate opportunities of today, such as supported accommodation in the community—in common with many of my hon. Friends' constituencies, South Ayrshire Hospitals NHS Trust provides credible opportunities for people which were not available in the past—one realises that we have come a long way in improving people's physical surroundings and human rights. We all have the right to live, to the greatest possible extent, an ordinary life.

We have taken great strides in recent years. I pay tribute, as did my hon. Friend the Member for Paisley, North, to health service staff, social workers and voluntary organisations. They have developed community care in a positive manner under very difficult financial circumstances, and often when the community has not cared or has at least needed to be convinced that care in the community is a good idea. Hon. Members have emphasised the difficult issues associated with care in the community, as well as how they have been overcome in many areas in Scotland by the dedication of those involved in its provision. Moreover, those difficulties have been overcome by convincing the community that it is far better that people live an ordinary life in their local community than spend years in institutions, as happened so often in the past.

The Bill has brought sharply into focus what various interested organisations have been calling for for more than 10 years. As many hon. Members have said, such organisations formed the Alliance for the Promotion of the Incapable Adults Bill, and have campaigned on the need to reform comprehensively the law on personal, welfare and financial decisions concerning people who cannot act for themselves. Such reform involves a range of mental disorders, including mental illness, learning disabilities, dementia and those caused by head injury.

The current legal framework, including the issues addressed by the Bill, causes needless distress, expense and inconvenience to disabled people and their carers. It must be recognised that, although we have taken great strides in community care and introduced many positive measures, carers often still feel disfranchised, including on financial matters. That must be addressed. People worry a great deal about what will happen to their relatives once they are no longer able to care for them. The law on that matter is part of the problem.

Miss Begg: Does my hon. Friend agree that the worry about what will happen to a child or a grown adult in such circumstances casts a shadow over the last few years of carers' lives because, at the moment, they cannot guarantee that, once they die, the same level of care will be provided for their loved ones?

Ms Osborne: I agree. I have assisted several carers in my constituency in their efforts to get a social work agreement. Many carers want the certainty of a

[Ms Osborne]

programme of respite care for 10, 20 or 30 years, not just the foreseeable future. Given the general scenario of community care, that is very difficult to achieve. There must be far more communication with carers to make them feel far more empowered, because, at the moment, they feel pretty powerless.

This debate must take account of the fact that the legal framework frequently creates problems for social workers, lawyers and health care professionals. I would like to put on record the great successes achieved in my constituency in relocating adults from psychiatric hospitals into the community—often that has led to much more fulfilling lives. I recently dealt with a case of rivalry in my constituency between carers and social workers over the financial dealings of an elderly lady who was put in a residential home for respite care after being in a psychiatric hospital for many years. She has been assessed as needing nursing care, but has not as yet been moved. I suspect that that is because of finances.

The extent to which such problems can be attributed to a lack of clarity in the legal framework, as opposed to general underfunding in the system and hence a lack of fairness, is a moot point. I am sure that all hon. Members await with great anticipation the outcome of the Government's deliberations on future funding of continuing care, which is of major significance in Scotland, as elsewhere.

The specific measure in the Bill offers a short-term solution, but it is very valuable. A clear mechanism to allow managers of hospitals to continue to hold the moneys and valuables held by them at the time of the patient's discharge, empowering them to spend the money or dispose of the valuables for the benefit of the patient under section 94 of the Mental Health (Scotland) Act 1984, even though the patient is no longer in hospital, will help to break the logjam to which so many hon. Members have referred.

The Scottish Law Commission's report "Incapable Adults", published in 1995, recommended replacing the patchwork of measures with a comprehensive and flexible system of guardianship, with simple no-court solutions to the most common problems. Subsequent Scottish Office consultation has confirmed a wide consensus in favour of the proposals. As hon. Members have said, there is an urgent need to introduce such measures. My hon. Friend's Bill will provide a good start. It will then be for the Scottish Parliament to ensure that wider reform is a top priority, following the detailed work which is more or less available off the shelf as we speak. I hope that the Bill will be dealt with as a matter of priority, and again congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Midlothian on promoting it.

10.39 am

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Inverclyde): I offer my compliments to my hon. and old Friend the Member for Midlothian (Mr. Clarke). He has heard many compliments this morning, but he will have to suffer yet another one. We all know that, during all his adult life, he has sought to protect and promote the interests of those who, for whatever reasons, are unable to defend their own interests. As someone who has long concerned himself with the need to protect such people, I am extremely grateful to him for choosing this subject.

Like my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen, South (Miss Begg), I am a little chary of using the term "incapable adult". I think that it is a legal term—perhaps my hon. Friend the Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Mr. Browne) will help me out on that—and, like many legal concepts, it has a chilling ring to it. I prefer the term "vulnerable person".

Ms Osborne: Does my hon. Friend agree that the phrase "hospital incapax patients" is downright offensive?

Dr. Godman: I think that it is. I am not a medical man—I have an authentic doctorate—but it sounds like a piece of equipment from the oncology department. God knows who the author is; he or she—I suspect that it is a man—ought to remain anonymous.

In fairness to both Conservative and Labour Administrations, we have sought to defend the interests of vulnerable people. I was delighted that, just before we ejected that odd-job lot from office, they introduced a measure to protect vulnerable persons giving evidence in court cases. The Bill is yet another element in the continuing reform of legislation to protect those who are unable to look after themselves.

I sincerely hope that the Bill is a precursor to comprehensive legislation on mental health welfare to be enacted by the Scottish Parliament. My right hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, East and Musselburgh (Dr. Strang) mentioned the commission that has been set up under the chairmanship of the admirable Bruce Millan. I hope that that will lead to a reform of the Mental Health (Scotland) Act 1984. I am sure that Bruce Millan and his estimable colleagues will take cognisance of the Bill.

I sincerely hope that Bruce Millan and his colleagues will investigate the use of electro-convulsive therapy. I suspect that my hon. Friend the Minister and I disagree on that form of treatment. I think that it has been used too freely. He may say that the regulations governing its use are sufficiently comprehensive, but I am not so sure.

My hon. Friend the Member for Paisley, North (Mrs. Adams) shares a concern about those who may be discharged from hospitals in the Argyll and Clyde area. A table published in response to a question about how many "hospital incapax patients" currently having their finances managed by hospital managers are likely to be discharged to continuing care in a non-hospital setting over the next year shows that the figure for that area is 60. I am surprised that it is so high. In some areas, the figure is zero.

It is entirely in the interests of those people to be so discharged and I welcome my constituents leaving the Victorian institutions. Some patients are incarcerated in Bridge of Weir hospital at this very moment. I think that it is to close in June or July. When will the contract for the Larkfield unit be signed? I hope that it will be up and running by December.

We are talking about a significant number of people—although even a dozen would be significant. I have some figures from the excellent Library research paper. It says that a

"Scottish Office statistical bulletin *Community Care 1997* showed an increase in people with mental health problems attending day centres from 110 in 1983 to 1,695 in 1997 and a decrease in the number of people living in hospitals from 14,693 in 1983 to 10,216 in 1996."

It is essential that the patients' interests are looked after when—finally, in some instances—they take their place in the community.

My hon. Friend the Member for Paisley, North mentioned the fact that some of the people are in every sense long-stay patients. I know a couple in Port Glasgow who have visited their son in Merchiston hospital for the past 41 years. Some people will never be able to look after themselves in the community, and we must not lose sight of those fellow citizens, some of whom—sadly, regrettably—will stay in hospitals such as Bridge of Weir or Ravenscraig until their dying day.

Mrs. Irene Adams: Does my hon. Friend agree that the concern is not only for the person in that situation but for the parents who have given a lifetime of service? The couple that he mentioned must have spent 41 years not only visiting but worrying about what will become of their son when they are no longer there to visit. People's whole lives are often overshadowed by the fact that they have a loved one in such an institution and that they will not survive that loved one. They are often greatly concerned that the loved one will simply be forgotten and no longer enjoy the little treats that doting parents who visit every week provide.

Dr. Godman: I agree with every word that my hon. Friend says. Every one of us has constituents who literally devote the whole of their lives outwith work to caring for others. All of us have an obligation to ensure that those carers' lives are made a little easier. My hon. Friend the Member for Ayr (Ms Osborne) mentioned the important need for respite care for such people. We have a major duty to protect their interests.

When patients are discharged into the community—be it in supported housing or a house or apartment in a housing association complex—is it possible for aid to be given by way of the mental illness specific grant? I am a little disappointed that the grant is stuck at the figure of £18 million a year.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland said that MISG

"will continue to provide ring-fenced resources totalling £18 million a year towards community-based mental health projects in Scotland."—[*Official Report*, 29 July 1998; Vol. 317, c. 291.]

I hope that when patients come into the community voluntary organisations might give them assistance, in line with what is sought in the Bill. The mental health development fund is of the order of £3 million per annum. Will voluntary organisations have access to that fund to help vulnerable people? The Bill will help vulnerable people and their families, if they have them, but they also need additional help. The hon. Member for Banbury (Mr. Baldry) asked about protecting the interests of people leaving hospital, who may have £2,00 or £3,000 in their accounts. What protection can be given to ensure that those people are not cheated by those who undertake their care in the community? Social workers and others do an admirable job in supporting vulnerable people in our communities, but they need help with the management of their money, above and beyond that which is given by the Mental Welfare Commission.

As hon. Members have pointed out—and the Mental Welfare Commission agrees—the majority of those whom the Bill seeks to protect have no contact with relatives. Given the years they have spent in hospital, their parents may be dead and their brothers and sisters may have moved out of the district in which they were born and raised. The former patients are vulnerable to manipulation and it is essential that those professionals who care for them are of the highest integrity. That might strike a sour note, but I have heard of vulnerable people being cheated of their funds, both in hospital and outside in the community. The Mental Health Welfare Commission has a duty, as mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Midlothian, to protect those people, sometimes through the appointment of a curator bonis. Nevertheless, we must ensure that when vulnerable people come out into the community they are protected and their moneys are safe.

Mrs. Irene Adams: Does my hon. Friend agree that 99.9 per cent. of the people who look after those who are not capable of looking after themselves, both in hospitals and out in the community, do sterling work? However, we as legislators must ensure that the protection of vulnerable people is paramount and that the little funds they have are looked after well. We need an assurance from my hon. Friend the Minister that vulnerable people cannot be cheated.

Dr. Godman: I agree with my hon. Friend. I am married to a social worker who used to assess people coming out of hospital, including elderly people leaving hospitals for nursing homes, some of whom were suffering from senile dementia and other illnesses associated with ageing. I have every trust in our social workers and other professionals who care for people in such circumstances, but there are bad eggs in all professions, including the law and even Members of Parliament.

Vulnerable people need protection when they leave hospital, but, as my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen, South said, many of them enjoy fulfilling lives in the community. I know a young lad who was in hospital for many years and is now in his 30s. He is delighted with his new house in a housing association complex. He is still not able to manage his money very well, but the local shopkeepers look after him. In fact, everyone in the neighbourhood looks after that fellow.

I understand that the Scottish Office has published draft guidance on the management of the finances of incapable adults, pending wholesale legislation. When will the final version be published and who will receive it? Will it be sent to local authorities, social work departments, trusts and health boards? The closing date for responses to the draft guidance was 31 October 1998, but there is no fixed date yet for the publication of the final form. I hope that it will be published in the next two or three months.

I welcome the Bill. It is a small measure, but it will give protection to many vulnerable people in our constituencies who have been denied that protection until now. I hope that the Bill has a clear passage through Parliament so that it reaches the statute book, where it belongs.

10.57 am

Mr. Russell Brown (Dumfries): I am delighted to take part in the debate this morning and to support my hon. Friend the Member for Midlothian (Mr. Clarke) and his Bill. I am delighted that the Bill will pass through Parliament at the same time as the extensive review is

[Mr. Russell Brown]

being undertaken by the Millan commission on the Mental Health (Scotland) Act 1984. It met for the first time eight days ago.

We should consider the history of mental health legislation in Scotland. Scottish mental health legislation has, since the war, tended to develop in parallel with English law, although there are significant differences, especially in the role of sheriffs in the relation to detention. The origins of the mental health legislation lie in the late 1950s. The Percy committee, which met between 1954 and 1957, was followed in Scotland by the Dunlop committee, and their recommendations led to sweeping reform in the Mental Health (Scotland) Act 1960. That Act sought to ensure that people with mental disorders were not automatically subject to legal controls, and it protected the rights of those who were detained against their will.

In 1983, the 1960 Act was amended substantially and that was consolidated in the 1984 Act. The debate in the early 1980s focused on tightening legal safeguards for patients and defining more precisely the compulsory powers that could be exercised over them. Safeguards on treatment, not just detention, were extended, and that was consistent with the general growth of concerns about patients' rights, but it led to some problems. The powers of guardianship were constrained to such a degree that the legislation became discredited in the eyes of many professionals. The legislation enacted in the early 1980s was not extensively debated in Parliament. It is, therefore, reasonable to say that the Millan commission has the opportunity to undertake the first fundamental review of mental health legislation in Scotland—

It being Eleven o'clock, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *interrupted the proceedings, pursuant to Standing Order No. 11 (Friday Sittings).*

Agriculture Council

11 am

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Nick Brown): In the early hours of yesterday morning, the European Union Agriculture Council provisionally agreed a package of reforms to the common agricultural policy. These will be passed to the Heads of Government meeting in Berlin later this month for consideration as part of the overall package of European Union reforms known as Agenda 2000.

The outcome of the Agriculture Council represents a radical change in the direction of the common agricultural policy. It is a change in direction for which the British Government have been pressing strongly, and it has been achieved despite a reluctance to reform on the part of several countries. We have, however, worked closely with like-minded member states to ensure that the case for reform is fully taken into account. The deal is a very good outcome for British consumers, for our farmers and for the environment. It is also a good deal for the European Union as a whole.

The heart of the reforms is a further shift away from supporting farmers' incomes through keeping food prices artificially high. Cereals support prices will fall by 20 per cent. in two steps. The basic price for beef will fall by 20 per cent. in three steps, and the intervention price by 25 per cent. Dairy support prices will fall by 15 per cent. in three steps, beginning in 2003. Direct payments to farmers are being increased to help compensate them for the price cuts.

These cuts in price support will help bring Europe's farming industry closer to market forces and improve farmers' responsiveness to consumer wishes. Once fully implemented, they will benefit British consumers by £1 billion a year. That is equivalent to a saving of up to £70 a year for a family of four if the effect of the price cuts feeds through fully.

The changes in direction will also benefit farmers in several important respects. The cereals price cut will enable the normal rate of compulsory set-aside to be zero as from the 2002-03 marketing year. It should also normally permit wheat exports to take place without export refunds, thereby removing the World Trade Organisation restrictions on our farmers' capacity to export. The cut in oilseeds aid will safeguard British oilseeds growers from ever-increasing penalties arising from the application of the Blair House agreement.

In the case of beef, the price cut of 20 to 25 per cent. is significant, even though it will not quite take European Union beef prices to world levels. The negotiations on the direct subsidy schemes were particularly difficult. A majority of member states whose beef is reared mainly under intensive systems wanted to correct what they perceived as a bias towards extensive grass-based systems—such as characterise much of British production—introduced in the last set of reforms in 1992.

Despite that, I was able to secure a good deal for our producers, especially those from the hills. That included an increase in the suckler cow premium to 200 ecu per cow and a 100,000 head increase in our beef special premium regional ceiling. Changes to the proposed beef extensification rules will better meet our farmers' needs as well as benefit the environment. The cut in the

minimum age for payment of beef special premium will help hill farmers gain access to the premium and encourage quality beef production.

The negotiations on dairy reform were also difficult. Several member states considered that the regime should not be reformed at all and others wanted to enshrine milk quotas as a fundamental element of farm support. My own view, and that of three other member states, was that dairy price support should be reduced to world levels over six years, allowing milk quotas eventually to be removed. The eventual compromise between those positions was that support prices will be cut by 15 per cent.—taking them halfway to world prices—beginning in 2003. In that year, there will be a review of the regime, with the express aim of allowing the present quota arrangements to run out after 2006. The United Kingdom will receive a very welcome increase in its milk quota of nearly 240,000 tonnes, some of which is specifically earmarked for Northern Ireland.

Clearly, I would have preferred an agreement that led automatically to the ending of milk quotas in 2006, because they impose major costs on our industry and limit its development. However, given the balance of opinion in the Council, I believe that the outcome was extremely good. I am confident that, by 2003, the balance of interests in the Council will have shifted significantly in our direction and we will be able to ensure a definite end to quotas.

A key element of the reforms is the creation of an integrated rural development policy, including agri-environment measures. This will provide the basis for a welcome shift of emphasis from production support towards environmental and rural economy measures in the future. It also provides for less-favoured areas compensation to be replaced by area payments with a more environmental focus. Furthermore, the reforms include new environmental protection requirements— *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Tim Yeo (South Suffolk): Would the right hon. Gentleman like me to take over?

Mr. Brown: That comment is actually very helpful.

The reforms include the new environmental protection requirements to be applied by member states where they consider it appropriate.

The proposal to impose a European Union-wide ceiling—I would have thought that Opposition Members would be particularly interested in this, as it is the point on which the Leader of Opposition decided to condemn me before the negotiations had even started—on individual farmers' direct payments created particular difficulties for the United Kingdom. It would have discriminated strongly against our farmers because of our more efficient farm structure. I am therefore extremely pleased that the proposal was removed entirely from the package. This was a very important gain for the United Kingdom and for our farmers.

The eventual deal did not provide for direct farm payments to be made degressive over time. The United Kingdom has strongly advocated the introduction of degressivity of payments as a means of bringing down the cost of the common agricultural policy over time to the benefit of taxpayers. That would put us in a stronger position before the start of the next World Trade Organisation round and it would help with our ambitions for European Union enlargement. It would also enable a further transfer of funds to rural development measures to take place.

However, despite pressure from several member states—notably the United Kingdom and France—the Commission refused to put degressivity on the table as a proposal. This meant that the Council could have introduced degressivity to the package only if it had acted unanimously. A majority of Ministers in the Agriculture Council were strongly opposed to the introduction of degressivity. My right hon. Friends will therefore be pursuing this issue, and the question of co-financing common agricultural policy payments, in other EU Councils following the guidance on budget stabilisation given on 26 February by Heads of Government at Petersberg. Heads of Government will be considering the package as a whole in Berlin later this month.

I believe the Agriculture Council has constructed a very good set of reforms that will bring substantial benefits to the United Kingdom and to the European Union as a whole. It is not the end of the reform road for the common agricultural policy. In particular, further consideration will have to be given to the financing arrangements. However, a major and most welcome step forward has been taken.

Mr. Yeo: I welcome the Minister back to the House. I hope that he has had a chance to recover from a gruelling negotiation, and I hope that his civil servants will be able to get his papers in order for his next contribution. I also thank the Minister for his courtesy in making the statement available to me about 15 minutes before he delivered it.

However, despite his optimistic tone and rather extravagant claims, is it not the case that this deal is simply "not satisfactory"? In case the Minister does not agree with that statement, may I point out that those were the words of the Prime Minister's spokesman, which were quoted in *The Times* this morning?

Has the deal not failed to reform the common agricultural policy as promised? Will the Minister confirm that the cost of the CAP to the taxpayer will now rise even further than originally feared? Will the original and very modest aim of getting the total cost of the CAP back down to present levels by 2006 now be met?

Will the right hon. Gentleman confirm that consumers will not benefit from this deal, because there will be no fall in food prices for many years? Are not his claims today of a windfall for consumers hopelessly premature? Will it not be at least seven years before the package is fully implemented, thus meeting the conditions that he says are necessary to get prices down at all?

Does the Minister recognise that his failure to secure an immediate increase in milk quota leaves Britain in the absurd position of importing much of its dairy produce, while British dairy farmers are still prevented from increasing their output? Is that not rather a humiliating retreat after all the tough talking of a few weeks ago? Is not a four-year wait for an increase in Britain's milk quota far too long? What are the prospects for ending milk quotas altogether in 2006?

Also, will the Minister explain how the national envelope for beef will work? Will he assure us that the Treasury will not divert elsewhere funds from that national envelope, which in other countries will be

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reserved for beef farmers? How many British beef farmers will be able to meet the extensification requirements? When will the Minister be able to explain in more detail how the promised support for environmental and rural economy measures works? Although that support is welcome, is he aware of fears that it will introduce yet more bureaucracy into the countryside?

Does the Minister agree that many people in Britain will be astonished that the European Union continues to subsidise tobacco farmers? Will he confirm that the latest talks leave the growers of a product so dangerous that the EU wants to ban it from being advertised, still receiving more than £500 million a year from taxpayers in the form of subsidies?

Does the Minister agree that the whole package is in danger of being overturned by the Finance Ministers or the Heads of Government in a few days' time? What has the deal done for Britain's chance of keeping the budget rebate that was won by the previous Government? I acknowledge that the threat of ceilings on individual payments to farmers has been temporarily averted, and I welcome that, but is there a risk that the Finance Ministers will reopen the deal and try to impose caps on payments to efficient British farmers or a floor to payments to inefficient continental farmers? No amount of jargon, such as "modulation" or "degressivity", can hide the fact that Britain's interests may still suffer when the Finance Ministers get their hands on the package.

In summary, will the Minister tell us whether anyone in Britain will benefit from this deal in the next four years? Is this not merely a no-win deal—a deal that is the result of going into talks without clear aims and without enough determination to achieve them? Is not the deal bad for taxpayers, who will have to foot an even bigger bill; bad for consumers, for whom the prospect of lower food prices is even more remote; and bad for many farmers, who will still not be competing on level terms?

Mr. Brown: I thank the hon. Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo) for his comments about my personal well-being. His questions fell away from there on in. He made a jibe about civil servants and the papers—yes, the papers were out of order, but it is unfair to criticise civil servants. Throughout the negotiations, I was well supported by civil servants from my Department. As a politician, one could say that I volunteer to go through all this; civil servants do it because it is their job. They have put in long hours and an enormous amount of work, which has gone well beyond what would normally be expected of them. I put on record my thanks for the work that the Department has put in.

The hon. Gentleman concentrated on the disappointments. As he is the Opposition spokesman, that was to be expected, but he was right to refer to two. The package holds two major disappointments. The first was the failure to get Agriculture Ministers to agree to the introduction of degressivity in the compensation payments. That is a clear aim of the British Government, and the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Prime Minister will pursue it at Berlin. We will continue to press on that point and, for the avoidance of any doubt, when the final compromise package was settled, I made it clear that we stood by our policy on degressivity and would continue to pursue it. There is no doubt among the representatives of other Governments about the British position.

On milk reform, I share the hon. Gentleman's disappointment that the reform will start only in 2003. However, the negotiations involved 15 member states, some of which were bitterly opposed to milk reform and some of which had the idea that we should keep the quota for ever and enshrine it in the agreement. That is a hopeless position for the European dairy industry. Four countries advocated reform and 11 opposed it, so to have secured reform in such circumstances is a good deal for the supporters of reform. I have had to accept delay, which was my contribution to the compromise, but the opponents of reform have had to accept reform, which was their contribution. Given that there were four of us on my side and 11 on the other, that is a pretty good deal to have secured.

Although the Conservatives call for that policy now, they have also been through negotiating rounds on the CAP and have not secured reform of the dairy regime. Indeed, successive Conservative Governments renewed the quota regime without any suggestion of its ever being reformed.

On food prices, there are price cuts in each of the different sectors. No sector was taken out, put to one side or shielded from necessary reform. Those cuts should feed through into the shops and to consumers. The hon. Gentleman said that the cuts would not come in until 2007, putting the date as far away as he plausibly could; but, because they will be phased in over time, so will the benefits to consumers. I accept that we will not feel the full effects of the cuts until the end of the period, but they will be felt remorselessly year by year. The most significant part of the package is that we are moving in the direction of world market prices, price cuts in CAP and reform. That is the path on which we are set, and it ought to be a good thing.

The hon. Gentleman asked about the national envelope. The National Farmers Union view is that I should use it to support the suckler cow premium. I have already received its representations and I am considering them. Before the negotiations started, I promised that, where I had scope to exercise discretion at a national level, I would consult first before making any final decisions. That is what I intend to do on the national envelope and, to answer another of the hon. Gentleman's questions, where there is scope for discretion on rural support measures. I will consult before making a final decision and, if the hon. Gentleman wishes to submit views on how I should apply the national envelope, I will be more than willing to consider his views, as well as others.

The hon. Gentleman asked about the tobacco regime. Yes, there is still such a regime in the CAP. It was not part of this table round. Indeed, other more significant areas were not a part of it. The sheep sector was the big omission. The proposal to make direct support payments degressive over time on the UK model would cover all direct support payments, including the tobacco industry. That means that payments would reduce over time, which to some extent meets the thrust of the hon. Gentleman's point. If he is saying that we should not pay agricultural support to tobacco at all, he makes a persuasive case. One wonders why the previous Government did not obliterate the payments when they were in charge.

The hon. Gentleman asked about ceilings. When this round started, and as I was on the train out all those weeks ago, the Leader of the Opposition condemned me in south-west England for having already given away our negotiating position on ceilings. I had done no such thing. He was completely wrong. As we can all see from the eventual outcome of the agreement, the United Kingdom negotiating position on ceilings has been obtained 100 per cent. It is not qualified at all. As the Leader of the Opposition accused me personally of having sold us out on this, and as I have obtained our objectives completely—as I said that I was setting out to do—I think that I am entitled to an apology. I am surprised that the hon. Gentleman, on behalf of the Leader of the Opposition, did not offer me one.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned Finance Ministers and Heads of Government scrutinising the package and seeking further changes. I have already made it clear to the House that it is an objective of the UK Government to introduce an element of degressivity into direct payments. I tried to do that at the Agriculture Council, but, if the Commission will not put it on the table, I do not have much chance. A majority of delegations were against it and it requires unanimity to achieve, so it was always likely that this area of the negotiations would have to go to Heads of Government, and so it will.

The hon. Gentleman's final point was that we lacked clear aims going into the negotiations. I have set out beyond any ambiguity the principal aims of the British Government in the negotiations. More than that, I consulted widely on them. I met the leaders of the farm organisations and individual farmers to ask them what I should be pressing for—not on the broad aims, because the Government's view is clear, but on matters of detail. I am grateful to the farmers who took time to discuss matters with me. Their detailed points informed the negotiations, and in areas, particularly on the arable side, I was able, because of those discussions, to achieve extra things for the UK.

The principal benefit is that the common agricultural policy is set on the road for reform—not as much reform as I wanted, but reform it is most certainly getting.

Dr. Gavin Strang (Edinburgh, East and Musselburgh): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the livelihoods of our farmers and farm workers are vital to this country? The crucial economic significance of the agriculture industry lies in the fact that it produces the raw material for our food manufacturing and processing industry in which hundreds of millions of pounds have been invested and thousands of jobs are at stake. Will he continue to ensure in the negotiations that we make certain that no policies develop that put our producers at a disadvantage to producers in other parts of the European Union? The agriculture industry is as important to this country as it is to France and Germany. It is vital that we have policies in place that enable our producers to compete on equal terms. He acknowledged that we are almost certainly being constrained by milk quotas, but there are other commodities in respect of which we are relatively efficient and in which we should have the chance to maintain, if not increase, our jobs and production.

Mr. Brown: As I would have expected, my right hon. Friend touches on the two most important points in the negotiations. Yes, I have a responsibility to protect the national interest, and that means the interests of producers as well as those of consumers. I have done that. He is right to press me to ensure that the United Kingdom is not uniquely disadvantaged in the outcome. The ceilings proposal would have uniquely disadvantaged the UK. That is why I am so pleased that I was able to fight it off in its entirety.

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Skye and Inverness, West): As the Minister rightly said, the interim outcome is part of a process that will include the Chancellor, the Prime Minister and, further down the route, the WTO. Does he agree that perhaps the most useful thing for hon. Members of all parties to do is to send signals to him, and through him to the Chancellor, about the matters that will be returned to? Specifically, we must ensure that the Finance Ministers do not reconsider some of them in a way that turns out to be disadvantageous to UK agriculture.

In that context, given that the Commission did not table the degressivity measures, for the reasons that he gave, and that Finance Ministers want to reconsider the matter, will he ensure that the British Chancellor's contribution is based on the original degressivity measures, which would have released extra funds in the context of Agenda 2000 for rural development, agri-environment and desperately underfunded schemes, such as countryside stewardship? They must not simply return to the issue as a means of reducing the growth of the further costs involved at this stage in the reform.

Will the right hon. Gentleman be more specific about the United Kingdom farmers who have already successfully pursued extensification? There will be some national leeway, or subsidiarity, to use another incomprehensible Euro-speak word. Will he ensure, for those UK farmers who do not fit the current Commission formula, that our Treasury uses the national leeway to increase considerably the uptake in the application of the all-important schemes that go to the long-term heart of CAP reform? That means wider rural development generally. In considering what lies ahead, will he be more specific about how Finance Ministers will pursue this matter in the context of the future of the UK rebate?

Mr. Brown: It was always the case that overshadowing the negotiations were the financial framework, the discussions between Heads of Government and Finance Ministers about the different methods of funding and the pressure that the UK was coming under on the rebate. I had to secure for the UK a decent agricultural component in what the hon. Gentleman rightly described as a much larger package. I have no doubt that the Prime Minister and the Chancellor of the Exchequer will continue to defend the British rebate vigorously. They will be able to do so because it is justified. We are still net contributors to the arrangements, and I am afraid that nothing that happened at the Agriculture Council has changed that.

The hon. Gentleman asked about extensification. That was a particularly difficult part of the negotiations, as I am sure all who follow such matters realise. The countries with extensive production systems are, essentially, ourselves, France and Ireland. Other countries have an interest in intensive production systems. They felt that the 1992 reforms shifted the balance too far in favour of extensification. My responsibility was to ensure that we were not disproportionately disadvantaged in the

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negotiations. Price cuts from the producer point of view affect everyone. We managed to safeguard the United Kingdom position. More than that, several elements in the package improve on the present position, including the increase in the regional ceiling.

I have some room for manoeuvre on the national envelope. It is much diminished from the original Commission proposal because it has been used in part for the introduction of the new slaughter premium. Where I have discretion on the national envelope, I intend to consult. The hon. Gentleman is right that many farmers will look to me to use it to protect extensification and extensive production systems. That is the thrust of the representations that the NFU has already made to me.

On rural development, I am very keen both on the agri-environment part of the package and on strengthening the second pillar of the CAP more generally; so I welcome the thrust of the hon. Gentleman's question. I have to say that the time to do that was in the Agriculture Council round of the negotiations, rather than the Finance Ministers or Heads of Government meetings. We have achieved something for the rural development measure, but not the extra contribution that degressivity could have made had it been negotiated in the Agriculture Council. I regret that, and it would be unreasonable for me to hold out prospects that we could return to it. Finance Ministers and Heads of Government will want to consider the budgetary constraints, rather than reopen the agricultural part of the package. I think that it is those two different components that have led to some confusion in this morning's press.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Is my right hon. Friend aware that, for the past 18 years, the Tories have been talking about reforming the CAP? I always took the view that, if anyone—especially a Labour Government—dared to reform it, they would play merry hell. Already this morning we have seen Tory spokesmen making it clear that even this marginal decision is not satisfactory to them. I rather suspect that that will be the attitude from here on in. *[Interruption.]* It is the farmers talking over there.

What concerns me, however, is that the newspaper reports have been suggesting that Britain's rebate will be affected as a result of the negotiations. I know that the Liberals made a reference to that, but, before the Tories start, may we have a categorical assurance that the rebate was never discussed in the negotiations this week and that the rebate in total is still on the table?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael J. Martin): Order. Before the Minister replies, I remind the House that today is a private Member's Bill day. May I have brief questions and, of course, brief answers?

Mr. Brown: That is a fair point, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but these are complex issues and, although the questions seem general, they require detailed and specific responses.

I assure my hon. Friend that the British rebate was not under discussion at the Agriculture Council. No delegation ever raised it. The British Government intend to fight to protect the rebate.

My hon. Friend is right to point out one further matter. Those who advocate reform confuse reform with the immediate imposition of budget savings. The two things are incompatible. In the short term, if we want reform, the budget will have to rise. The previous Government always fell at that hurdle. They put the short-term budgetary interests before the medium-term interests of reform. They always failed. This is the most significant reform of the CAP ever, and the United Kingdom Government have been in the vanguard pressing for it.

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham): I acknowledge the difficulties that the right hon. Gentleman met at the Council. None the less, does he accept that the outcome represents a substantial shortfall on our long-term objectives? Does he accept that one of the major problems lies in the compensation payments—the direct payments? Does he accept that they are properly to be regarded as transitional payments which will taper away into nothingness over a period?

Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that one of the fundamental problems is that there is not a majority within the Council for fundamental reform and that, if many of the Council members had to choose between forgoing an enlargement and forgoing fundamental reform, they would choose to forgo enlargement? Does he accept that, in the absence of an appetite for fundamental reform within the Council, we are likely to see reform only if Heads of Government give very clear and tight riding instructions and, if necessary, take policy responsibility for the process?

Mr. Brown: The right hon. and learned Gentleman's point that Heads of Government have to take final responsibility is right. Both the Agriculture Council and the separate discussions about the structural funds will go as two separate components of Agenda 2000 to the Heads of Government for final discussion and decision.

On fundamental reform of the CAP, the right hon. and learned Gentleman is right to say that a majority of Farming Ministers still oppose what he and I would describe as fundamental reform. There is a philosophical difference between those who want radical reform of the CAP, encouraged and led in part by the United Kingdom, and those who still adhere to the European model of agriculture, which involves price supports, export refunds and protectionist measures, which I believe are fundamentally the wrong way forward.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman accurately describes our proposals for degressivity. A majority of Agriculture Ministers were not willing to accept it. The mechanism of degressivity makes the direct support payments reduce in value over time, as the right hon. and learned Gentleman correctly described. He described the package as a shortfall. I prefer to describe it as a start, but I fully accept that it does not start quickly enough.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire): If the Opposition will not apologise to my right hon. Friend, I will apologise because he has achieved far more than I imagined possible, given the vested interests in the European Union that make the negotiations tremendously difficult. One argument about the possibility of achieving reform was that, unless there was reform, we would not be able to achieve expansion of the EU because the terms and conditions of the common market CAP would be

unacceptable to applicants. Will the arrangements facilitate the possibility of enlargement, or do we still have to wait for further reforms?

Mr. Brown: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his remarks. He has put his finger on an important point. The reform package still makes enlargement of the EU difficult. It marches in the right direction, but it does not get there quickly enough to facilitate enlargement on the present timetable. It would not surprise me if we returned to these matters again before the end of the six-year period.

Mr. David Maclean (Penrith and The Border): Who are we to believe this morning—the Minister, who tells us that this is the most radical deal in his generation, or the Prime Minister's spokesman, who says that it is just not satisfactory? On this occasion, I prefer to believe the No. 10 spokesman.

Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that the British public will not find it satisfactory when the issues discussed at the Agriculture Council have resulted in cuts for northern European farm produce and farmers in Britain, but an overall budget that will increase by £1 billion, while the wine lake, the olive oil sludge pond and the obscenity of the £500 million taxpayers' subsidy to tobacco were not on the agenda? Does he understand that British farmers will think that he has been suckered into a deal that cuts their prices while paying no attention to the scandal of the CAP in southern Europe?

Mr. Brown: I think the right hon. Gentleman has slightly lost the plot. Olive oil and tobacco were never part of this negotiating round, although of course the direct payments would have been affected had the British idea of degressivity been accepted.

The right hon. Gentleman asks whom he should believe—the Prime Minister's spokesman or me. I have good news for him: he can believe both of us. The CAP reform package does not go far enough for me or for the United Kingdom, but it is still the most radical shake-up the CAP has ever had. It is certainly much better than anything achieved by the right hon. Gentleman's party when it was in government. The right hon. Gentleman says that we have described it is as not acceptable. Of course it is not acceptable that there is not some limit of degressivity in the direct payments. I have always made that clear. I made it clear at the conclusion of the Council in the early hours yesterday by reading a statement on to the record on behalf of the Government. We have made it clear that we intend to pursue the matter at Heads of Government level.

Mr. Kelvin Hopkins (Luton, North): I welcome my right hon. Friend's statement and applaud his efforts in what were obviously very difficult negotiations. I believe that there is broad agreement that the common agricultural policy is a very bad system of agricultural subsidy and has always been specifically disadvantageous to Britain. Does my right hon. Friend think that, taken together, these reforms will diminish Britain's relative disadvantage compared with other EU states? Will these reforms, taken together, make a difference and improve the malign redistribution effects between member states?

Mr. Brown: The question of the balances between member states is very complex. There is a north-south balance, to which the Mediterranean countries draw attention—from their viewpoint, one can understand why—and there are differences in the balance caused by the relative incomes in different countries and differences in the balance resulting from the different agricultural structures in the different countries. I believe that the outcome represents a fair compromise between these different interests. However, by far and away the best way to secure the United Kingdom's long-term advantage would be to press on with radical reform so that our efficient farm structures can benefit from access without penalty to world markets, and gain the advantages that accrue to efficient agricultural production systems.

Mr. Tony Baldry (Banbury): Does the Minister agree on the direction in which we are meant to be going? Consumers want to know that prices will fall, and the reduction in price support will be worth while only if there is a reduction in prices in supermarkets. What has been really frustrating for farmers—indeed, for everyone—is the fact that the substantial falls in farmgate prices have not been passed on to consumers. I do not blame the Minister for that, but may we have some discussions with the supermarket chains to ensure that consumers have some benefit from the reforms?

Does the Minister agree that we all acknowledge that an objective of UK policy must be to ensure that eventual common agricultural policy reforms reward efficient UK producers? If we can at least all agree the objectives, there may not be as much accusation and counter-accusation.

Mr. Brown: We have made a substantial move in the direction of the point that the hon. Gentleman makes about producers. We have not got there as fast as I would like, but at least I have got the common agricultural policy to go in the direction that I want it to go.

We did not specifically discuss retail prices because that is beyond the competence—the scope—of the Agriculture Council. I am certain, though, that if producer prices are reduced, that must feed through into benefits to consumers.

Ms Joan Ryan (Enfield, North): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on negotiating this reform. I am certain that it will be good news for consumers; it will certainly be welcomed by my constituents.

Does my right hon. Friend agree that this reform is clear evidence that the Government's positive approach of working in co-operation with our European partners is best for Britain and brings benefits for Britain, and is in marked contrast to the approach of, and the outcomes achieved by, the Conservatives when they were in power?

Mr. Brown: My approach to these negotiations was to make sure that I kept the United Kingdom at the heart of the negotiations on the Commission's proposals, and that I did not allow the United Kingdom to be marginalised in such a way that the other Ministers would gang up on us and introduce a measure that specifically disadvantaged the United Kingdom. In particular, I was thinking about the possibility of ceilings being imposed on these payments, which would have meant that the United Kingdom would pay disproportionately for support measures that we did not welcome.

If we had left ourselves out of the debate about reform, there would have been substantially less reform, but I am not sure that there would have been substantially

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less expenditure. I believe that it is right that the United Kingdom co-operates with our European partners—instead of perpetually lecturing them and telling them that they are wrong, even when they suggest things that are in our interests, which was the previous Government's approach.

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): Judged by what most of us thought possible, the Minister has probably not done that badly, but, judged by what Labour promised in opposition and in its manifesto, this deal is a complete flop. How can it be radical progress when the budget will be 2.5 per cent. above what was agreed in Germany only weeks ago? How can we talk about substantial progress when it will take longer to reform the dairy regime than the period in which the Government think it is possible for us to join the euro? In the meantime, dairy farmers and farmers in other sectors will see their incomes fall. They are already bleeding to death, and there will be an even worse haemorrhage as a result of this shambles.

Mr. Brown: The immediate effect of the package on farm incomes is relatively modest. As for the point about dairy reform, no other Government have managed even to make a start on the issue. As I said, 11 countries are opposed to reform, four are in favour, and I managed to secure reform, although it was delayed. I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his rather more generous introductory remarks.

Dr. Alan Whitehead (Southampton, Test): I congratulate the Minister on what he has achieved in these negotiations and on what I understand is progress on environmental stewardship as part of the negotiations. Do the negotiations include discussion and/or agreement on support for the production of biomass feedstock for alternative energy production? Does the Minister intend to discuss the consequences of these moves forward on environmental stewardship with English Nature and the new Countryside Agency?

Mr. Brown: I do intend to consult on the rural development measures and yes, there is scope within the regime for environmental measures of the type that my hon. Friend describes, and he and I both support. Right up to the end of the negotiations, I was pressing for a stronger regime on non-food crops. I consider that this is an important area, in which this country could make substantial progress. The regime is permissive, but there is not as much in it as I wanted. We have made an amendment to the text, which goes some way towards achieving what we want, but does not go far enough.

Mr. Alasdair Morgan (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale): In relation to the application of the national envelope, the Secretary of State said that he would consult. In respect of Scotland, will he confirm that it will be up to the new Scottish Parliament to undertake those consultations and, more particularly, that the new Scottish Parliament will be in charge of deciding how those funds will be allocated?

Mr. Brown: There is not a separate Scottish national envelope, I am afraid. The United Kingdom negotiates in the European Union at United Kingdom level, but, where there is room for devolved discretion, I am willing to consider any sensible proposal, as long as it does not introduce market distortions. Remember that the common agricultural policy is a common agricultural policy for the whole European Union. There is not a separate Scottish version of it, I am afraid.

Consultations will be done, as they would have been done anyway, by the Scottish Office in Scotland, by the Welsh Office in Wales, by the Northern Ireland Office in Northern Ireland and by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in England. The hon. Gentleman is right to say that, post-devolution, the Scottish Parliament will have a role. I am now discussing—although, of course, we cannot reach a final conclusion until after the elections—ways in which the new Scottish Agriculture Minister can play a full part in the UK delegation to the European Agriculture Council.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Inverclyde): I have long argued that the failure to reform the common agricultural policy will have harmful consequences for the applicant states. Is it not likely that applicant states will demand full implementation of all agricultural benefits—or, if we are to stick to the timetable, are we going to finish up with two classes of member states in relation to the CAP?

Mr. Brown: My hon. Friend is on a very good point. It would be completely unfair to devise a two-tier CAP and a two-tier European Union where some people were fully in and others were only half in and were a second type of member. If countries are going to join, they should join fully and their joining should be facilitated fully.

Mr. Roger Gale (North Thanet): Thanet's farmers produce some of the finest cauliflowers in the world. It is a high-risk crop, requiring high investment and providing a low price to the farmer. The supermarket price to the consumer is very high and the farmgate price is very low; that is at today's prices. Given the track record of retailers, if there are to be any pig farmers left in business in this country, their livestock will fly before supermarkets reduce their prices to the consumer. The Minister has made great play of the fact that real savings will be made and will be passed on to the consumer. What possible justification does he have for that claim?

Mr. Brown: If prices come down at producer level, that feeds through at the retail level; it is as simple and straightforward as that. That is a market economy—a concept that used to be pretty well understood by Conservative Members. Neither cauliflowers nor pigs were part of the negotiations or the Agenda 2000 package.

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas (Harrow, West): I join my hon. Friends in congratulating my right hon. Friend on securing a hard-won but substantial agreement, albeit not a perfect one. This deal benefits farmers and consumers, such as those in my constituency. Given the negative and nit-picking attitude of the Conservative party, does my right hon. Friend believe that farmers and consumers will be relieved that it is new Labour negotiating in Brussels, and not the Conservatives?

Mr. Brown: I am certain that that is true. The Conservative party's negotiating approach is to tell

everyone else that they are wrong and then wonder why the others have ganged up on this country. It could not have secured this agreement.

I welcome what my hon. Friend said about farmers. At the end of the negotiations, in the early hours of yesterday morning, I explained the outcome to the leaders of the United Kingdom farming unions who were out there. They all, without exception, congratulated me on what I had secured for the United Kingdom. They shook my hand and said, "Well done."

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): Although I recognise the difficult job that the right hon. Gentleman has had to do, does he accept that we have ended up with fudged proposals that are not sustainable in the long term? Does this agreement not extend the period of uncertainty for dairy farmers? Has he confidence that the WTO talks will not intervene during the currency of these proposals? After 2003, there will be a 1.5 per cent. increase in milk quotas for Britain and the other member states. Why will Italy, Greece, Spain and Ireland have those increases in quota earlier? Why are they to get a competitive advantage over our farmers?

Mr. Brown: Because our increase in quota is part of a general linear distribution of quota, which it was agreed would come later. It comes later for all the countries. Special requests were negotiated for some countries, and I was able to secure an extra allocation for the United Kingdom in respect of Northern Ireland.

There is some truth in what the hon. Gentleman said about uncertainty in the dairy regime. I should not be surprised if we had to return to these issues when we know the outcome of the agricultural component of the WTO discussions. I regret the fact that we could not start on dairy reform earlier. As I said, 11 countries were against it and four were in favour, so the fact that we have got any reform at all is an achievement. The hon. Gentleman described the deal as a fudge: I would describe it as a start in the right direction.

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): Farmers' incomes have seen a dramatic decline in the past couple of years. The president of the NFU said this morning that the next few years would be exceedingly difficult for farmers. Will the Minister give us an assurance that the Government will not take any measures that will put in danger the future of Milk Marque, which gives security to many milk farmers?

Mr. Brown: The Government have in front of them the Monopolies and Mergers Commission report on Milk Marque, and I do not think that I should say anything to the House until they have considered their position and a formal statement has been made. As the hon. Gentleman knows, the Department of Trade and Industry has the lead responsibility for that area.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): If, as the Minister says, all the farmers' leaders have been falling over themselves to congratulate him on the CAP compromise, why has Mr. Ben Gill, the president of NFU, been quoted as saying that it will not solve the financial problems of Britain's farmers and that the next few years will still be very difficult?

Mr. Brown: Mr. Ben Gill was not falling over himself, and I did not say that he was. He shook my hand and said, "Well done." That does not mean that all the problems facing farmers have been resolved in this round of negotiations. He was right to say that times would still be difficult for UK farmers in the future, as they will be for EU farmers. My job is to stay as close as I can to producers and to others, to ensure that we have a continuing dialogue and to do what the Government reasonably can to help.

Mrs. Ray Michie (Argyll and Bute): I understand that there is to be a shift from headage to area payments. How will that affect hill livestock compensatory allowances, which are vital, particularly to family farms in the severely disadvantaged areas of the highlands and islands? Who will be the winners and losers? I do not share the Minister's confidence that the consumer will benefit. After all, the supermarkets did not significantly lower their prices when the beef and lamb markets collapsed in Scotland last October.

Mr. Brown: I shall not go over again what I said about cuts in producer prices feeding through in the marketplace to retail prices. I shall respond to the hon. Lady's very good question about the future for the HLCAs. The new proposals take the system from the current headage arrangements to an area-based arrangement. There are a number of advantages to that, and I welcome the change. We have consulted on the matter, but we cannot give a final view until we see how it will work out in terms of real money. The extra payments on the HLCAs that I secured for farmers—a 55 per cent. increase for this year—have been widely welcomed. The change in regime will be subject to consultation throughout the United Kingdom on precisely how to make the transition. I intend to implement the changes in a fair and even-handed way, ensuring that there are no spectacular losers. It is possible to envisage how they might occur, and I am mindful of the difficulties faced by people who are livestock farming in less-favoured areas.

Mental Health (Amendment) (Scotland) Bill

Question again proposed, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

11.57 am

Mr. Russell Brown: When I was on my feet earlier, I wondered why so many people had come into the Chamber. I now realise why. Under normal circumstances, I would be upset at being interrupted in full flow, but I was delighted to be disturbed by my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, who came to the House to make such a positive statement for farmers and consumers.

Before the statement, I was going over some of the history of mental health provisions in Scotland. The 1983 amendments and the 1984 consolidation Act were not extensively debated in Parliament, so it is reasonable to say that the Millan commission has the opportunity to undertake the first fundamental review of the legislation for more than 40 years.

Since 1984, the Disabled Persons (Services, Consultation and Representation) Act 1986 has been introduced. That was also a private Member's Bill, and was introduced by my right hon. Friend the Member for Coatbridge and Chryston (Mr. Clarke) to improve the rights of disabled people, including people with mental disorders. However, significant sections of the Act were never implemented, including a statutory scheme for advocacy and a requirement for care planning for people being discharged from long-stay care.

The National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990 reorganised the health service, creating what we all now know as NHS trusts. That has, without doubt, complicated issues raised by the Mental Health (Scotland) Act 1984 relating to who bears legal responsibility for such matters as detaining patients and managing their funds. The Act also established new duties for local authorities to assess the needs of those who require community care, and to plan community care services.

In recognition of the fact that community care services for mentally ill people were underdeveloped, a mental illness specific grant was introduced, with the use of powers under the Act. Directions made under the Act established a new right for people requiring residential care to choose their care home. That is an important aspect of something that is happening in my constituency.

Although the Act did not introduce charging for residential care, the increasing use of community care rather than hospitals—especially in the case of elderly people—and budgetary constraints on local authorities led to more people being charged for residential and home care services. That includes services that people receive compulsorily, under, for example, mental health guardianship.

A number of other Acts deal with patients with mental health problems—for instance, the Access to Health Records Act 1990, the Mental Health (Detention) (Scotland) Act 1991, the Local Government etc. (Scotland) Act 1995, the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, the Criminal Procedure (Scotland) Act 1995 and the Mental Health (Patients in the Community) Act 1995. The list goes on.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael J. Martin): Order. I am reluctant to interrupt the hon. Gentleman, but the terms of the Bill are very narrow. The Bill concerns the ability of patients to gain access to private funds.

Mr. Brown: I accept that, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

There have also been important reports by the Scottish Law Commission on, for example, incapable adults and vulnerable adults.

What my hon. Friend the Member for Midlothian described as a "wee Bill" will nevertheless confer major benefits on those whom it will touch. How would any of us feel if we were told that all our savings were locked away out of our reach, and that we could not have access to them without a cumbersome, lengthy, expensive and inappropriate court procedure?

Many of my constituents with mental health problems are moving out of institutionalised care. In Dumfries, the Crichton Royal infirmary, a well-known hospital for people with such problems, is due to close by 31 December this year. I can tell hon. Members that that timetable will not be achieved.

The intention is to move patients into the community. At an early stage, I spoke to the chief executive of my local community trust, and impressed on him that any move to relocate people in the community in and around Dumfries should take place on the basis that they should be located appropriately. I said that the relocation should not take place with the aim of meeting a deadline. When I met the chief executive again last week, I was delighted that he was able to tell me that the site could not be vacated by the end of the year, and that the process might take another three or six months.

People have been moved into a host of different settings—converted properties, and properties purpose built to house patients. It should not be forgotten that relocating patients means moving them into a different setting. Some of those people may have spent only 12 or 24 months in what is classed as institutional care, but, for many others, it has been their home for 40, 50 or even 60 years. Life will be very different for those people.

I was recently asked to visit a newly purpose-built property in my home town, which was to house four frail elderly ladies. Establishing such homes can be an anxious time not just for the people concerned and their carers, but for the communities in which the people will be placed. I am pleased to say, however, that communities are getting the message that people need more appropriate settings than institutional care.

In my area, 190 patients are in community trusts beds and subject to the incapax rule, 142 of whom have their funds managed by hospital managers; the funds of the other 48 are managed by curators. It is predicted that 75 of those 190 will move from health care into a variety of social care settings over the next 12 months. To date, around 40 people additional to those 190 have already left hospital within the resettlement programme, as it is being called. Some were incapax when in hospital. A small number, around five, have a curator in place.

In the area, a local working group was set up to produce joint health and social care guidance on supporting people who were incapable of managing their own financial

affairs, especially after leaving hospital. In Dumfries and Galloway, we are running almost a unique system where we are endeavouring to assist people as they move out, but the issues are complex and we need to take into account whether patients have close relatives who will take responsibility, and whether patients have significant capital or income. The lack of a clear legislative framework has made the task of the group, which has done some sterling work, more and more complex.

One hospital—I will not mention any names, but it is obviously outwith the area—has taken a particularly clear and rigid line that it cannot in any circumstances transfer money. That money can still be accessed by patients and their care workers, but it is an infringement of human rights that their money is not more easily accessed. It is ridiculous that someone could be discharged back into their home area of Dumfries with their money still being retained more than 100 miles away.

Mrs. Irene Adams: Does my hon. Friend agree that life is often difficult enough for people who are making the transition from long-term residential care back to the community? Often, as he has said, they have been in care for 40 or 50 years and have enjoyed the little luxuries that their funds have bought them in recent years. When they are released back into the community without access to those funds, they are even further confused by the fact they cannot continue to enjoy those little luxuries.

Mr. Brown: My hon. Friend is exactly right. It comes back to the saying about the simple things in life being so pleasing to people with severe mental health problems.

The issue of arranging for people's money to be managed after their discharge has taken up hours and hours of the resettlement group's time in Dumfries. Banks and building societies are anything but helpful when people cannot sign for themselves to open an account. Arranging for a curator to be put in place is expensive and leads to inflexibility. It is a nightmare; it can be classed as nothing but that. The lack of legislation to provide a framework means that local authorities cannot agree arrangements to resolve that situation.

Ms Osborne: Does my hon. Friend agree that one aspect of community care can complicate matters in relation to the Bill? Many elderly people move from one part of the country to the other; many have moved to Ayrshire because it is such a picturesque part of Scotland. Does he agree that that aspect has to be taken into account as well?

Mr. Brown: My hon. Friend is exactly right. Ayrshire is a beautiful part of the country, but I have to say that Dumfries is equally beautiful.

As a society, we are moving towards discharging people back into the community, but the major anomaly in relation to how patients' finances are managed is an infringement of human rights. My hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen, South (Miss Begg) said that she believed she had spent her money somewhat frivolously at the Monet exhibition yesterday. Frivolously or not, as we head towards the millennium, those who fall into the category of incapax patients also deserve to have that right in a civilised society.

The Bill will move things forward for so many vulnerable people and is a great credit to my hon. Friend the Member for Midlothian—who, as hon. Members have already said, is a big man with a big heart. By choosing this issue above all those from which he could have chosen, he has also, once again, shown his true socialist credentials. I know full well that, first thing on Monday, he will grab a copy of *Hansard* to read all the compliments that have been paid to him today, and justifiably so. However, in the eyes of many of us, he will remain—as we say north of the border—a crabbit old devil at times.

The Bill is a major step forward. Once enacted, it will plug a loophole. The new Scottish Parliament will also be able to take on board the issue. I merely hope that all hon. Members will support my hon. Friend the Member for Midlothian in promoting his Bill.

12.10 pm

Mrs. Rosemary McKenna (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth): It is a pleasure to be called to speak in the debate. However, looking at the statistics that we were given today, I see that Lanarkshire, the Western Isles and Shetland have no one who would be affected by the Bill's provisions. I do not know why that is, although I shall certainly look into it. I hope that it is because the areas are very enlightened and have moved on in addressing the issue. Anything else that Lanarkshire, the Western Isles and Shetland might have in common is a completely mystery to me.

I am pleased to support my hon. Friend the Member for Midlothian (Mr. Clarke) in promoting his Bill, and heartily associate myself with the words that other hon. Members have spoken about him today. His choice of issue to promote in a Bill tells us much about him. It tells us about the type of man that he is.

I shall use some of my hon. Friend's own words. He said that it was a "wee Bill". He should have said that, "It was a wee Bill that was needed for a wee while, but will make a great big difference to the lives of a lot of people in Scotland."

I should like to echo the words of my right hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, East and Musselburgh (Dr. Strang), who spoke about the committee established by the Under–Secretary of State for Scotland, my hon. Friend the Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden (Mr. Galbraith), under the excellent chairmanship of Bruce Millan. Although there is a huge task to be done by the Scottish Parliament, this small Bill will make a tremendous difference and help in that work. We want an early resolution of the matter, but it is important that time should be taken to get it right. The Bill will help the committee to address all the issues.

I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen, South (Miss Begg) for her extremely amusing and telling speech, in which she demonstrated the importance to the House of having her as an hon. Member. She spoke with such conviction, authority and humour that it makes me look forward to the day when it is not a surprise to see in this place people who are wheelchair bound. She was right to say that language is crucial. My preferred option is to speak of "people with disabilities", as that puts people first, focusing on their abilities, not disabilities. We should be talking about people's capabilities.

I should like to mention a facility in my own constituency that, before passage of the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990, was created by people in

[Mrs. Rosemary McKenna]

the community. In the early 1980s, a partnership of local authorities in Cumbernauld and Kilsyth and in Strathclyde, the then Scottish Society for the Mentally Handicapped, the parents of handicapped people and local businesses established one of the first group tenancies in Scotland.

When the partnership was created, my very good and hon. Friend the Member for Stirling (Mrs. McGuire) was its chairperson—she had also been very much involved in its creation—and I was the local authority leader. The partnership solved a problem for the parents of the group home's residents, who had been extremely concerned about their children's future. Most of the people came from long-term institutions, but some of them were within the community. It was a real partnership and it worked extremely well. It was the first group tenancy in our town. There are now three in Cumbernauld and one in Kilsyth. They make a tremendous difference and have dramatically improved the lives of the people involved.

I mentioned that my hon. Friend the Member for Stirling was chair of the partnership. She will remember an incident involving Derek, who will not mind being mentioned by name. In fact, he will be absolutely delighted to see his name in *Hansard*. At the official opening, Derek, who was in his early 20s, asked my hon. Friend to intervene and tell his mother that it was his decision as to when he went to bed. Derek treasured being allowed to make that simple decision. My hon. Friend the Member for Stirling handled the situation very diplomatically.

Derek had come from a much-loved home where he was extremely well cared for, but going to live in the group tenancy gave him independence and a tremendous feeling of being part of the community. I treasure that, as does the entire community in Cumbernauld and Kilsyth. Group tenancies have enhanced the quality of life of the adults in the group, who go out for pub lunches and cause mayhem at local church dances. I should say that they are quite indiscriminate about the church dances. They love them all, and they are very welcome. They also go shopping in the town centre. They have enhanced the quality of life of the entire community. They are part of our community. Children grow up with such people in their midst and we gain as much from their presence as they do from having their freedom.

We should all support the Bill. Mention has been made of the concern of parents. I should like to raise another issue that is not directly related to the Bill, but involves people making decisions. As a local councillor, I once tried to deliver a letter to the local nursing home where there were about 60 geriatric patients. I asked to speak to the matron, who agreed to take the letters but said that they would make no difference. I said, "Don't you think they should know who their local Member is and who they should speak to if they have any problems?" She replied, "I decide that." That really worried me. I am also worried that they do not have proper access to voting—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I have allowed some leeway, but I cannot allow the hon. Lady to go so wide of the Bill and discuss polling facilities.

Mrs. McKenna: I was saying that everyone has the right to vote—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I cannot allow the hon. Lady to talk about the right to vote. She must restrict her comments to the contents of the Bill.

Mrs. McKenna: I appreciate that, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It is a matter that I can pursue elsewhere, and I certainly will.

Society should be judged on how it treats its most vulnerable members. As the law has not been changed to reflect care in the community, we are all failing the most vulnerable people in our society when we deny them small items of comfort. It diminishes them and us, so I urge the House to support the Bill.

12.19 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Sam Galbraith): I appreciate the choice of Bill of my hon. Friend the Member for Midlothian (Mr. Clarke) and the elegant and persuasive way in which he spoke. He has received so many compliments today that I wonder whether he is the same person whom we know or his brother. I am happy to say that all the compliments were justified. As has been said, many hon. Members who have the chance of a private Member's Bill go for an approach that creates publicity and media attention and gives them a reputation. In keeping with his record in the Labour movement and the trade union movement, my hon. Friend has once again chosen an unspectacular route that will benefit a large number of people. He should be congratulated on that.

My hon. Friend the Member for Dumfries (Mr. Brown) said that my hon. Friend the Member for Midlothian was crabbit. That is probably true from time to time, but it is only because of his frustration at being unable to enact his good measures. We forgive him for his crabbit behaviour, but we congratulate him on the Bill, which is a significant step forward that will be regarded as a small but important measure for the people concerned.

Before I deal with some of the issues in the Bill, I should like to refer to some of the points that have been raised. I thank the hon. Member for Banbury (Mr. Baldry) for his support for the Bill and the kind words that he passed on to my hon. Friend the Member for Midlothian. He asked some important questions, including what happens if someone ceases to be incapacitated. As at present, the funds will be returned to the person from the control of hospital managers before or after discharge. He also asked about the meaning of benefit. There is no definition of the word in the Mental Health (Scotland) Act 1984, but courts would continue to look on the ordinary meaning of the word.

The hon. Gentleman was also concerned about expenditure and the right of redress. One or two other hon. Members have raised that. I may deal later with guidance on how those issues should be managed. There are no specific rights under the 1984 Act for an incapable patient to challenge expenditure by hospital managers. We shall consider that in the context of the incapable adults Bill to come forward under the new Scottish Parliament, but anyone who deals with a person's funds has an obligation to account for his actions. If he is negligent, that can be remedied under common law. I hope that I have answered the hon. Gentleman's queries on that, but if he has any other concerns I should be only too pleased to reassure him.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, East and Musselburgh (Dr. Strang) eloquently described the benefits of community care and the reason why we need the Bill. He has visited many former long-term hospital

patients, particularly from Gogarburn, and seen their terrific success in the community. I endorse everything that he said on that.

The hon. Member for Argyll and Bute (Mrs. Michie) welcomed and supported the Bill on behalf of her party. I am grateful to her for that. She raised several issues, including whether the hospital manager can hand over funds to someone else to be managed. The answer is no. That is why the Bill is necessary. Other arrangements, such as the appointment of a curator bonis, can be made, but they are very expensive and would not be appropriate for some of the amounts involved.

The hon. Lady was also worried about extra bureaucracy. We shall deal with that in the guidance that we shall issue if the Bill becomes law to ensure that there is no unnecessary bureaucracy. She asked whether the money would revert to the Crown following death. Normal laws of succession will apply, as they do to every patient—an incapable adult is no different. If the person has a will, it will be implemented; if not, the law of succession will apply. It is only if neither of those circumstances apply that the Crown would receive the funds under the doctrine of ultimus haeres. I hope that I have reassured her on that point.

My hon. Friend the Member for Paisley, North (Mrs. Adams) described extremely well the reasons for the Bill when she talked about John. What she outlined is exactly the problem that we face, and I am grateful to her for highlighting it. I am also grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Inverness, East, Nairn and Lochaber (Mr. Stewart) for describing the reasons for the Bill and the reality behind it. I am sure that all of us would find someone who is involved in such matters in our constituencies.

My hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen, South (Miss Begg) was right once again to mention that language is important. As a doctor, I always used to be upset when people were described as "a low back pain" or "a head injury". I used to try to inculcate my colleagues with the notion that such people were real people with dignities, realities and futures. We should always remember that. In my defence, I should say that such terms are legal ones—and my hon. Friend knows what lawyers are like. She is right that the medical profession must treat people with dignity. She also described some of the small activities from which we all benefit, and mentioned getting her hair done. That is not one of the benefits that I share, but I understand what she means.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ayr (Ms Osborne) talked about funding of community care. There is now more than £1 billion available for social work. We will increase that by £279 million over the next three years to address the very problem that she described.

My hon. Friend the Member for Greenock and Inverclyde (Dr. Godman) asked some very specific questions on people in long-term care; bridging care before moving into the community; and re-provision at Larkfield. The folk involved in that re-provisioning are very confident that the contract for the new Larkfield unit will be signed very soon. He mentioned the mental illness specific grant. We have made it very specific, and a permanent fixture. It used to be temporary and considered each year, but it has been analysed and found to be useful, so will become permanent.

My hon. Friend the Member for Greenock and Inverclyde also asked about guidance on managing the funds of incapacitated patients—not just in hospital but in the community—and mentioned the draft guidance that was published last year. We have received a number of responses to that, especially from the Law Society, the Mental Welfare Commission and local authorities. We are considering them, and hope to issue final guidance very shortly, which will go to all the usual statutory bodies, such as local authorities, health boards, and so on.

My hon. Friend the Member for Dumfries talked about Crichton Royal. I am pleased to hear that the principles of community care are firmly followed there, and that nobody leaves hospital for the community until the right facilities are provided for them. There are no time scales for such things; facilities must be right for the patient. That must be the most important criterion, and I am pleased that it has been adopted at that hospital.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cumbernauld and Kilsyth (Mrs. McKenna) mentioned the review of mental welfare legislation and described the benefits of community care. In doing so, she did not only talk of the person involved, although that is very important. Indeed, such matters are the most important to those people; that is what we are all about. She is right, however, that the community often benefits and is enriched, too. I am grateful to her for her contribution.

The Government unequivocally support the Bill. As my hon. Friend the Member for Midlothian said, it responds to a real and pressing difficulty caused by the inflexibility of section 94 of 1984 Act. As he so clearly described, the Act, which consolidated the Mental Health (Scotland) Act 1960, is of considerable antiquity and has not kept pace with changes in the way in which people are managed and treated in care. It was enacted when hospital care was seen as the right and proper way for society to look after people who were unable to care for themselves. Since then, developments have shown that individuals with mental disorders can, as my hon. Friend the Member for Paisley, North described, live much more fulfilled lives in the community, given appropriate support.

The Government recognise the case for new comprehensive mental health legislation consistent with current practice. I am glad of the welcome from all parties for the review that I announced in December to be conducted under the chairmanship of the right hon. Bruce Millan, a distinguished former Secretary of State for Scotland. The review is now into its stride and the first meeting was held last week. I am certain that we will get a report that will lay the basis for enlightened mental health legislation fit for the new millennium.

That legislation will take time to go through the new Scottish Parliament. The 1984 Act in its present form does not allow hospital managers to release the funds of incapable patients when they leave hospital to live in the community. That would be an unacceptable situation even if only one patient was affected, but when, as we have heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Midlothian, perhaps as many as 750 people could be in such a position by the end of the year, with more in the following years, we cannot allow the situation to continue. Action is needed, and that is why I am very grateful to my hon. Friend.

It might be helpful to the House if I say a little bit more about the management of the funds of people who, through mental disorder, are unable to look after their own

[Mr. Sam Galbraith]

affairs. The 1984 Act recognised the problem and, within the prevailing wisdom at that time, provided a helpful framework designed to ensure that the interests of patients and their resources are fully safeguarded. For example, the legislation allows local authorities to apply for the appointment of a curator bonis to look after the funds of people incapable of doing so for themselves, whether in hospital or in the community.

The Mental Welfare Commission, a body set up under the 1984 Act to exercise protective functions with respect to the mentally disordered, can also arrange a similar appointment but, as numerous hon. Members have mentioned, such arrangements can be extremely expensive and in many cases they are totally disproportionate to the sums held in the hospital.

Section 94 was enacted to allow hospital managers to receive, hold and expend the resources of patients in the hospital. The provision was conceived with the best of intentions, and indeed it still provides a perfectly adequate solution for the management of patients' funds while they are in hospital, with hospital managers ensuring that they get the optimum benefit.

Many patients now have the opportunity to move into the community, whether returning to their own home or moving into supported or nursing home accommodation. For many, whether young or not so young, that offers the best opportunity for a better quality of life than is possible in hospital: a life with some decency and dignity. That is not because long-stay hospitals are unpleasant places, although some are, but simply because care in the community, by its very nature, can offer the necessary security, protection and comfort in a more domestic and acceptable setting. I am sure that we have all been to see patients who used to be in hospital and are now living in the community, with all the advances and improvements that have been made. I have no doubt whatever about the benefits.

Before any patient is discharged from hospital, the social work department will co-ordinate a multidisciplinary assessment of the care and support needed in the community. Services can be provided by a range of statutory and independent sector agencies, ensuring that there is a package of support for everyone.

That package, to be put in place before the patient returns to the community, should include planning to ensure that resources accruing to the patient when in the community will be properly managed on his or her behalf by whatever means are appropriate. The difficulty, as I have said, is that resources already accumulated by patients while in hospital cannot move with them when they move into the community. That is simply a lacuna in the 1984 Act, which our predecessors in the House could not have been expected to foresee. My hon. Friend's Bill plugs the gap. It will also allow hospital managers to receive and hold interest accruing on moneys already held in the hospital, a point which has been made by the Law Society of Scotland. The Bill will have a dramatic effect in liberating funds trapped in hospitals and help to ensure that the persons concerned, while in the community, will secure the maximum ability to obtain the small things that make the difference, as described by my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen, South.

Several hon. Members made the point that we need to ensure that reasonable and proper safeguards are in place to make sure that the resources are truly used in the patient's best interests when in the community. The hospital manager will retain responsibility for the funds, and will be responsible for authorising expenditure. There will need to be close co-operation between the new carer in the community and the hospital manager. I anticipate that the procedures, which will be put in place when the Bill becomes law, will enable the new carer to apply to the hospital manager for the release of funds, as the occasion arises, to be spent in the most appropriate way for the person's benefit.

I would expect each NHS trust, in such circumstances, to be satisfied that the proposed spend is appropriate and for the real personal benefit of the individual, and that consideration has been given to value for money in each case. I would emphasise that such spend will not replace expenditure on items or services that are the proper responsibility of the care facility, the NHS or the local authority. We must always remember that the moneys that we are speaking about today belong specifically to a particular patient and must be used for that person's individual benefit. To guarantee that, if the Bill is enacted, I undertake to ensure that further guidance is issued to those who will be required to operate the new provisions. The guidance will set out, for example, how money should be requested from hospital managers, and how hospital managers should consider such requests.

In his speech, my hon. Friend the Member for Midlothian said that he had no wish to see his Bill grow old in the same way as the 1984 Act has done, and he expressed the hope that wide-ranging, comprehensive legislation would be enacted in the Scottish Parliament that would modernise the arrangements for managing the affairs of incapable adults. Hon. Members will be glad to know that I share my hon Friend's views.

The report issued by the Scottish Law Commission on incapable adults as long ago as 1995 made proposals for a new legislative framework for managing the affairs of incapable adults. Following consideration of an extensive consultation on the commission's proposals, the Government made it clear last December that we fully accepted the need for reform of existing legislation in that important area, and set out the Government's views on the commission's proposals. It will be within the competence of the Scottish Parliament to legislate in that area and, while we cannot prejudge or pre-empt what the Parliament's legislative programme will be, it would certainly be my hope that legislative progress can be made in this deserving area at an early stage.

While legislation must await the new Parliament, we can take steps administratively to improve the current situation. That is why we consulted last year on draft guidance that seeks to address concerns about the arrangements for managing and protecting the finances, housing and other property of people who are incapable of managing their own affairs as a result of mental disorder. It provides guidance for health boards, local authorities and relevant independent sector agencies and seeks to clarify the existing legal options for the management and protection of incapable adults' resources. That point was raised by my hon. Friend the

Member for Greenock and Inverclyde. Many constructive responses have been received during the consultation, and we hope to be in a position shortly to issue the final guidance to the bodies that I have mentioned. The guidance will focus above all else on the needs of the individual. It will assert the primacy of private or family arrangements over institutional ones, with due regard to appropriate safeguards, and it will reaffirm opportunities to make best use of existing options for managing the financial affairs of incapable adults. This guidance, together with the Bill before the House today, will help to clarify current areas of doubt and ensure that people who suffer from mental disorders receive the best possible deal under the existing legislative framework.

I cannot emphasise enough the extent to which the Government view my hon. Friend's Bill as an important and necessary measure. All hon. Members referred this morning to cases where money has become entrapped and cannot be used for the future. We cannot allow that situation to continue. I hope—as does my hon. Friend the Member for Midlothian—that the Bill will be an interim measure until a fully fledged modern legislative framework for managing the funds of incapable adults is introduced in the new Parliament.

I congratulate my hon. Friend once again. He has taken his time and used his resources and experience to do something positive for a group in society whom he is able to assist through his own direct action. In his conduct in the House and throughout his public and private life, my hon. Friend has always sought to use what powers he has to root out inequalities, deal with disadvantage and to produce a richer, fairer and more dignified life for as many people as possible in which everyone is free and more able to realise their potential. My hon. Friend has sought to do that in this measure, and I congratulate him on behalf of all hon. Members on both sides of the House.

Mr. Eric Clarke: With the leave of the House, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I do not know what to say—everyone has been so nice to me. I am grateful to hon. Members for the welcome that they have given the Bill. I also thank the Minister—it is a mutual admiration society—and his civil servants who helped me behind the scenes. They encouraged me to produce this Bill and assisted me in drawing it up. I am very grateful to them.

I must also thank the Law Society and Michael Clancy, Adrian Ward and Ann Keenan. I have discovered that not all lawyers are crooks and that many care about society and want to correct anomalies. Those three people are in that category.

I must mention some of my hon. Friends specifically. My hon. Friend the Member for Paisley, North (Mrs. Adams) did an embarrassing amount of work behind the scenes. Another lawyer, my hon. Friend the Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Mr. Browne), also did a tower of work on my behalf. I was also assisted by my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, West (Mr. Dowd)—who is from south of the border—and my hon. Friend the Member for Stirling (Mrs. McGuire). The sponsors and supporters of the Bill have been absolutely wonderful. Bruce Millan told me on Saturday that I was doing a marvellous job, so he has endorsed the Bill as well.

I must declare an interest in the debate as I am a disabled person. It is correct to say that this is a small Bill which, as it currently stands, cannot hope to put right the problems that hon. Members have identified regarding the management of the finances of those who are incapable of looking after their own affairs because of a minor disorder. Indeed, the Bill does not attempt to do so. It aims simply to address one problem that, if not corrected, would seriously disadvantage the people concerned. As such, it represents one small but important step along the way to comprehensive legislation, which we all hope will be pursued in the Scottish Parliament. I hope—indeed, I am sure—that the support that I have received from my hon. Friend the Minister also demonstrates the Government's willingness to deal with this important topic.

Future action will be taken in the new Parliament in Edinburgh. In the meantime, we must take steps so that we can tackle this cumbersome problem. Accordingly, I commend the Bill to the House.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I have much pleasure in putting the Question.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee, pursuant to Standing Order No. 63 (Committal of Bills).

Bus Fuel Duty (Exemptions) Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

12.46 pm

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

When I was fortunate enough to attend Committee Room 10 just as you were drawing the ballot for private Member's Bills this year, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I think that I was pleased that my name was drawn from the box, giving me the opportunity to present this Bill. Once he has been lucky in the ballot, an hon. Member is offered many choices for the subject of his private Member's Bill. Many hon. Members have told me how many letters one gets as soon as one's name is drawn. This is the first time that I have been so high in the ballot, and I was surprised to receive about 600 letters over Christmas suggesting subjects for my Bill.

Last September, I visited one of the community transport schemes in my constituency, in Bakewell, to see the good work done and the help provided by the Community Transport Association.

At this stage, I must thank all the sponsors of the Bill, who range from the Chairman of the Select Committee on the Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs to a former Secretary of State for Transport and a former Local Government Minister, as well as hon. Members representing Derbyshire—the hon. Members for Amber Valley (Judy Mallaber) and for North-East Derbyshire (Mr. Barnes)—the deputy leader of the Liberal Democrat party, and other Members of Parliament, who have all understood what I am trying to achieve.

The Bill would exempt operators of certain community bus services from the payment of Customs and Excise duty on fuel used to operate the services. In particular, it would ensure that the exemption is granted to those community bus services that assist thousands of elderly and disabled people in both rural and urban areas. The service is particularly helpful to my constituents, many of whom live in isolated villages where the terrain makes a walk of even the shortest distance difficult for old people.

The House may not be aware that registered commercial bus services already receive a fuel duty rebate, which was raised in line with the duty increase in the Budget. It amounts to around two thirds of the duty paid by commercial operators. However, that fuel duty relief does not apply to voluntary and charitable community trust bus services, which assist elderly and disabled people daily. I was surprised to find out that that anomaly existed, particularly given the way in which the Government continue to increase fuel prices—as we have seen with the escalator. The increases will have a detrimental impact on community bus services.

Community bus services do not qualify for fuel duty relief because they do not operate a fixed route or timetable. That means that those valuable services are penalised for going out of their way to offer a door-to-door service that accommodates people who might otherwise be housebound and unable to gain access to mainstream transport. It is a huge anomaly that a bus operating empty but on a registered route qualifies for the rebate but a community bus that offers a specific service to individual people does not. It is ironic that such a huge differential applies between the commercial and voluntary sectors. Community transport is valuable but is denied the fuel duty relief to which commercial operators are legally entitled.

The Bill's sponsors agree that community transport schemes perform a valuable service. Their real value derives from the quality of life that they help to bring to so many elderly and disabled people with mobility problems who would otherwise be unable to access essential day-to-day amenities such as health care—dentistry, chiropody, hospitals—or visit friends and community groups. Such people thereby gain active involvement in society in a way that would otherwise not be possible for them.

Deborah Oddy of the Bakewell scheme told me:

"There are a substantial number of people who have needs which deny them access to the things that others take for granted, such as appointments at the doctors or hospital, visiting friends and relatives or joining in adult education classes. There are increased problems faced by rural communities in making even the smallest journey unless you have a car".

I saw the service at first hand in my constituency when I undertook a bus journey on 16 September to from Hassop to Bakewell. The people using it found it tremendously valuable, particularly in remote rural areas such as those in the north of my constituency. It is no exaggeration to say that the bus services are a lifeline to housebound people who would otherwise not have access to towns.

Community transport services in Derbyshire have been at the forefront of the campaign for fuel duty exemption. A convoy of five community bus transport groups from the county came down before Christmas and their petition and was presented by the hon. Member for Amber Valley to the House and the Government. Following the first scheme in Glossop 18 years ago, others have replicated the service throughout the county in Bakewell, Chesterfield, Clowne, Ilkeston, Ripley, Swadlincote and Derby.

In 1998, there were eight community transport schemes in Derbyshire. They used an estimated 265,000 litres of fuel, had running costs of £2.5 million and a contribution from the county council of £775,000. They covered nearly 1.2 million miles and carried some 443,000 passengers. During an average month, community transport in Derbyshire covers more than 65,000 miles and carries some 76,000 passengers. All the Derbyshire schemes are registered non-profit-making charities that have been operating for the past 10 years with a mixture of paid staff and volunteers. They operate a range of targeted schemes.

Dial-a-bus takes people who have difficulty using public transport from their homes to local town centres and supermarkets. Dial-a-ride transport allows people who are unable to use ordinary taxis to travel from home to wherever they want to go—to hospitals or to visit friends or relatives. The social car scheme offered by the Bakewell and Eyam service is similar to dial-a-ride. Volunteer drivers use their cars to provide transport for people, escorting or waiting for them when they reach their destination or returning for them. The community bus operates normal services in Bakewell, Eyam, Clowne and Swadlincote on designated routes on which no commercial service operates. Small detours can be made to pick up regular passengers who are unable to get to the bus stop. That can be very important in the remoter parts of my constituency and hilly areas where the terrain can be steep and difficult.

Financial support for such bus services comes from Derbyshire county council, district and parish councils, local businesses, trusts and fund-raising schemes. The rural nature of Derbyshire illustrates one of the key points in the debate. In many rural areas of the United Kingdom, sparsity of population and public transport provision mean that there is even greater dependency on community transport schemes.

As the TAS partnership has said:

"some 20 per cent. of rural settlements in England are estimated to have a bus service below 'subsistence' levels—fewer than four return journeys a day, and no evening/weekend service."

The Minister of Transport has said:

"a significant proportion of people in rural areas—upwards of 20 per cent. in rural households—have no access whatever to a car."—[*Official Report*, 20 October 1998; Vol. 317, c. 1075.]

According to a survey by the Rural Development Commission, 75 per cent. of parishes had no daily public bus service in 1997.

The Government have recognised the value of community transport. In the last Budget, they announced a rural transport fund of a further £10 million for capital modernisation funds, matched by the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions over the next two years. I am sure that rural areas will benefit from, and welcome, that money. However, this week's Budget announced an 11.6 per cent. increase in the duty on diesel from 44.99p to 51.13p per litre. I doubt that any road user will have welcomed the fuel duty increases announced in the Budget but, while registered bus operators have the consolation of an increase in fuel duty rebate in line with the duty increases, no such cheer is available for the 5,000 voluntary community transport schemes, which offer a wonderful and valuable service.

The Minister may well point out the capital programme that she has announced. However, it is not always the capital that is the difficulty. Often, it is the revenue running costs. That is what the Bill deals with. It addresses the severe problems that community bus services feel that they may face as a result of the road fuel duty escalator.

The Bill gives the Government an opportunity to ease the pain that the fuel duty increases have caused community transport operators. The savings that exemption will allow could provide resources for operators to broaden their services, and many more handicapped, disabled and elderly people would benefit. The savings for Derbyshire as a result of the Bill, now and following implementation of the measures in this week's Budget, could well be more than £117,000, which could pay for new specified minibuses and enable operators significantly to increase the mileage covered.

Mr. Andrew Love (Edmonton): The hon. Gentleman said that the cost to the Exchequer for Derbyshire alone, after the fuel escalator, would be about £117,000. Can he give the House an idea of the likely cost to the Exchequer of a nationwide scheme?

Mr. McLoughlin: I was expecting such a question to be asked—not planted; that would be an absurd suggestion. The Bill would give the voluntary sector the same treatment as the commercial sector. The Government whom the hon. Gentleman supports will make an allowance for an increase in the fuel duty rebate to the commercial sector this week, following the Chancellor's Budget announcements. A few weeks ago, in a written answer to a question that I had asked, the Minister for Transport in London said:

"Expenditure"—

this was last year, before the Budget—

"is expected to be £270 million in this financial year, reflecting the increase in the rate of rebate in line with this year's increase in duty."—[*Official Report*, 19 January 1999; Vol. 323, c. 445.]

The Government will therefore increase the fuel duty rebate for the commercial sector even more this year.

I am saying to the hon. Gentleman that the Government are finding about £300 million for the commercial sector. In some cases—not in all cases, and they would not want to do so constantly—operators may be running buses empty, and they will receive a Government subsidy for doing so. The community transport scheme provides a valuable service, which is used.

I say to the hon. Gentleman, anticipating the intervention that he or another hon. Member may make, that my Bill would give a 100 per cent. rebate. I am the first to accept that the Bill has not been drafted by the parliamentary draftsmen whose services were open to the Government to use—and we know that sometimes even they can make mistakes in Bills. I believe that, so far, more than 70 amendments have been tabled to schedule 1 of the Employment Relations Bill—a Government-

drafted Bill.

I am happy for the Bill to pass into Committee and for the Government to use their draftsmen and to say that we have not quite got it right and a few amendments—tinkerings—are needed. I suggest to the hon. Gentleman that, if no such amendments were needed, it would be the first time ever that a Bill needed no amendment at all. My Bill may not be perfectly drafted, but there will be an opportunity in Committee to address some of those problems.

I also point out to the hon. Gentleman that another charity gets a 100 per cent. rebate—I am very pleased that it does—and that is the Royal National Lifeboat Institution. I consider that the schemes that I am talking about today provide a valuable service to all those elderly, handicapped or disabled people in my constituency. I am not sure which constituency the hon. Gentleman represents, but I am sure that the same applies there.

This important Bill should progress further through its parliamentary stages.

Mr. Love: I return to the question that I asked earlier. Will the hon. Gentleman give the House an idea of the likely cost of his Bill to the Exchequer, should it be introduced nationwide?

Mr. McLoughlin: I have just said that the amount of money that the Government are spending this year or as a result of the Budget that the hon. Gentleman no doubt supports and no doubt waved his Order Paper for, will mean that the commercial sector will get a £300 million rebate, on the Government's figures. As a matter of fairness, the Community Transport Association should be treated in the same way as the commercial sector. The points that the hon. Gentleman makes about cost can be discussed in Committee.

[Mr. McLoughlin]

The hon. Gentleman must acknowledge that some of the costs that are already being faced by local authorities in giving the money to community transport schemes are a call on the Exchequer. The simple fact is that 50,000 registered bus services already place a charge of about £300 million on the Exchequer.

It is also possible to assume that the exemption would lead to lower charges for users. For example, the Bakewell and Eyam community transport scheme charges to cover the costs and has stated that, with the £14,500 a year saving which it has estimated would come from a fuel duty exemption, it would be able to offer lower fares and expand the service.

The Public Accounts Committee report on the bus fuel grant, which was presented to Parliament in June 1989, stressed the contribution that bus fuel grants for public bus services make to keeping fares down and enabling wider mileage of provision than would otherwise be possible.

I have already described the tangible difference that community transport schemes make to everyday life for elderly and disabled people. The Bill could make even more of a difference by extending that excellent service. That would increase the provision of public transport, especially in rural areas, and help to build the integrated transport system that the Government keep talking about. If they are serious about that, they should take the Bill seriously.

I believe that this measure is fair for voluntary community transport schemes, which do so much good for their communities. They and the registered operators should be given equal treatment, especially because community bus services, which go out of their way to help those who have least access to mainstream transport, are disqualified from assistance. My Bill would correct that anomaly.

I have had plenty of support for the Bill. I have already referred to its sponsors, and I should like to thank some of the other people who have given me tremendous help with the Bill. I thank the Public Bill Office for its help with drafting the Bill. It is difficult to draw up legilsation. This private Member's Bill has not been given to me by the Government to progress through the parliamentary process.

It is outrageous that the Government have made a statement, which took an hour of our time, on a Friday during debate on a private Member's Bill. This is only the third Friday of this parliamentary Session on which the House has sat, and it is the second Friday on which the Government have made a statement. It is disgraceful to interrupt discussions on a private Member's Bill. In the past, the Government have made statements at seven o'clock on a Thursday evening before a non-sitting Friday. Given that this statement was trailed in the press yesterday, there is no justification for the Government to take valuable time away from debate on private Member's Bills. They are obviously attempting to ensure that my Bill makes no further progress. I hope that the Procedure Committee will examine that problem. When that happens on a Friday—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. The hon. Gentleman has made his point many times over.

Mr. McLoughlin: The point is always worth making strongly, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but I accept your ruling. I hope that the Procedure Committee will look into the matter.

I have received support from various people. I should like to mention Colin Smale, who runs the Amber Valley community transport scheme in my constituency. He said:

"If the Government are going to be looking to Community Transport to continue to expand their work in rural areas in particular then it is reasonable for us to look to government to offer financial support to help make that happen."

In the *Community Transport Magazine* in 1999, the Minister for Transport in London said:

"The White Paper is about integration: different modes of transport, of transport policy with other policies and of transport policy at local, regional and national levels. It is also about integrating the needs of a wide variety of groups and individuals in the operation of transport planning and provision.

It's about transport helping to build and serve communities. The White Paper is founded on the principle that transport should be safe, it should be efficient, it should be clean, and it should be fair. It must be fair in that it serves the needs of all those who use it, including elderly people, disabled people and children. In other words, it must mitigate, not contribute to, social exclusion. It must serve rural areas as well as urban ones. Rural communities have a strong tradition of self-help and community and voluntary transport has made a significant contribution to the quality of life in rural areas for many years."

If the Minister and the Government mean what they say, they should not object to discussion of the issues in Committee, so that we can find out more about the Government's views. The Bill is small and not complicated, but it would significantly improve the operation of community transport in a number of constituencies.

As I have said, a contribution is already being made to the commercial sector, and the Budget will increase that contribution. Help is already being given to one voluntary organisation, the Royal National Lifeboat Institution. I am asking for the same help for another voluntary organisation, which provides much help and support throughout the country.

1.12 pm

Judy Mallaber (Amber Valley): A couple of months ago, I visited a centre in Heanor, in my constituency, called Stepping Stones. It provides lunch every day for pensioners. For the first time, I achieved my ambition to keep fit by joining the centre's morning keep-fit class. I do not normally get around to that here, although I always intend to go to the gym.

At lunchtime on the day of my visit, we discovered that several people who should have been there were missing, because of a bomb scare near the pick-up point for the community transport buses. People had not been able to travel to a centre on which they relied for their daily meal. That shows how important community transport is every day. The system started in Derbyshire in the early 1980s, as a result of the international year of the disabled. As the

hon. Member for West Derbyshire (Mr. McLoughlin) said, there are now eight groups in the county, one of which is in Derby.

As a sponsor of the Bill, I am delighted that my neighbour has seen the light, recognised the importance of this issue and become aware of the campaign that took place all last year in Derbyshire, and has also been taking place in other parts of the country. I shall restrain myself from talking about the Conservative Government's record on public transport, although the hon. Gentleman lashed out a bit at the end of his speech, letting himself down after showing a very co-operative approach. I will, however, give a little of the history of the campaign that led to the Bill.

Let me say, first, that the community transport services in my area have even been visited by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, during the election campaign. She has seen the valuable work that community transport can do.

Those in charge of community transport are very pleased about the new understanding of its role that is developing among Transport Ministers, in particular. They are especially pleased with what has been said in the transport White Paper. Paragraph 5.35 states:

"Conventional public transport cannot always meet the diverse accessibility needs of all in our communities, particularly the needs of disabled people and those who live in remote rural areas."

The White Paper goes on to refer to the strength of voluntary action and community transport. The Community Transport Association is pleased that the Government have commissioned a special report to examine the issues surrounding community transport and is therefore confident that action will be taken to help it. The Bill proposes one way in which to help.

That report, which was commissioned from Steer Davies Gleave, has not yet been published, but, as a result of a parliamentary question that I asked my right hon. Friend the Minister of Transport, I have been given a copy of its findings. It says that a number of issues should be taken on board to assist community transport:

"The voluntary transport sector requires encouragement if it is to develop; otherwise, as it faces increasing pressure to deliver transport services:

it will become less effective; and,

its task will become ever more difficult."

It recommends that a number of measures should be taken by central Government, including

"providing the voluntary sector with access to passenger transport financial support comparable to concessionary fares and fuel duty rebate".

That recommendation will go to the Government from a report that they themselves have commissioned. As I say, the Bill provides one mechanism for giving that assistance.

The petition to which the hon. Member for West Derbyshire referred had 7,000 signatures from people throughout the county, and I presented it in December. It raised a specific issue: if we allowed the fuel duty rebate paid to commercial bus operators to be paid to community transport vehicles, that would end the discrimination faced by elderly and disabled people who were unable to gain access to normal bus services. Those people seek an end to discrimination. That is the campaign that I have been pursuing.

Because of the mechanisms that one has to use in terms of parliamentary procedure, the Bill goes rather further than that, but we look for some assurance that, even if the Bill cannot progress, some mechanisms will be examined to meet the recommendations in the report to end that discrimination.

I am not particularly fussed about what mechanism is used. I am continuing to pursue the issue of extending the fuel duty rebate, but I want that issue to be taken forward.

Mr. McLoughlin: May I assure the hon. Lady that I did realise that? As I understand it, although I was not able to extend the rebate scheme, for the reasons to which she referred, it would be possible to amend the Bill to allow a percentage of the rebate, so that it would indeed do exactly what we both want: give the same to the commercial sector as to the voluntary sector.

Judy Mallaber: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that comment.

My hon. Friend the Member for Edmonton (Mr. Love) asked what the costs of the scheme would be. On a completely rough-and-ready basis, depending on exactly what parts of the community transport service are involved, my proposal to extend the fuel duty rebate would cost between £4 million and £8 million. That is a ball-park figure. Obviously, I do not have access to the information. I hope that more will become available as a result of the study by the consultants.

As a result of the petition, my hon. Friend the Member for High Peak (Mr. Levitt) and I visited the Chancellor and the Minister of Transport. Before I talk about the some of the specific issues that they raised with me, I shall look a little more at the role of community transport and some of the things that it does.

I mentioned the White Paper on public transport, which looks at an integrated transport system. Unfortunately, the current transport system is not accessible to all the general public; it is not accessible to perhaps 10 per cent. of people who have mobility problems: the elderly or disabled. I ask the Minister to acknowledge in her reply that the current public transport system is not open to all the general public. That will at least get that out of the way.

I agree that the position has been made worse by what happened in the Budget, although I do not in any way criticise the fuel duty escalator, which was introduced by the previous Government. However, an issue arises from it. We estimate that the measure will cost Amber Valley Community Transport an extra £1,900. I understand that about £50 million will be added to the fuel duty rebate to commercial bus companies. I say that not to challenge the provision, but merely to raise an issue that should be addressed.

We already get community transport on the cheap. Amber Valley Community Transport has 40 drivers and 36 escorts who volunteer—they work for free—in driving buses and in helping people who cannot reach supermarket shelves, for example, to do their shopping. There are many examples of the work done by those volunteers—such as John Waldron, who gave up his Christmas day to drive people to a Christmas dinner.

As an example of the lengths to which people will go to help in providing community transport, I should mention Karen Dudley, the operations manager at Amber Valley

[Judy Mallaber]

Community Transport, who herself is in a wheelchair but—I was rather stunned to hear it—did a free-fall parachute jump, in tandem with an experienced parachutist, to raise funds for the scheme. By doing the jump, she raised £2,000 from a Chesterfield firm and another £1,000 from other people.

Another example is the Amber Valley Community Transport administration officer, who is also a barbershop singer. She organised a barbershop concert to support community transport. Those are the types of things being done to subsidise a community transport service for a section of our community.

Amber Valley has four different services, which were mentioned by the hon. Member for West Derbyshire. Dial-a-bus—which is equivalent to dial-a-ride elsewhere—provides both regular bus services from one part of the area to another and free helpers to assist people with tasks such as shopping. There is also a door-to-door pick-up service, which, in our area, is called dial-a-ride. There are also group rides. Finally, there is a bus contracting facility—which would not be covered by the Bill. All four are valuable services, and any rebate to one service would enable us to expand the others.

I should like to give a couple of examples—with which I was provided, just the other day, by my local community transport—of the assistance provided by community transport services.

Mrs. B is 79 years old and lives alone four miles from the nearest town centre. She suffers from arthritis and walks with sticks. She travels on dial-a-bus into Alfreton every Thursday morning, and into Mansfield every other Monday, to do her own shopping, to visit the bank and to collect her pension. The service is the only way in which she can remain independent. She has also built up a wide social circle by using dial-a-bus.

Mrs. D is in her late 30s and has multiple sclerosis. She uses a wheelchair. She is the mother of two children. She goes into Heanor every week to do the family shopping. She uses a dial-a-bus escort to help her get around town. It is the only way in which she can maintain her family and her role within the family nucleus.

Mr. O is 84 years old. He is a war veteran and lives alone. He has double vision, and therefore cannot use conventional public transport. He travels on the Wirksworth dial-a-bus every Tuesday, and also uses the regular Matlock bus—in the constituency of the hon. Member for West Derbyshire. Mr. O also travels on the fortnightly out-of-town service, which takes passengers into Derby, Mansfield and Chesterfield. He is a very proud man, and the service is the only way in which he can keep his independence.

I have given those examples not only to show the importance of community transport, but to explain the type of services that are provided, and why I believe that such services should, like commercial bus services, be assisted.

Some of the issues on community bus services that Ministers have raised with me can be tackled. I realise that there will be some complications in addressing the issues, but, as I said, I am not hooked on any one particular method of doing so. I am speaking today simply to try to raise the issues and to get Ministers to consider them seriously. I certainly hope that resolving the matter will not require a private Member's Bill. I hope also that the matter will be taken on board in the current review of community transport, to which I know Ministers are sympathetic.

The current legal position is that the fuel duty rebate is available only for buses that run scheduled services that are open to any public passenger. I contend, first, that commercial bus companies are not open to all the general public living along their routes, as 10 per cent. of the population along those routes are unable to access bus services because they have mobility problems. People in wheelchairs, for example, cannot use the buses.

Secondly, some community bus services, particularly dial-a-bus, which makes 60 per cent. of the journeys in my area, are scheduled services. All the people I mentioned earlier use a regular scheduled bus service that happens to be a community transport service. I have a whole sheaf of schedules. One can go from Somercotes to Alfreton every Thursday. The bus gets there at 10.30 am and leaves at 12 o'clock. They are all scheduled services which run on a regular basis in the same way as those operated by a commercial bus company. They are open to all members of the general public who do not have access to the services operated by the standard commercial bus companies which claim to be available to the general public; the only difference is that people phone in advance to say that they will be using the service and arrange to be picked up from their homes.

I noticed in a newspaper today that the Deputy Prime Minister is examining whether taxis could be used to provide a more comprehensive service without requiring a bus to go to every village: the taxi service would complement the bus service. It is an excellent idea, which would expand the integrated transport system. If such a facility could be arranged to enable people living in remote areas to have access to the scheduled bus service, why would the same not be possible in respect of community transport? It is the only factor that distinguishes dial-a-bus from a commercial bus company. Some of the legal arguments and definitions are not necessarily valid, and that should certainly be taken seriously.

Because of the way in which it is formulated, the Bill is in Treasury hands. However, according to my right hon. Friend the Chancellor, any rebate scheme would be paid out of the transport budget. Quite understandably, my right hon. Friend the Minister of Transport was concerned that it would be an open-ended commitment; so it is a difficult issue.

As there are many different types of community transport, definitions are also important. There will have to be a number of gateways. Which organisations would be eligible to be defined as community transport organisations? That is easy. Section 19 of the Transport Act 1985 defines who is eligible for a permit to run community transport bus services. That could be the first gateway. It would then be necessary to decide which parts of the service qualified to be included in the provision. That would need to be examined carefully. My contention is that at least the dial-a-bus service should be eligible.

It is also argued that, if a large section of the public are unable to use the general transport service because of mobility problems, the same applies to others who cannot access public transport because no services are provided

in rural areas. That is a legitimate point. People could set up a car-sharing scheme in a rural area and expect it to qualify. The issue needs to be examined, but we are taking action and putting money into rural transport. In south Derbyshire, we have a rural bus challenge for which we have gained money. It will use some of the community transport vehicles.

Mr. Gareth Thomas (Clwyd, West): My hon. Friend has put her finger on the problem with the Bill. First, it is necessary to establish the category of exemptions, how broad a category it should be and precisely how it should be defined. Does she accept that that in itself is problematic, before one even begins to look at the other vexed question of defining exempted and non-exempted use?

Judy Mallaber: I am quite sure that Ministers and civil servants are perfectly capable of producing some fairly robust definitions. I would be happy if the provision applied simply to community transport in Derbyshire, although we are unlikely to get away with that.

There are a number of possible definitions. One is in the Transport Act 1985 in relation to organisations that are eligible for permits. We would also need to specify exactly which services qualified. I am not particularly hooked on the Bill; however, the issue will be raised in the forthcoming community transport report which the Government have commissioned.

I am happy for any mechanism to be considered. The Bill is an opportunity to raise the problem of the genuine discrimination between the services. If some other mechanism is used to address that issue and another way of providing better services for those with disabilities is found, I shall be equally happy. My aim is to get the issue on the agenda and push it forward. Much as the hon. Member for West Derbyshire would like the Bill to become law, I do not have any expectation of that happening, but it has given us an opportunity to ask for the issue to be taken seriously.

I should like to mention one other issue on the transport White Paper that community transport groups have raised with me, which relates to alternative methods of developing an integrated transport system. Local authorities have been asked to draw up local transport plans. The draft guidance puts strong emphasis on the importance of involving cyclists and walkers from the beginning. I hope that similar emphasis will be put on involving community transport at the start of the development of local transport plans. That may answer some of the questions that have been raised and make the financial mechanism in the Bill less necessary.

Community transport is important and provides a valuable service; I have not heard anyone argue with that. I support the principles of the Bill. I ask my hon. Friend the Minister to accept that public transport is not open to all members of the public and that there is discrimination against people with mobility problems. The Government have recognised that in the White Paper. I ask her to pass on to Transport Ministers how pleased we are that they will take the issues seriously. If she cannot accept the mechanism in the Bill, will she discuss with her colleagues alternative measures on the fuel duty rebate? If they cannot accept that, will she encourage Transport Ministers to consider alternative ways of assisting the community transport service? I have every confidence that that will be done, because we are committed to a fair public transport system. I am confident that Ministers will look seriously at community transport issues.

I am delighted to have had a chance to raise the issue today. I hope that we shall find a mechanism—through the Bill or in some other way—of removing discrimination and ensuring that the most vulnerable are able to live in their home and have a full life, with access to the public transport system.

1.32 pm

Mr. Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham): On behalf of the Opposition, I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for West Derbyshire (Mr. McLoughlin) on securing a place in the ballot and on introducing a measure to address an apparent anomaly in the funding of local bus schemes that discriminates unfairly against crucial community bus links.

The Bill raises some important issues with which all hon. Members can be sympathetic, whether they represent rural or urban constituencies. The distinguished cross-party sponsorship of the Bill shows the wide support that it has gained. I hope that it will strike a chord with the Government's apparent policy on public transport, as articulated so often by the Deputy Prime Minister, when he is in the country.

We support a Second Reading for the Bill and believe that the problems that it highlights deserve close scrutiny in Committee. It should be for the Committee, when the issue can be given a full airing, to decide whether the method of supporting community transport schemes set out in the Bill is the most practical way to tackle the problem. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for bringing the issue to the attention of the House. Many of the queries about eligibility and gateways raised by the hon. Member for Amber Valley (Judy Mallaber) can be dealt with in Committee.

I am sure that, like me, all hon. Members have first-hand constituency experience of the essential service provided by community bus schemes. As my hon. Friend the Member for West Derbyshire has said, in rural areas, up to 20 per cent. of the population have no access to a car and local shops can be few and far between. For those people, such bus services are a lifeline.

In urban areas, too, elderly people in particular can be stranded if they live a mile or so away from essential services, as is so often the case. Such people obviously need links with shops, banks, post offices, doctors' surgeries, health centres and hospitals for appointments. In the Worthing and Adur districts in my constituency, local community bus schemes are run by very dedicated staff to provide links with just those essential services. Without such schemes, and if scheduled bus services do not pick up close by, people are reliant on friendly neighbours, family or expensive taxis, which are often out of their price range.

Mr. David Maclean (Penrith and The Border): Is my hon. Friend aware of the most recent Rural Development Commission survey of 1997, which showed that 75 per cent. of parishes do not have a regular scheduled daily bus service? In view of the astronomical hike in petrol duty of 17p a gallon and the 28p a gallon hike in diesel, will not rural people particularly be severely

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disadvantaged unless they have a community bus service? Surely community bus services will be crucified unless they are given the same fuel duty exemption as commercial operators.

Mr. Loughton: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend. This week's Budget did no service to people living in rural areas. The anomaly in transport provision in such areas has been exaggerated even more by Tuesday's events. I reiterate, however, that we are not just talking about rural communities.

Even more crucial than the plight of elderly people is that of disabled people, who are obviously even less mobile. Scheduled bus services are often unable to cope with wheelchairs, although, in some areas, low-floor buses are making wheelchair access easier. It therefore seems absurd that community buses, which are tailor-made to cope with the needs of elderly and less mobile people in particular, suffer discrimination at the hands of the taxation system—a system through which, by offering scheduled bus services a fuel duty rebate that is worth £270 million already and is likely to rise, owing to measures in the Budget, to around £320 million, the Government already recognise the work and worth of public transport systems. Through what appear to be minor technicalities, that system excludes arguably the most community-oriented and public-spirited of all bus services.

The existence of more than 5,000 community transport schemes in the United Kingdom bears testimony to the take-up rate. Many operate on a shoestring, often only through the goodwill of volunteer drivers and charitable fund raising, which pays for the maintenance and purchase of the buses. Many more community bus services are needed, and I am sure that many more would start up if given a level playing field on fuel duty rebate.

The main reason that community buses are excluded from the fuel duty rebate is that most schemes are either not available to all members of the public or, as a door-to-door service, cannot supply a schedule of stopping times and places. Typically, that excludes hopper bus dial-a-ride schemes, which are targeted specifically at elderly and disabled people. The provision of disabled access and wheelchair lifts is proving particularly costly, never mind their on-going maintenance.

In October, the Economic Secretary to the Treasury rejected an extension of the criteria for granting the fuel duty rebate on the grounds that it would entail extra expenditure or a lower rebate overall, and that the provision of dial-a-ride services should be left to each local authority. Much local authority transport spending is taken up by the transporting of school children, especially those who attend special educational needs schools, as well as by many other competing causes. That is understandable. Given the Government's pump priming of local authority bus service provision in rural areas, it would be only consistent to allow local authorities to promote community bus services as well—if they enjoyed the same fuel duty rebate. I know that my local authorities would like to be able to do just that. Community buses do not stack up the raw miles or passenger numbers of the scheduled services, as they are closely targeted and localised, but that should in no way diminish the vital role that they play.

The total amount involved has not been quantified by the Government, but it need not be excessive. It could be merely a matter of the redistribution of the existing rebate funds of £320 million, part of which is being used to fund empty or almost empty buses, which does not seem to be the most efficient subsidy.

My hon. Friend the Member for West Derbyshire said that services in his county travel about 1.2 million miles a year, carry 443,000 passengers, use more than 265,000 litres of fuel and, if the Bill had been law, would have been able to claim a rebate last year of about £80,000. The figure would of course be much greater after the Budget. We are talking not about small tin-pot schemes but about major contributions to community transport, carrying a great number of people who would otherwise have severely limited transport choices.

The sum is not enormous in the great scheme of things or in the context of bus subsidies overall, but it is an enormous amount to the small community bus service operators and could make the difference between survival or otherwise. The measure is timely, in the wake of the Budget, which brought about an enormous increase of 11.6 per cent. in road diesel duty, bringing it up to 51.1p a litre: the highest duty by far in Europe, and perhaps the highest in the entire world.

That is another substantial stealth tax hike and it is already having serious repercussions for the road freight haulage industry, part of which is already looking to reflag its vehicles and operate from the continent. Tax on diesel is 2.5 times lower in Germany, which is the next highest charger.

The Government seem content that competition will now come from French, German and Belgian lorry drivers filling up on the continent and coming here to take British loads on British roads to British destinations. By no stretch of the imagination will there be similar competition from dial-a-ride—or should I say téléphone-un-bus?—services operating from Paris and Brussels. I fear that they will not penetrate as far as Derbyshire. Schemes will be severely financially penalised.

Apart from the effects on the freight industry, the diesel duty rise may have disastrous consequences for the economics of many ordinary bus services, let alone the community schemes, which under current legislation will suffer the full brunt of the increases.

As the green tax Minister, the Economic Secretary may be interested to know about the implications for environmentally friendly road fuel gases. Many of us were pleased that in the Budget the Government revived the previous Government's initiative to promote liquid petroleum gas and compressed natural gas over fossil fuels by substantially reducing the duty on them, although even after the 29 per cent. cut the duty on road fuel gases in this country remains the highest in the European Union. The changes suggested in the Bill could go some way towards providing further financial incentives to promote the use of road fuel gases in community buses converted for the purpose. That should and could be considered more closely in Committee.

My hon. Friend the Member for West Derbyshire has highlighted the current situation in which the Royal National Lifeboat Institution rightly gets 100 per cent. fuel duty relief, as has been the case for the past 35 years,

since 1964. That is an obvious precedent for another service that offers a valuable contribution to the community.

My hon. Friend has done the House a great service by bringing to our attention that obvious anomaly. I hope that the Government will respond positively and allow the Bill to go to a Standing Committee for full debate.

1.44 pm

Mr. Andrew Dismore (Hendon): I congratulate the hon. Member for West Derbyshire (Mr. McLoughlin) on securing a high place in the ballot. I was very interested in his remarks and those of my hon. Friend the Member for Amber Valley (Judy Mallaber), who adopted a realistic and flexible approach to some of the problems that may be experienced. My first question is whether the fuel duty rebate is the best way to support community transport. It is a technical and complex scheme. My hon. Friend mentioned section 19 of the Transport Act 1985 and I also researched that Act for my speech today. Some people might think a bus is a bus is a bus and is easy to define, but—in an example of the complexities of the scheme—section 19 defines a bus in several ways. A "bus" is a vehicle which is adapted to carry more than eight passengers. A "large bus" is a vehicle which is adapted to carry more than 16 passengers, and a "small bus" means a vehicle which is adapted to carry more than eight but not more than 16 passengers. We may think that we know what we mean when we talk about a bus, but the legislation is complex even when it comes to simple definitions. I question whether one would wish to get bogged down in such complexities of the law, when it comes to community transport schemes.

Another issue that arises is the transparency of public support for community transport schemes. Many such schemes, in my experience, receive support from a variety of sources, including charities, local authorities, other public bodies and, in some circumstances, commercial companies. It is important to know where the money for community transport schemes comes from. The whole system of fuel duty rebate is very complex and provides some hidden subsidies. Before I started to examine the issue, I was unaware of its existence and the support that the rebate scheme gives to commercial companies.

We must consider the role of community transport in local communities. That issue is addressed in the White Paper on the future of Transport "A New Deal for Transport: Better for Everyone". In paragraph 5.35, it states:

"Conventional public transport cannot always meet the diverse accessibility needs of all in our communities, particularly the needs of disabled people and those who live in remote rural areas."

The Government accept the importance of community transport schemes, and the White Paper pays tribute to the role of those who developed them. It states:

"Voluntary action is a strength of local communities everywhere. In London, for example"—

as a Member for a London seat, I know the situation well—

"it has given rise to an extensive network of transport services run on a voluntary basis for disabled people."

It continues—and this is the important point—

"We are conducting a review of voluntary and community transport activity. There are already relaxations of the normal rules for bus operator licensing to help non-profit making bodies, especially those who provide 'community' bus services including mini-buses."

We must be aware of the possible abuses of the system, including those that are intentional, through fraud, and—probably more likely—unintentional, through inadvertence, that could arise from extending the fuel duty rebate scheme. For example, my hon. Friend the Member for Amber Valley mentioned the complexities of the scheme and it could be difficult to distinguish between qualifying and non-qualifying use of a vehicle, especially the smaller ones. If a minibus has a full tank of fuel, it might be used sometimes for a qualifying journey and sometimes for a non-qualifying journey. How can we unscramble which litre of fuel was used for one purpose and which for another?

Mr. McLoughlin: The hon. Gentleman is creating a smokescreen. The commercial sector has no difficulty in identifying the difference. Some operations carried out by bus companies do not attract the rebate and some do. The scheme under which the bus companies certify which journeys qualify and which do not is open to inspection, as the Public Accounts Committee pointed out in its report.

Mr. Dismore: That is an interesting intervention, but I am not mixing up two different things. I cannot remember the last time that I saw a driver on a jolly through the west end in his double-decker. It is much more likely that a small community vehicle would be used for non-qualifying journeys. It is also perhaps easier to distinguish between the fuels used by larger vehicles.

We may end up subsidising school journeys that we would otherwise not support financially. When travelling to work in the morning, one often sees little minibuses that are run by private schools. Those schools could afford, by using school fees, to pay for their pupils' transport but they would undoubtedly claim that, because they are running a school bus, they should qualify for a fuel rebate. I question whether those are the sorts of organisations that we should support.

There is an additional complication with regard to the European aspects. I am afraid that we must consider Europe from time to time in the House, and the fuel duty rebate raises particular problems. Duty rates and uses are subject to European Union directives with which the Government obviously comply. If we were to pass this legislation, we would have to try to obtain a derogation from the European Union—and no doubt end up having lengthy arguments about whether we were entitled to do so.

We must also consider some important environmental aspects. Vehicles that are perhaps not in the first flush of youth are sometimes used for community transport schemes. Such vehicles may not be very fuel efficient.

Judy Mallaber: I assure my hon. Friend that the nine buses in Amber Valley use clean fuel when they can find it at the local pumps. We are about to get rid of the only vehicle that does not use clean fuel. Therefore, it is possible to have energy-efficient community transport.

Mr. Dismore: I am pleased that my hon. Friend's constituents have such an excellent bus service, but I am afraid that that is not the experience nationwide. We have heard much about community transport schemes in Derbyshire, but the same conditions do not necessarily

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prevail throughout the country. I think that there is a risk with community transport that the vehicles used will not emit the most environmentally friendly particulates.

Mr. McLoughlin: I think the hon. Gentleman is wrong. The simple fact is that, if we introduce this rebate scheme, many of those who operate community buses will be able to spend more money refurbishing their buses and using more modern vehicles. The hon. Gentleman should not use that argument against the community transport system. As the hon. Member for Amber Valley (Judy Mallaber) said, the people of Derbyshire have modern community transport vehicles because they have raised so much money through voluntary mechanisms.

Mr. Dismore: The hon. Gentleman raises an interesting issue, which brings me to my next point regarding the position of alternative fuels. The scheme under discussion applies only to certain types of fuel and I think that, in considering community transport, we must have regard to possible alternatives. The Red Book makes it clear that the Government are trying to move towards fairer tax treatment of the different fuels available. Paragraph 5.68 on page 77 refers to the Government's commitment to

"moving towards a fairer tax treatment of petrol and diesel, when calculated on an energy or carbon basis. This means that the duty on diesel should be higher than that for unleaded petrol".

On the following page, the Red Book refers to

"increasing the duty differential between ultra low sulphur diesel . . . and standard diesel to encourage the use of this cleaner fuel. This will reduce emissions of particulates and nitrogen oxides from existing vehicles and, over time, encourage the use of cleaner diesel technology."

The Government state that they wish to encourage

"the use of road fuel gases, which produce lower emissions, especially of particulates, than conventional fuels".

That is an important start, which is not covered by the proposals in this Bill.

Dr. Alan Whitehead (Southampton, Test): Is my hon. Friend aware that a particular concern of commercial bus companies has been that the fuel rebate system offers them no incentive to invest in alternative fuels and creates inequalities between conventional and non-conventional fuels? Is he also aware that the Government have apparently moved in the Budget towards increasing the rebate on road gas in addition to reducing the duty? Therefore, a constructive development would have been for this Bill to add an incentive for such alternative fuels to be used by community transport services.

Mr. Dismore: My hon. Friend has a valid point. We have been exploring some of the alternative fuels, one of which has not been mentioned in any of the documentation that I have seen—the use of electric vehicles. For community transport, where smaller vehicles may be used, we should consider ways to support the use of electric vehicles, which have no emissions—other than, perhaps, back at the power station.

On page 122 of the White Paper "A New Deal for Transport: Better for Everyone" the Government state that they intend to consult on more environmentally friendly vehicles, as part of their transport policy, which is an important development.

I asked the Library to look into this issue and was pleased to find that the Government said that they would consider the issue as part of their review of vehicle excise duty and that they intend

"to go ahead with the proposal . . . It will be extended to 'clean' buses, which will further improve air quality in urban areas. Also to encourage clean buses, the possibility of changing the fuel duty rebate paid to buses, so that those with low emissions receive more than those with high emissions"

is to be reviewed.

If fuel duty rebate were withdrawn altogether—I do not think that that is on the cards at present—it would have to be replaced with some alternative payment or support to bus operators. I want such a replacement to give full range to the possibilities of alternative fuels, as my hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Test (Dr. Whitehead) suggested in his helpful intervention.

We must also consider the possibility that there would be other people in the queue for rebates if we provided exemptions for community transport. What about other important community uses of transport, for example the emergency services—ambulances, the police and the fire service—which do not benefit from the rebate at present? Ultimately, it will be the taxpayer, either at the local or the national level, who will have to pay. What about the medical profession—doctors and community nurses? If we can provide support to farmers through the scheme, what about providing it to doctors as well?

Mr. Maclean: I cannot believe what I am hearing, especially the hon. Gentleman's latest excuse. The state pays for the emergency services: it pays the whole of their fuel duty. Admittedly, they pay part back to the Treasury, but it is all the same money, going round and round. To suggest that one cannot subsidise community transport because the ambulance, police and fire service would want similar subsidies is scraping the bottom of the exhaust pipe.

Mr. Dismore: That was an interesting intervention. The right hon. Gentleman did not deal with my point. The subsidy might affect the balance between local and national Government—in terms of where the money comes from. I also mentioned the position of general practitioners, who obviously use their cars a great deal for community benefit. I do not recall the taxpayer ever picking up the petrol bill of a GP at the filling station. The same is true of community nurses. I take the right hon. Gentleman's point, but it can be developed.

That begs the question whether the existing system works effectively. My hon. Friend the Member for Amber Valley pointed out the many flaws in the existing public transport system. If the fuel duty rebate were such a good way to support public transport, we would have better bus services. She mentioned constituents who benefit from community transport schemes. Perhaps I may respond by mentioning constituents who suffer real problems with their bus service, which already benefits from the fuel duty rebate. For example, consider the 113 service in my constituency. A constituent writes:

"The buses are still a disgrace, both in presentation and maintenance along with a service which is unreliable and inconsistent."

I can only share those sentiments. The problems have clearly not been cured by the availability to Metroline, the bus company in question, of the fuel duty rebate. I question whether such relief would achieve some of the objectives claimed for it by proponents of the Bill.

The head teacher of one of my local secondary schools wrote to me complaining about the school bus service provided by Arriva on behalf of London Transport. She tells me of the problems of almost 100 students who have to travel towards Edgware and leave the school from 15.30 onwards. The buses, scheduled at 15.31., 15.41 and 15.57, should serve the needs of the school adequately.

Liz Blackman (Erewash): My hon. Friend seems to be arguing that the fuel duty rebate has an inverse relationship to the quality of service. Is he really prepared to sustain that argument?

Mr. Dismore: My argument is that the fuel duty rebate has little impact on the quality of service from what I can see in my constituency of the public bus network. I get many complaints about the bus service in my constituency. I mentioned the 113, which is one of the greatest culprits.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I have indulged the hon. Gentleman long enough. He is stretching his remarks way beyond the confines of the Bill.

Mr. Dismore: I shall refrain from quoting further examples of the rotten bus service in my constituency. I was explaining to my hon. Friend the Member for Erewash (Liz Blackman) that there is no relationship between the rebate and quality of service.

Mr. Loughton: Before the hon. Gentleman reads out the entire timetable of the outer London bus service, is he saying that bus fuel duty rebate should be scrapped altogether to create a level playing field for community bus services? If he is, has he cleared with it with the Deputy Prime Minister?

Mr. Dismore: I was not saying that. I was saying that I welcome the review of the operation of such schemes. If the hon. Gentleman would like me to remind him of the contents of the White Paper, I would be happy to read out the extracts again.

Mr. Loughton *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Dismore: The hon. Gentleman obviously remembers what the White Paper says. I am pleased that the Government will consider the schemes in the round, not only from the point of view of the existing narrow schemes but in respect of the more environmentally friendly fuels that we were discussing in response to the intervention of my hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Test. There is a possibility of greatly developing those schemes. As that happens, I would like to think that we could consider community transport in the round.

Page 111 of the transport White Paper shows that the Government are acting on local transport. The hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Mr. Loughton) made a valid point when he said that we are not only discussing rural transport but urban transport. I am pleased that the White Paper talks about local authorities needing actively to involve local people, businesses, transport operators and other organisations, such as those providing health care, in drawing up plans.

That is important in my area because one of the biggest single complaints concerns the health service. People in my constituency in Colindale and west Hendon have difficulty travelling to hospital. Since the previous Government closed Edgware hospital, they have had terrible trouble trying to get to the alternative acute facilities at Barnet because it can require three bus changes. I am pleased that as we develop local transport plans, the health service will be involved. I know from discussions with the chair of my local health authority that there is commitment to working with partners such as the local authority to solve this thorny problem. *[Interruption.]* I am not sure whether the right hon. Member for Penrith and The Border (Mr. Maclean) is trying to make an intervention. The Government are making great progress on rural transport.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. These general remarks about local transport and national transport are outside the scope of the Bill, which is about exemption from fuel duties.

Mr. Dismore: The reason why I raise the issue of rural transport is that the proponents of the Bill relied in their arguments on the need to support community transport services. It is appropriate for me to respond to those arguments by questioning the need for the Bill and saying what the Government are already doing for rural transport.

In the Budget, the Government stressed their commitment to improving public transport in rural areas. Last year's Budget allocated an extra £50 million for transport in rural areas, the majority of which was used to provide additional bus services in England. In the Budget statement on Tuesday, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor allocated an extra £20 million to the rural transport fund and £10 million to the capital modernisation fund—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I do not think that the hon. Gentleman has heard me. We are talking about whether certain categories of vehicle should be eligible for the exemption from fuel duty. General arguments about rural or any other form of transport are not pertinent.

Mr. Dismore: In those circumstances, perhaps I can conclude by saying that the Bill does not provide a complete answer to a real problem. Support for rural transport can be provided more satisfactorily through some of the initiatives announced by the Government in the transport White Paper. The Government have already addressed many of the problems, but the Bill does nothing to deal with environmental concerns.

2.7 pm

Mr. David Maclean (Penrith and The Border): It is a pleasure to support the Bill promoted by my hon. Friend the Member for West Derbyshire (Mr. McLoughlin). I apologise that I missed part of his speech; I was tied up in another meeting. I am grateful to him for the excellent brief that he has provided on community transport. It is also a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore). I must confess—as a former law and order Minister, it is dangerous to make such confessions—that, as a young child, on occasion I misbehaved by sticking a

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potato up an exhaust pipe to make a vehicle grind to a halt. As I sat and listened to the hon. Gentleman, I wished that I had a bag of King Edwards handy.

The Bill is an innocuous little measure. It is a simple one-clause Bill. All the points that the hon. Member for Hendon raised were suitable for Committee. One heard cynics say before we came into the Chamber that the Labour party was opposed to the measure. I said, "I don't believe it. It cannot be." The measure is right up the Labour party's street. It is exactly the sort of measure that Labour Members used to advance just before the election.

The Bill is about three things close to the heart of Labour Members—buses, communities and subsidy. In those circumstances, I cannot imagine that any Labour Member opposes it. I heard the hon. Member for Amber Valley (Judy Mallaber) support my hon. Friend. I am glad to see the same all-party support for the measure that we had for the Mental Health (Amendment) (Scotland) Bill earlier this morning.

As the Bill has already had a good airing this morning, and can safely be sent up to Committee before we end our proceedings today, I shall be relatively brief. There are more than 5,000 community transport schemes across the United Kingdom, which offer a vital service to sections of the community, such as the elderly and disabled people, who might otherwise be denied access to essential day-to-day amenities. It enables them to get to shopping and health care facilities or simply to visit friends or other community groups. It gives them a chance to participate in things that they would not otherwise be able to do.

That is not an exaggeration. The Rural Development Commission—which the Government are abolishing—said:

"75 per cent. of parishes had no daily public bus service in 1997".

Upwards of 20 per cent. of people in rural areas have no access whatever to a car.

It was a pleasure in the Budget debate to follow the right hon. Member for Bishop Auckland (Mr. Foster), who made a passionate plea on behalf of those people in rural areas who are not wealthy but need to have a car—yes, perhaps an old car, perhaps a slightly smoky car, but, if they do not have a car, they do not travel. It is not that their choice of buses is limited to those at 8 o'clock, 8.5, 8.30, 9 o'clock, 10 o'clock and so on; there are no buses whatever in large parts of the rural areas.

The unfortunate, often inadvertent, discrimination that those people face is that Government Departments—we find this in the health service—look at the structure of the country and say, "There is an area with a lot of buses. People therefore must be poor, so we shall allocate more money. There is an area with a lot of cars; they must be wealthy, so we shall allocate less money." In rural areas, there can be as much poverty and deprivation as in urban areas, but motor vehicles are essential if people—including those who are trying to return to work—are to find a job. I believe that the new deal will reveal how difficult it is, in rural areas, to get transport to work.

Community transport fills a vital role, as it has since its inception. The hon. Member for Hendon made a surprising speech. No doubt, I shall get a letter from London Transport next week, correcting me, but, as a rural Member, I can say that, if buses in the lake district mountains emitted the smoke that I often see coming from London buses, we would make pretty sure that they were put out of action straight away. It sits ill in the mouth of a London Member to suggest that community buses in our rural areas might be more polluting or dirty than commercial buses. That comment—and a few others—may prove a slight source of embarrassment to the Government and to other Labour party members when we have the benefit of analysing *Hansard* on Monday.

It beggars belief to suggest that a rebate for community transport on the same basis as the rebate for commercial operators would be too complicated for the Treasury to operate. A Department that can apparently make sense of self-assessment has some pretty clever civil servants in it—civil servants cleverer than this taxpayer trying to complete the forms—so the argument that the Treasury would not be competent to administer such a scheme is not persuasive.

I cannot understand why anyone would oppose the Bill. It is not as though it is introducing the radical concept of a subsidy to bus operators for the first time. The subsidies to the commercial regular daily bus operators, including those on the 133 route in London—*[Interruption.]* I meant the 113. I look forward to trying it out some time if the hon. Member for Hendon will send me a schedule. We know that there is a subsidy to commercial operators. I cannot imagine that any Labour Member is willing to say to the Community Transport Association, and to the 5 million pensioners who will write to them next week if the Bill does not get into Committee today, "It is all very well to subsidise commercial operators, but we cannot give the same subsidy to volunteer operators—those who drive the minibuses for disabled people, those who, in their own time, drive community transport vehicles, providing that vital lifeline to so many of our constituents, urban as well as rural." I know that no Labour Member will wish to oppose the measure.

I look forward to serving on the Committee, where some of the technicalities raised by the hon. Member for Hendon may be properly addressed. We may have to do a couple of sessions in Committee before we get it right, but I believe that we are all willing to sacrifice that time in a proper House of Commons Committee to ensure that we get the technicalities of the Bill right, to bring relief to those wonderful volunteers who do so much to help all our constituents.

2.15 pm

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Ms Patricia Hewitt): I shall begin by congratulating the hon. Member for West Derbyshire (Mr. McLoughlin) on securing a position in the ballot for private Members' Bills. I also congratulate him, his hon. Friends and my hon. Friends, the co-sponsors of the Bill, on securing an extremely lively and interesting debate on a subject of great importance to their constituents and to many people throughout the country.

The hon. Gentleman and other hon. Members have spoken eloquently about the need to support community bus services, and about the real benefits that they deliver to their communities. The Government accept wholeheartedly the worth of those services, and said as much in the White Paper on the future of transport, "A New Deal for Transport: Better for Everyone", which was recently launched by my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister.

The hon. Gentleman and others who have spoken in the debate stressed the fact that many people living in rural areas do not have access to bus services. That is right. In paragraph 5.35 of the White Paper, we said:

"Conventional public transport cannot always meet the diverse accessibility needs of all in our communities, particularly the needs of disabled people and those who live in remoter rural areas."

I am a little surprised to hear from the official Opposition such concern for rural transport, given that the Conservative Government did so much to undermine rural transport. It is because of our concern for people living in rural communities that we have allocated £50 million a year to rural transport.

Mr. Maclean: It is most courteous of the hon. Lady to give way. I accept that she has allocated £50 million a year to rural transport. Will she tell us what the income to the Treasury will be from the 17p a gallon increase in petrol that rural motorists will have to pay in the next year?

Ms Hewitt: We are continuing the fuel duty escalator introduced by previous Government—the right hon. Gentleman was a member of that Government. Now that the Conservative party is in opposition, it has given up on the policy that it correctly introduced to reduce people's dependence on car transport, and in so doing to contribute to our environmental objectives, in particular, the achievement of the Kyoto and other targets for the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions.

I shall explain what the Government are doing to assist rural transport, especially in Derbyshire. Derbyshire's share of the rural transport fund is £700,000 a year: the fund assists new bus services in rural areas. That is a matter of concern not only to the hon. Member for West Derbyshire but to my hon. Friend the Member for Amber Valley (Judy Mallaber). There is also a further £800,000 for the Southern Derbyshire rural access initiative, which has been awarded through the rural bus challenge competition.

Dr. Desmond Turner (Brighton, Kemptown): Does my hon. Friend agree that this morning has been a bit like a session in another forum with which my hon. Friends are familiar? An important subject is raised and a resolution is proposed—in this case a Bill—that addresses the subject but not necessarily in the most helpful way, and the movers are asked to remit it. In expressing the Government's support for, and intention to promote the interests of, community transport, will the Minister please take into account that this subject is just as important in urban areas as it is in rural communities?

Ms Hewitt: My hon. Friend is right. There are notable examples of community and voluntary transport schemes—in London, for instance—that are enormously helpful to people with disabilities. My hon. Friend made another important point in reminding us that concern about rural transport and community transport schemes is not the subject of the Bill.

Judy Mallaber: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Ms Hewitt: I should have liked to finish what I was saying in answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Brighton, Kemptown (Dr. Turner), but of course I will give way.

Judy Mallaber: I understand that, although so far petitions on the issue that I raised have come from Derbyshire, petitions are being signed in the West Midlands metropolitan area asking for exactly what we in Derbyshire have asked for. This is not just a rural issue.

Ms Hewitt: That is an interesting point, but I am sure that, like me, my hon. Friend welcomes the additional funds that the Government's rural transport initiative has provided for people in Derbyshire.

My hon. Friend spoke eloquently about the volunteers who participate in community transport schemes in her constituency. I pay tribute to them, and to others involved in such schemes in urban as well as rural areas throughout the country. They provide a vivid example of what my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has described as the need for more people to give to their neighbours—to give their time, as well as their money, to their communities, and in doing so to build a stronger, more inclusive community for us all. I am particularly aware of the invaluable work done by volunteers in regard to community transport initiatives, because—until recently, when she became too frail to drive—my 83-year-old mother was a volunteer driver for a community transport scheme.

My hon. Friend mentioned a study by consultants that was commissioned by the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions. My hon. Friend the Minister for Transport in London, who has joined me for the debate, assures me that she and her colleagues will consider the consultants' report carefully as part of their review of community transport schemes.

Mr. McLoughlin: When does the Minister expect the Department to complete its review?

Ms Hewitt: It will do so as quickly as possible. The matter is complex, and my colleagues and their officials wish to consult and reflect on it. An announcement will be made in due course.

The hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Mr. Loughton) spoke of the need for community bus services, and the need for community transport to be put on the same footing as commercial operators. Like the hon. Member for West Derbyshire, he referred to what he described as the precedent set by the Royal National Lifeboat Institution. He is wrong: although the RNLI is exempt from fuel duty and receives a rebate, that is not because it is a charity doing deserving work but because all sea-going vessels are exempt from fuel duty under a European Union directive. The RNLI has not been singled out for special treatment, and it does not set a precedent in that regard.

Mr. Loughton: I believe that the RNLI has been exempt since 1964, which probably predates an EU directive. Moreover, it provides a community service, both on sea and on land. That is the principle that we were trying to extend.

Ms Hewitt: I am grateful for that clarification. Of course the RNLI provides an invaluable community service, and it is one of the many charities whose work we wish to support; but the fact is that a European Union directive exempts all vessels, and another exempts aircraft. I am afraid that, in 1999, the hon. Gentleman cannot support what he has said.

Mr. Loughton: Will the Minister confirm that, in 1964, there was no European Union directive and that the RNLI

[Mr. Loughton]

was exempted under other directives, which emanated from our Government? Therefore, is she not confusing two things?

Ms Hewitt: I was trying merely to bring the hon. Gentleman up to date with the position as it exists now.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore) also spoke about the Government's review of community and voluntary transport schemes. That is an important point. As I think that my hon. Friend the Member for Amber Valley recognised, it is to that review and the work of the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions that she and other sponsors of the Bill need to direct their concern and efforts.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hendon stressed the technical difficulties with the Bill. They are real. They are not mere matters of drafting that can be sorted out in Committee. As the hon. Member for West Derbyshire recognised—indeed, admitted, when he courteously came to see me in anticipation of the debate—although his objective was to secure an extension of the fuel duty rebate for commercial bus operators to operators of community and voluntary transport schemes, his Bill was directed at the operation of fuel duty itself and would require the fuel that was made available for community and voluntary transport schemes to be exempted from duty. That is not a matter that can simply be sorted out in Committee. As the hon. Member for West Derbyshire recognises, nor can the operation, or possible extension, of the fuel duty rebate be properly dealt with in a private Member's Bill. That problem goes to the heart of the Bill. It is not simply a technical difficulty to be ironed out upstairs in Committee.

Mr. Maclean: I have listened carefully to the hon. Lady. I accept that it may not be a matter for a private Member's Bill, but will she accept an amendment to the Finance Bill, or preferably introduce a relevant and appropriate amendment to the Finance Bill, so that the matter can be dealt with properly in the budgetary measures, where much more complicated things are dealt with easily?

Ms Hewitt: The right hon. Gentleman was a member of the previous Government. I am sure that he will recognise that it would be a wholly inappropriate matter for the Finance Bill. I shall explain, should I have the time, precisely what the implications of the Bill, or a similar amendment to the Finance Bill, will be. The objectives that the hon. Member for West Derbyshire and the Bill's sponsors seek to secure are properly a matter for public spending, whether through the rural transport fund, the fuel duty rebate or some other mechanism involving my right hon. Friend the Minister of Transport and the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions.

Mr. McLoughlin: I want to press the Minister on the matter. I am surprised by that answer. I do not accept it. Bearing in mind that, in his Budget speech, the Chancellor announced that there was to be a review of shipping, cabotage and the rights of shipping, surely it is a matter that could be accommodated—I will not say easily—in the Finance Bill.

Ms Hewitt: The hon. Gentleman indicated his full understanding of the difficulties with his Bill when we met last week, but it would assist in answering him and other hon. Members if I said a little more about the operation of the fuel duty scheme, to which the Bill refers, but to which few hon. Members have referred.

We have an efficient means of collecting Excise duties. They are collected essentially at an early stage in the production and distribution system. Road fuel duty is collected on delivery from the refinery, or import warehouse. There are few taxpayers. Those that pay are mostly household names from the oil industry. They are reputable, compliant businesses who pay a large amount of money to the Exchequer every month, on time and accurately.

It being half-past Two o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

Debate to be resumed on Friday 19 March.

Remaining Private Members' Bills

STREETWORKS BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Mr. Christopher Fraser (Mid-Dorset and North Poole): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is it appropriate for Labour Members to object to a private Member's Bill with which the Government have told me they agree in principle, and which also endorses the Government's own White Paper—which pledges:

"We wish to reduce the impact on traffic and pedestrians caused by streetworks for utility companies"?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. Whether any hon. Member objects to a measure before the House is not a point of order for the occupant of the Chair.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 19 March.

NUCLEAR SAFEGUARDS BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 19 March.

BREEDING AND SALE OF DOGS (WELFARE) BILL

Bill read a Second Time, and committed to a Standing Committee, pursuant to Standing Order No. 63 (Committal of Bills).

SEA FISHERIES (SHELLFISH) (AMENDMENT) BILL *[LORDS]*

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 26 March.

COMPUTER MILLENNIUM NON-COMPLIANCE (CONTINGENCY PLANS) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 19 March.

PUBLIC HOUSE NAMES BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 19 March.

ENERGY EFFICIENCY BILL

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Question [26 February], That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Hon. Members: Object.

Debate to be resumed on Friday 19 March.

ENERGY CONSERVATION (HOUSING) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Debate to be resumed on Friday 19 March.

ADJOURNMENT (EASTER)

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 25 (Periodic Adjournments),

That this House, at its rising on Wednesday 31st March, do adjourn till Tuesday 13th April 1999.—*[Mr. Hanson.]*

Question agreed to.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, at the sitting on Wednesday 31st March, the Speaker shall not adjourn the House until she shall have notified the Royal Assent to Acts agreed upon by both Houses.—*[Mr. Hanson.]*

Agriculture Subsidy Payments

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Hanson.]*

2.32 pm

Mr. Gareth Thomas (Clwyd, West): After today's announcement by my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on the outcome of the Brussels negotiations on common agricultural policy reform, this debate has become rather more topical than I had expected it would be. May I express my pleasure that the Under-Secretary of State for Wales, my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, Central (Mr. Jones), has returned safely from Brussels? It is good to see him in the Chamber. I shall have some serious questions for him about the rather important issue of how common agricultural policy payments and subsidies are administered.

I should like, first, to concentrate on the system for distributing the moneys that play such an important part in sustaining agriculture, not only in Wales but across the United Kingdom. Although I accept that the Government have made progress on the matter, there is great concern that the current system is inefficient and subject to wholly unacceptable delay, and that it needs to be reformed root and branch.

The second theme which I wish to pursue concerns the manner in which European Union regulations governing payments of subsidies are interpreted and the overall issue of fairness. There is a perception—I can vouch for it from my own constituency postbag—that the rules are construed rather inflexibly and unfairly by the Welsh Office Agriculture Department.

There is a perception that Wales has been the poor relation in respect of the administration of the system of payments and the resources and the information technology required to deliver an efficient system. The Government have acknowledged that, as they have commissioned a major review. I expect that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary can tell us more about the progress on that.

Let us remind ourselves of the importance of CAP payments and subsidies to Welsh farmers and the Welsh rural economy. In 1997-98, the payments amounted to £230 million and no fewer than 20,000 Welsh farmers received some form of payment or subsidy. I understand that the payments account for some 50 per cent. of farmers' net incomes.

I need hardly remind my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary that agriculture is in a difficult state. His Department's forecast for this year anticipates a drop in farm income of 41 per cent., leaving the average farmer in Wales with an income of about £6,000 per annum. If there were any need to disabuse the general public of the idea that small farmers in my constituency and in Wales as a whole are well off, the figures would speak for themselves. Farmers are going through a particularly difficult time as a result of world trading conditions and the aftermath of the BSE crisis. Farmers, particularly in the less-favoured areas in Wales, depend heavily on the hill livestock compensatory allowance.

Given the critical state of the Welsh rural economy, cash flow is crucial. The Government accept the need for public support for agriculture in the widest public interest, but we need a better system for delivering payments, which must be made more efficient and more timely.

A letter that I received recently from the National Farmers Union in Ruthin about the inefficiency of the present system stated:

> "The dramatic fall in farm income has been compounded in recent years by continued delays in administration and processing of applications by the Welsh Office. These delays are unacceptable and have contributed to severe cash flow difficulties experienced by Welsh producers, thus placing them at a serious disadvantage with their English counterparts."

As I said earlier, the Government have responded and, following a comprehensive review by the management consultants, Hedra, work is in progress on a three-year project to update the system. One of the key findings of the Hedra report was that the Welsh Office Agriculture Department, to which the task of distributing payments has been devolved—and it will subsequently go to the National Assembly for Wales—could not meet farmers charter targets. The report accepted that, for many years, the Welsh Office Agriculture Department had been operating under what was described as crisis management. There were severe problems with the IT system, which was regarded as outdated, and there were inherent difficulties in the paperwork and the forms.

On 15 December last year, the Secretary of State for Wales announced that he accepted the findings of the management consultants' report and that there would be a three-year project to revolutionise the payment system while retaining the present network of Welsh Office Agriculture Department offices. The aim to which the Government aspire is, in the words of the Secretary of State, to

> "concentrate on treating farmers properly and releasing payments accurately, on time and with as few burdens as possible."

In the light of that, I have some questions for my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary. First, what progress has been achieved? I appreciate that this is at an early stage, but an indication of what steps have been taken to implement the project would be much appreciated. Secondly, what resources have been put into the project? I ask that with particular regard to computer technology, which will form an important part of the updating process. Thirdly, when will the improvements come about? Fourthly, what steps will be taken to monitor the effectiveness of the changes? Fifthly, how will the system cope with recent and imminent changes to the common agricultural policy regime and the introduction of the all-Wales agri-environmental scheme, Tir Gofal, which was launched in my constituency last week? Sixthly, and crucially, will the Government consider accelerating the process of change from the anticipated three years to nearer two years or one year? If the implementation of the new computer technology is outsourced, why is it not possible to have real progress much earlier than in three years?

Delay in payments is an important issue. Farmers have experienced severe problems, causing tremendous cash flow difficulties. On the death of a partner in a farm partnership, the Welsh Office Agriculture Department freezes all payments of subsidy to the farm until it has received the grant of probate. That can take up to a year, during which no payments are received. I should like my hon. Friend to review that issue, about which the Farmers Union of Wales is particularly concerned. Could not written assurances from a solicitor be accepted? I appreciate that the Welsh Office needs assurances as to

the identity of the right person for payment, but I hope that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will adopt a more pragmatic approach.

My second main issue relates to the fairness and consistency of the application of the integrated administration and control system—IACS—rules, particularly in the light of European Union regulation 3887/92, with which I am sure that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary is familiar. My evidence is that it is applied inflexibly and unfairly. I appreciate that the European Union demands high standards of probity and accountability, and that there should be rules to prevent the risk of abuse, but rules should be for the guidance of wise men, not the blind obedience of fools. On many occasions, insufficient common sense and common justice have been applied. My hon. Friend knows of my keen interest in agricultural matters, reflecting my rural constituency, and I am due to see him next week to discuss some individual cases.

Mistakes arise as a result of the complexity of the paperwork. There are examples of claims being turned down because field areas were given in acres rather than hectares, because certain boxes were not ticked, because incorrect field numbers were given on the claim forms, because of a failure to submit a valid form due to ill health or because there was a mistake in copying an identification number.

I should like to refer to two cases, to which I do not expect a formal reply from my hon. Friend today. I am simply putting him on notice. He has received correspondence on the matter, and I look forward to a detailed response from him when I meet him next week.

The case of D. W. and E. F. Roberts of Tan-y-Crraig, Llangernyw, involves an incorrect forage declaration on the IACS form. There was absolutely no element of bad faith on their part. There was an error in so far as the field recorded on the form was the wrong one. That was due to the fact that the owner of the field had given my constituents the wrong number—an innocent mistake, which seems not to have been taken on board in the Welsh Office. I want the Welsh Office seriously to consider taking a sympathetic approach to that case.

The case of the well-established family farmers G. E. Edwards and Sons of Llanfwrog has also given me much cause for concern. There has been extensive correspondence between me, my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary and his predecessor on the matter. It concerns sheep annual premium and hill livestock compensatory allowance claim forms for 1997, which were rejected because they were submitted out of time. Rather unfortunate circumstances surround the case, arising from the illness of the senior partner, who would normally have provided the paperwork. I ask my hon. Friend seriously to reconsider the merits of the case, which is very sad. I want him to think again about it, even if it means stretching the rules. He can do so justifiably because they allow sufficient scope for discretion in order to formulate solutions that are consistent with common sense.

What progress has been made in agreeing the recently published Commission proposals, which would permit the waiver of automatic penalties for certain types of error? I would be interested to hear my hon. Friend's response. Article 11 of the regulations to which I refer deal with the vexed issue of force majeure. The European Commission accepts that, where the defence of force majeure is made, it can excuse claimants from failure to comply with certain conditions. How is that article interpreted? Does the Welsh Office have a definitive view? Is it a question for the Welsh Office Agriculture Department or for the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food here in London?

I speak as someone who has a predilection for adopting a legal approach, since I was a lawyer before I entered Parliament. Article 11 gives very wide discretion as to how to interpret force majeure. Clause 3 of the article says:

"Without prejudice to the actual circumstances to be taken into account in individual cases, the competent authorities"—

I query whether the competent authority is MAFF or the Welsh Office Agriculture Department—

"may recognize, in particular, the following cases of force majeure".

They include the death of the farmer, long-term professional incapacity, a severe natural disaster, and so on. What is significant, and what I do not think the Welsh Office fully accepts, is that the list is neither exhaustive nor determinative of what amounts to force majeure. I want the Welsh Office to apply its collective mind to how to interpret article 11 fairly and consistently.

Clause 2 of article 11 refers to the need to lodge the invocation of force majeure

"within 10 working days of the date on which the farmer is in a position to do so."

That must mean that the farmer must be aware of the circumstances that enable him to invoke the force majeure defence. That was not acknowledged in the cases to which I have referred.

I want the Welsh Office to consider an appeal tribunal—a second independent opinion—for rejected claims. Such a tribunal exists in Ireland. Does the Welsh Office believe that the transfer orders under the Government of Wales Act 1998 allow the National Assembly for Wales to use its subordinate legislative powers to set up such a tribunal? That would certainly be much valued.

I am sure that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary will agree that we must get the administration of payments right. That is necessary in the public interest and is essential for fairness and to ensure that farmers can survive what is a very difficult time.

2.51 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Jon Owen Jones): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd, West (Mr. Thomas) for raising such an important issue for debate at a time when farming and rural communities are facing a great deal of economic hardship. We are now facing major changes as a result of negotiations that were completed only a few days ago in Brussels. He has been assiduous in representing the interests of farmers in his constituency to the Welsh Office over many months, and he is joined today by my hon. Friend the Member for Delyn (Mr. Hanson), who has been similarly assiduous.

Sheep production makes a very significant contribution to the local economy in Clwyd, West, with more than three quarters of a million sheep and lambs on more than 900 holdings. Net farm incomes in the less-favoured areas of Wales are forecast to have fallen by two thirds in the

[Mr. Jon Owen Jones]

past year, and the situation has been exacerbated by the continuing strength of sterling, the collapse of export markets in Asia and Russia, and the beef export ban, which we have been working so hard to overturn.

Farming communities are the bedrock of rural Wales and the Government are committed to supporting the industry as it meets the challenges of the years to come. Reform of the common agricultural policy is necessary as fundamental changes occur both in the European Union and in the liberalised worldwide market, with the reduction or removal of supply controls.

The Government are committed to the concept that environmental considerations must be integrated into subsidy payments to farmers. We cannot tolerate a situation in which the agricultural community becomes wholly dependent on direct subsidy from central Government and the European Union.

Since coming to power, in recognition of the difficulties faced by farmers, the Government have provided vital short-term help for the industry. My right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food announced on 16 November a further major aid package for UK farmers totalling £120 million. Welsh farmers will receive £21 million of that, which will mean, on average, about £1,500 extra for all cattle and sheep farmers in the less-favoured areas.

A £5.6 million subsidy was targeted to suckler cow producers in Wales, and 98 per cent. of that has already been paid. The remaining £15 million earmarked for Wales means that farmers can expect an average increase of about 55 per cent. on current rates for hill livestock compensatory allowances. The payments are well under way and we expect to have paid the vast majority by the end of April.

The new all-Wales agri-environment scheme, Tir Gofal, will embrace the best practices from existing schemes. It is a whole farm initiative, to be run by the Countryside Council for Wales in partnership with the Farming and Rural Conservation Agency and Snowdonia national park.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales has launched three agri-food plans for the lamb and beef, dairy and organic sectors this week. They have been developed after wide industry consultation and are based on a common vision, linking the primary produce of Welsh agriculture to profitable markets. The plans form an important part of the Welsh Office's strategy to help farmers, and clearly demonstrate our continuing commitment to the industry. However, we cannot fully protect farmers from economic realities, though our short-term aid package will help to offset some of the financial hardship. The extra aid payments have placed additional burdens on the Welsh Office's payments regime.

The Welsh Office has made some progress with its standard CAP payments this year. For 1998-99 arable payments, 98 per cent. of advance oilseed payments were made by the due date last September, and 93 per cent. of the main arable payments were made by the end of December 1998, against 63 per cent. in 1997. I am also pleased to say that final oilseed payments commenced last month and we anticipate paying 100 per cent. of those claims by 21 April. Also, 97 per cent. of eligible claims from the sheep annual premium scheme have now been paid. Beef special premium and suckler cow premium advance payments commenced in November 1998 and have achieved a payment rate of more than 80 per cent. to date, against 75 per cent. in the previous year. General scheme performance against farmers charter targets is improving, but I acknowledge that it is still unsatisfactory when most schemes are achieving only between 70 to 80 per cent. of their required targets.

It has been recognised for some time that the administration of EU agricultural subsidy payments has been problematic in Wales. The current payments system is out of date and labour intensive. Most of the schemes are difficult to administer and are underpinned by a plethora of EU regulations and accompanying UK statutory instruments.

The payment of £200 million of EU subsidies, via 160,000 transactions to 20,000 farmers each year in Wales alone, necessitates the production of a complex suite of computer programmes. Those have to be tested and rolled out to our divisional officers who strive to give the best possible service, but it is clear that improvements to that service can and must be made.

We fully accept that farmers should receive their subsidy payments on time, notwithstanding the complexities of the current EU rules governing those payments. We recognise that delays in payment have been an added problem for farmers. Our failure, in Wales, to meet farmers charter targets is not acceptable.

As part of the Government's comprehensive spending review in 1998, the Welsh Office appointed consultants to assess the options for securing improved administration of payments to farmers in Wales under the CAP rules. All options, including transferring the work to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food or the Intervention Board Executive Agency, involved developing new computer systems and business processes for making payments. Following widespread consultation with farming unions, Welsh Members of Parliament, Welsh Office staff and trade unions, it was decided to retain the work within the Welsh Office.

As hon. Members in Wales will know, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced on 15 December 1998 a major three-year project that will improve the payment system to Welsh farmers. It will develop joint delivery of services with other public sector bodies in Wales, and establish front offices for the National Assembly at the Agriculture Department's divisional and local offices. The project will develop local accessibility of services to farmers and safeguard approximately 500 jobs in rural Wales.

The £16 million project is a new investment and will not be funded from existing provision for Welsh farmers. It is one of the largest single projects facing the Welsh Office and the National Assembly, and demonstrates our commitment to improving the service provided to farmers and others living in rural Wales. Three quarters of the funds have been secured from the Treasury's new invest-to-save budget which is intended to encourage cross-boundary working between Government Departments to ensure more efficient and effective public services. That will involve a new farmer-centred approach to the administration of the CAP in Wales and will reduce the administrative burden on farmers. An early priority will be the simplification and standardisation of services.

Over the coming months, we will work closely with the farming community and others in rural Wales to find out what improvements they want. We will also look at how the common agricultural policy is administered in other member states so that we can adopt best practice. I regret that I cannot answer specifically some of the questions that my hon. Friend asked about the payment process and its development. However, I trust that he understands that we recognise that the present payment regime is inadequate and are actively seeking to improve the system.

While attempting to make our services more customer friendly, we have to acknowledge the need for good regulation and control. Regulation is unavoidable as United Kingdom farmers benefit from around £3 billion-worth of European Union and domestic support measures. We have to take account of operating systems in all member states in order to ensure consistency of approach.

Taxpayers' money cannot be spent without controls, which are in place to ensure that the right amount is paid to eligible farmers. Controls also need to be seen to be in place, particularly in the context of lifting the beef export ban. Member states presently have little discretion over how European Union rules are implemented, and EU auditors frequently check that the United Kingdom territories are administering the schemes correctly. The penalties for not doing so can result in substantial financial disallowance of European Union funding, with a consequential cost to the United Kingdom Exchequer.

I shall meet my hon. Friend to discuss the particular cases that he has brought to my attention. However, he will understand that I cannot address those specific problems from the Dispatch Box today—and it would not be advantageous to those concerned if I were to do so. I trust that I have been able to demonstrate that, subject to the constraints of ensuring consistency across the United Kingdom and the European Union, I shall do all I can to make sure that the rules are operated in a manner that takes account of human frailty. I ask my hon. Friend to accept my reassurances for the time being. I will be glad to discuss with him and with any other Welsh Members specific cases in depth if they require me to do so.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at two minutes past Three o'clock.

House of Commons

Monday 15 March 1999

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

HOME DEPARTMENT

The Secretary of State was asked—

European Elections

1. **Mr. Martin Linton** (Battersea): When he plans to launch a public information campaign on the voting system to be used in the European elections. [74577]

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Jack Straw): I am pleased to announce to the House that we will be spending £3.5 million on a publicity campaign to explain to the electorate the new voting system for the European elections, and to encourage voter participation and a higher turnout. The campaign will begin in May. I will be happy to discuss details of the campaign with the Opposition parties.

Mr. Linton: May I assure my right hon. Friend that there will be a wide welcome for his announcement that money will be spent on a public information campaign? The voting system will be extremely simple—indeed, it will be simpler than the present one, since it simply requires an "X" against one party name. However, does he believe that £3.5 million will be enough, given that £5 million was spent in New Zealand on introducing a new voting system to a far smaller population? Does my right hon. Friend think that the five weeks between the end of the local elections and the European elections will be long enough to drive the point home to voters across the country—who have known in previous elections that their vote might not count towards the result—that, for the first time, they will have a chance, through the new system, to ensure that their vote does count towards the result and does result in representation?

Mr. Straw: Everybody's vote counts in every election, whatever the system. I am glad that my hon. Friend has welcomed the substantial amount of money, which will enable us to run a television advertising campaign and provide a leaflet drop into every household. It should serve its purpose. Turnouts in previous European elections have been unacceptably low in this country and in some others, and we hope that they are raised. On my hon. Friend's point about the five weeks between the local and European elections, everyone would accept that it would be confusing if the publicity campaign were to begin before the local elections had been completed.

My hon. Friend will know that the New Zealand system is infinitely more complicated than the one we have introduced.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): Will the Home Secretary confirm that in any literature that is put out to try to explain the iniquities of the proportional list system, there will be a paragraph setting out clearly why such a system would be wholly inappropriate for future Westminster elections, and confirming that it will never be adopted for future Westminster elections?

Mr. Straw: No—because that may be otiose. It is very important that this is an all-party publicity campaign, and that is why I am happy to discuss the matter with spokespersons of the other main parties.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire): Will not the public search out their own information if they have a reason to do so? Whatever fancy franchise is operating, is not having 100 per cent. electoral registration—so that everyone has a vote that counts—of considerable importance in these and other elections? What progress has been made towards a modern electoral franchise system?

Mr. Straw: As the system is new, we need to explain it and—as my hon. Friend the Member for Battersea (Mr. Linton) made clear—its simplicity. It simply requires one cross to be put on the ballot paper against the party of one's choice. That causes us no difficulty, although it may cause Conservative Members some difficulty—particularly as two Conservative parties will be standing. We accept the need for modernisation of electoral registration, and we will make proposals shortly in respect of that.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): Will the public information campaign extend to Gibraltar, to explain to its citizens—who are citizens of the European Union—why they cannot have votes? Will the Home Secretary reconsider the matter and introduce a short Bill to give them votes in light of the European Court's decision, or will he extend one of the British constituencies—in London, for example—so that they get votes that way?

Mr. Straw: The Government take extremely seriously the decisions of the European Court of Human Rights. The question of a specific and separate franchise for Gibraltar was fully debated in this House during discussion of the European Parliamentary Elections Bill. That proposition was rejected. Meanwhile, we are considering how to implement the decision of the European Court, but there is no prospect of doing so before the June elections.

Mr. Gordon Prentice (Pendle): My hon. Friend the Member for Battersea (Mr. Linton) said that the new system was simple. However, is there not tremendous scope for confusion, given that two Conservative parties will be standing—the Hagueite Conservatives and the pro-euro Conservatives?

May I now ask my right hon. Friend a serious question? The registrar of political parties is not obliged to give reasons for his decisions or to publish guidelines. Is not there a case, because of the confusion that has arisen, for the registrar to do that?

Mr. Straw: It is not the system, but the message coming from the two Conservative parties that will be complicated. Even if we were to spend £100 million on an information campaign about that, we would not cut through the confusion at the heart of those parties.

So taken was I with my hon. Friend's first question that I have forgotten his second one.

Mr. Prentice: It was about the registrar.

Mr. Straw: Oh yes, the registrar. A process is laid down in the Registration of Political Parties Act 1998 whereby if there is an argument, it is referred to a special Speaker's Committee. That is how these matters should be dealt with.

Sir Norman Fowler (Sutton Coldfield): I hope that the Home Secretary will remind us how many Labour parties and Socialist parties are standing.

Large areas and populations are involved in the elections. The Home Secretary will obviously confirm that provision will be made for re-counts, contrary to some of the current rumours. Does he recall that virtually no one in the House, from any party, argued in favour of the closed list? Following the European elections, will the Government continue to be committed to the closed list for future elections, or do they have an open mind?

Mr. Straw: Of course there can, and no doubt may, be re-counts, at the point at which the votes are counted, in a constituency or a combination of constituencies.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): No, no.

Mr. Straw: With respect, that is the appropriate point, because it is at that point that there is a reconciliation, or lack of it, between the total number of votes cast and the aggregate of votes cast for individual candidates at that level.

Regarding whether we have an open mind, I have always made it clear that we stand ready to review the operation of the system in the light of the experience in June.

Hospital Workers (Workplace Safety)

2. **Mr. Derek Twigg** (Halton): What steps his Department is taking to protect NHS hospital workers from criminal attacks at work. [74578]

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. Paul Boateng): Home Office officials are contributing to a cross-Government working group, led by the Department of Health, developing proposals to tackle the violence that, sadly, hospital workers all too often experience. The Crime and Disorder Act 1998 requires local authorities and police, jointly and in co-operation with the relevant local organisations, including health authorities and trusts, to formulate and implement strategies to reduce crime and disorder in their area. We would expect those strategies to tackle violence against hospital workers where it is identified as a problem.

Mr. Twigg: Like other hon. Members, I have had complaints from health service workers who have been attacked while on duty. I am sure that my hon. Friend will agree that partnership is an important approach. Are there any examples of good local practice to tackle this issue of major concern?

Mr. Boateng: It is one of the most disturbing and alarming features of our times that public servants, doing a difficult job day in, day out, night in, night out, as hospital workers do, should be subject to such attacks. One in seven of all injuries suffered by NHS staff are directly attributable to acts of violence by patients or visitors to hospitals. That is an indictment of our society, and we must do something about it. I commend the example set in my hon. Friend's constituency, at Halton general hospital, where emphasis is being laid on staff training, giving them the strength to identify risks and, importantly, ensuring that signs throughout the hospital make it absolutely clear that such conduct simply will not be tolerated.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): Given that 50 per cent. of nurses have been attacked over the past 12 months and that no less than 47 per cent. have specifically reported being punched, slapped or spat at, can the Minister tell the House now, or inform me later in writing, what proportion of violent incidents in accident and emergency departments are attributable to alcohol abuse?

Mr. Boateng: The hon. Gentleman makes an interesting point and his statistics, if accurate, are alarming indeed. The abuse of alcohol makes a substantial contribution to violence in accident and emergency departments, and that is why projects such as the one that is being run by the Cardiff violence prevention group are so important. Professor John Shephard has arranged a hotline as part of a strategy to identify the pubs and clubs from which the violence is emanating, and to tackle it at root with the management, the licensing authorities and the police. That strategy stands a good chance of reducing the violence associated with alcohol in A and E departments and, indeed, in some of the sites covered by that violence prevention group, violent assaults have been reduced by 50 per cent. That is an achievement for partnership work between NHS staff, the police and the private sector, and it is such partnerships that will bring those alarming figures down.

Health Visitors

3. **Dr. Phyllis Starkey** (Milton Keynes, South-West): What responses have been received from organisations representing health visitors to the consultation document, "Supporting Families". [74579]

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Jack Straw): While responses to the document are still being logged, we have so far received almost 200 responses from health care trusts, health care organisations and individuals in the medical profession. We have at least five responses from local centres of the

Community Practitioners and Health Visitors Association and a co-ordinated response from the United Kingdom Central Council for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting. All of them showed considerable support for our proposals to expand the role of health visitors.

Dr. Starkey: I thank my right hon. Friend for that response. When I spoke to the health visitors in Milton Keynes, they generally supported the document, but they were concerned that they might be asked to interfere in people's personal relationships. Will my right hon. Friend confirm that it is envisaged that the role of health visitors will be to support and advise families, not to police people's personal relationships?

Mr. Straw: I can confirm that. One of the reasons why health visitors are held in such trust and confidence by people is that they are seen as a source of independent advice and counselling, and not as part of the agencies of social control, which are necessary, but in which—happily—the health visitors are not involved.

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Mid-Sussex): Does the Home Secretary agree that health visitors provide an invaluable service and do their jobs extraordinarily well? When he considers the responses to the consultation paper, will he also consider—taking into account the point made by the hon. Member for Milton Keynes, South-West (Dr. Starkey)—a graded system so that health visitors continue to call, beyond the usual arrangements, on families that are considered to be high risk?

Mr. Straw: The hon. Gentleman's suggestion is very important and I shall certainly take it forward.

Drug Treatment and Testing Orders

4. **Mr. Tony McWalter** (Hemel Hempstead): What assessment he has made of the progress made by probation services in implementing the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, with particular reference to the supervision of drug treatment and testing orders. [74580]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. George Howarth): The three probation services involved—Liverpool, Gloucester and Croydon—in the drug treatment and testing order pilots have successfully set up schemes and, as of 5 March 1999, 28 orders have been made. It is too early to assess the effectiveness of those orders, but the early signs are encouraging.

Mr. McWalter: I thank my hon. Friend for that answer, and I apologise for my lack of voice. I welcome his assurance that we are progressing slowly but surely on the issue, but is he confident that probation services and local authorities will have the resources necessary to deal with the issues when the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 is fully operational?

Mr. Howarth: The Home Office has provided £1.7 million to run and evaluate the pilot schemes in the three areas that I have mentioned over their 18-month period. As we roll the scheme out, the necessary resources will be in place to ensure that that new and innovative approach to breaking the link between drugs and crime is advanced in the way that the legislation envisages.

Mr. Richard Allan (Sheffield, Hallam): The Government have used the probation services' tremendous efficiency improvements of more than 20 per cent. since 1994 as an example for the police force. However, many chief officers of probation are already reporting difficulties in meeting both national standards and new commitments under the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, particularly following a 10 per cent. fall in the work force between 1994 and the end of 1997. Is the Minister confident that probation services will be able to recruit new officers? Is he concerned that in January there were only 274 trainee probation officers? Does he have any plans to try to increase recruitment and training of officers?

Mr. Howarth: Staffing must be properly monitored. The comprehensive spending review settlement for the probation service over the next three years will provide £18 million, £24 million and £25 million respectively on top of the money already available. That should be enough to deal with the problems that are likely to arise. Training must, of course, be kept under review, and we shall keep a close eye on developments for both the service's work load and its available resources.

Drug Addiction (Crime)

5. **Mr. Barry Sheerman** (Huddersfield): What new steps he is taking to tackle the links between drug addiction and crime. [74581]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. George Howarth): Our initiatives include piloting a new drug treatment and testing order with a view to national roll-out in 2000–01, and setting up and monitoring arrest referral and court referral schemes such as the STEP—the substance misuse treatment enforcement programme—in West Yorkshire, which I have visited and which is resourced by the police and probation services. We are also establishing a new drug prevention advisory service to support drug action teams on drug prevention, including prevention of drug-related crime.

Mr. Sheerman: Although we have done much good work on both the supply of and demand for drugs, is my hon. Friend aware that police attention seems too often to be focused on low-level, corner-shop parts of the drug trade? Anyone who has spoken to a chief constable will know that drugs are a multi-million pound business and a tremendous problem that we must face up to. Does my hon. Friend believe that signing up to the Schengen group of countries will help us to take on large operators and big gangs, so that we can stop a business that is dangerous to many of our constituents?

Mr. Howarth: My hon. Friend should know that about £1.4 billion is spent across Government on drug-related activity. Following the comprehensive spending review, £217 million of additional expenditure will be made available over a three-year period, mainly for treatment-based approaches. As regards Schengen and the

international drug trade, my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary is undertaking constructive discussions with colleagues from states that have signed up to Schengen and we hope that that dialogue will bear fruit in due course. One thing is absolutely clear: we will use our resources and our influence to stop the foul and iniquitous international trade in drugs, which does no one any good in the United Kingdom or elsewhere.

Mr. James Clappison (Hertsmere): Does the Minister agree that there is a trade in drugs in our prisons? Keeping drugs out of prison is vital if the link between drug addiction and crime is to be broken. Is it not a fact that drugs are far too readily available in our prisons? This is a difficult problem, but does the Minister accept that the Government made a serious mistake in weakening the system of mandatory drug testing just when there was evidence that it was working? Are not the Government in danger of not even fighting the war against drugs, let alone winning it?

Mr. Howarth: The hon. Gentleman's statistics are inaccurate, and I shall return to that point in a moment. First, however, we do not believe that it is acceptable that anyone in prison should use drugs, and whatever means are necessary to prevent that will be made available to the Prison Service, including additional resources from the comprehensive spending review.

The truth is that our more careful targeting of mandatory drug testing has made us able to deal with the problem at the point at which it most seriously manifests itself rather than following a scatter-gun principle. Mandatory drug testing remains, but it is partly random, and partly at the discretion of governors. The hon. Gentleman should know that the proportion of people discovered through mandatory testing to be taking drugs has fallen rather than risen. Independent evidence shows that more people come out of prison drug-free than are going in. We must be doing something right.

Dr. Brian Iddon (Bolton, South-East): Bolton probation service has been running an excellent project, funded by the Department of Health, to examine the link between drugs and crime. The project will terminate at the end of this month, but last year it reported to the Department and I draw my hon. Friend's attention to the report, which identifies various gaps in the service that we could fill. One that concerns me is the absence of treatment services for very young people—that is, those under 18. Is my hon. Friend, with the Department of Health, dealing with that problem?

Mr. Howarth: Although we may disagree on some of the finer points of policy, may I pay tribute to the work that my hon. Friend does on this matter? He is knowledgeable and he puts in a lot of time. There is concern that the right resources are not in all the right places to deal with the problem of drug taking at a young age. We are in continuous dialogue with our colleagues at the Department of Health and we are determined that, where appropriate, treatment-based approaches should be available to people of every age. It is particularly important that we catch people as young as possible so that they do not get into the spiral of drug abuse, particularly abuse of hard drugs, which leads to crime and often, in the longer term, to very serious crime. It is important that we intervene as early as possible.

Dr. Vincent Cable (Twickenham): Does the Minister acknowledge that the extent of addiction and criminal behaviour that originates in alcohol abuse is quantitatively much larger than that originating in drugs more narrowly defined? What plans do the Government have to give that problem comparable attention?

Mr. Howarth: The hon. Gentleman is right. A long history of particularly violent crime is associated with the heavy use of alcohol. I am chair of the ministerial group that is considering the problems of under-age drinking across the board. We have already introduced several measures to deal with it, including discouraging the use and production of inappropriate, so-called alcopops. More needs to be done and we are working hard to produce a programme that will start to deal with that serious problem.

West Mercia Police

6. **Miss Julie Kirkbride** (Bromsgrove): If he will make a statement on the number of *(a)* police and *(b)* administrative staff in the West Mercia police force in *(a)* 1998–99 and *(b)* 1999–2000. [74582]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Mike O'Brien): I understand from the chief constable that the 1998–99 budget for West Mercia constabulary contained financial provision for 2,067 police officers and 1,065 civilian support staff. The 1999–2000 budget contains provision for 2,063 police officers and 1,072 support staff. The chief constable appears to have concluded that he can best deliver levels of service with slightly fewer officers and slightly more support staff.

Miss Kirkbride: Frankly, that was a disgraceful answer. Clearly, it is not true to say that that is the chief constable's decision. It is purely a result of the fact that the Government have not properly resourced police forces in this financial year. The settlement figure for West Mercia is 2.8 per cent., which clearly does not cover the police pay settlement and all the other things that the police have to do to conform with the Government's legislation.

Having admitted that disgraceful fact, will the Minister answer a question that applies to the future and not the present day? Changes will be made to the national emergency call centre in the West Mercia area. As a result, 90 police constables may well find that their posts become redundant. In the light of that dreadful answer, will he assure us that the complement will not be reduced and that those constables will be redeployed in the area, so that my constituents can look forward to having police on the beat rather than their being cut because of the inadequate resources provided by the Government?

Mr. O'Brien: Oh dear! The Tory leader and shadow Chancellor call for cuts in taxes and spending, but Back Benchers call for more spending. It is no wonder that two Tory parties are fighting the European election. The hon. Lady might have joined me in congratulating Peter

Hanson, the new chief constable. Let us consider the answer that she described as disgraceful in the light of the Conservative research department's 1995 publication, which states:

"Central government controls on manpower numbers and capital expenditure have been scrapped by the Police and Magistrates' Courts Act 1994—a change for which chief constables had been calling for some years. Decisions about resources will in future be made by police authorities and chief constables. This reform commanded all-party support."

The Conservative party supported that and put it through. She should not now complain about what her Government did.

Lewes Prison

7. **Mr. Norman Baker** (Lewes): What recent assessment he has made of the effectiveness of measures taken to minimise noise disruption for residents living close to HMP Lewes. [74583]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. George Howarth): There has been a prison at Lewes since 1853. Staff have acted on residents' concerns. Any prisoner found shouting from a cell window will be placed on a disciplinary charge. Cell windows overlooking the main road have been adjusted to control the level of noise.

Mr. Baker: I am sorry to raise what appears to be a minor matter in this way, but I do so because I have failed to get a solution to the problem from the prison governor or from the head of the Prison Service in a face-to-face meeting. Noise continues for up three hours an evening. Abusive and foul language is shouted out of prison windows with no apparent control in the prison to stop it. It causes great disturbance to my constituents who, at a recent meeting, said that they were fed up with it and wanted a resolution. What will the Minister do? I gather that he can change the windows and have them closed so that people cannot lean out, but what is going on in the prison which means prisoners can run riot for three hours?

Mr. Howarth: I understand that the problem is perpetrated by young offenders. The hon. Gentleman should know that the governor of the prison has been working closely to address the noise problem with the environmental health department, which has written to the prison to say that it is pleased by the positive way in which the prison has approached the problem. He should also be aware that the person who originally raised the complaint has also contacted the governor to express her thanks for the measures taken by the staff at the prison. It might not make good *Focus* material, but if the hon. Gentleman took up the governor's invitation to discuss the problem, he might have a better understanding of the measures taken.

Voluntary Organisations

8. **Mr. Bill O'Brien** (Normanton): What assessment he has made of the role of voluntary organisations in combating crime and disorder; and if he will make a statement. [74584]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Kate Hoey): Voluntary organisations have an important role in preventing and reducing crime. That is why the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 requires a wide range of voluntary bodies to be invited to participate in the work of the crime and disorder reduction partnerships.

Mr. O'Brien: I thank my hon. Friend for that response. I raise the issue because of the previous Government's lack of initiative in helping voluntary organisations to combat crime and disorder. Does she accept that there are many groups in my constituency, including town, parish and community councils, the Churches, neighbourhood watch and Victim Support, that are keen to combat crime and disorder in the community? My concerns are heightened by the fact that the elderly and disabled are the most vulnerable people. Will she consider helping voluntary organisations in their campaign to combat crime and disorder, and explain the way forward in that respect?

Kate Hoey: I thank my hon. Friend for that question. The whole aim of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, and particularly of local crime reduction strategies, is to give local communities and voluntary organisations an important role in deciding how to tackle local problems. Voluntary organisations can bring a different perspective to tackling crime and disorder. It is crucial that they are given such a role, which is why it is now statutory under the Crime and Disorder Act. We shall continue to work closely with the voluntary sector to ensure that that happens. The sort of initiatives that are happening in my hon. Friend's constituency will happen throughout the country and be supported by the Government.

Liquor Licensing Laws

9. **Mr. John Grogan** (Selby): What progress he has made in reviewing the liquor licensing laws. [74585]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. George Howarth): As my hon. Friend knows, last May I announced a comprehensive review of liquor licensing legislation, with the aim of producing a simpler and more effective system. We have been having useful discussions with a wide range of interested parties including the trade, courts, police and residents associations. We aim to produce a set of balanced proposals for public consultation by early next year.

Mr. Grogan: Does my hon. Friend agree that a more flexible and more liberal liquor licensing system, with longer opening hours, has been a resounding success in Scotland for the past 25 years? Does he also agree with those senior police officers who argue that a more modern system in England and Wales could help to cut crime by abolishing for ever the 11 o'clock rush, which leads to so many people spilling out into our streets at exactly the same time in search of food or transport home?

Mr. Howarth: My hon. Friend is quite right. As often happens, the Scottish experience leads us to draw many

interesting conclusions. I hope that what emerges from the review process is a properly balanced system, whereby the rights of consumers to have access to entertainment and alcohol at a suitable time for them are properly balanced by the need to provide protection for residents who live near licensed premises. If we achieve a system that meets both those tests, which I believe is possible, we shall have done a good job.

Animal Procedures Committee

10. **Mr. Brian White** (Milton Keynes, North-East): What assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the Animal Procedures Committee. [74586]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. George Howarth): The principal role of the Animal Procedures Committee is to advise the Secretary of State on matters to do with the operation of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986. Work completed and planned covers matters of current importance concerning the use of animals in scientific procedures. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I greatly value the committee's advice and we consider that the reform of the membership that has taken place since the election gives the committee a more balanced membership.

Mr. White: Although I accept that the current Government have done more for animal welfare than any previous Government—the number of animal welfare experts on the committee has increased and cosmetics testing on animals has ended—does the Minister accept that, with 2.5 million animals affected, there is a great deal more that the committee needs to do to protect the welfare of animals?

Mr. Howarth: The committee recognises that a large amount of work can still be undertaken; its members are anxious to get on with it, and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I encourage them to do so. What is important is that those who have responsibility—whether at individual institutional level, as a member of the Animal Procedures Committee, or as a Minister—should be constantly vigilant to ensure that animals are used in such procedures only when no reasonable alternative exists. Measured against that simple test, we are doing well; however, we must always apply that test, because there are occasions when extremely important benefits to medical science and public safety can be derived from the procedures.

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): Does the Minister agree with the Animal Procedures Committee's conclusion in its recent report, that the 1986 Act

"provides a good framework for a well regulated and responsible use of animals in experiments within the UK"?

Does he agree with the committee's recommendation that the

"working of the Act can be improved further"

by, for example, enhanced training, better cost-benefit analysis and acquiring animals for experiments only from countries whose welfare standards match our own?

To anyone who is concerned about animal welfare, does not that report show that there can be no justification for any further independent review, such as a royal commission? Would not that only delay and hamper the progress towards higher standards that is already being achieved under the existing Act? Does the Minister now regret his party ever having promised a royal commission—a promise that had all the appearance of being aimed at winning votes—and will he take this opportunity to confirm that the Government have abandoned that pledge?

Mr. Howarth: The Government have an open mind about whether a royal commission would be the best way of achieving a reduction in the number of animals used in such procedures. For the present, I am content that the time and energy that we devote to these issues is aimed, where possible, at reducing the number of animals involved in the procedures or at least ensuring that the procedures are appropriate.

The hon. Gentleman is correct about the conclusions of the review of the 1986 Act conducted by the APC. As part of that process, from the first of next month we will require establishments that conduct the procedures to carry out an ethical review. When considering embarking on such experiments, a committee within the institution will be required to consider whether that is the most important form of action. Most sensible people have welcomed that move, as I am sure the hon. Gentleman will.

Kerb Crawling

11. **Ms Jenny Jones** (Wolverhampton, South-West): What plans he has to review the law on kerb crawling. [74587]

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. Paul Boateng): We intend to make kerb crawling an arrestable offence when a suitable legislative opportunity arises. In addition, we set up in January a review to consider the present law on sex offences and to recommend clear and coherent offences that will protect the individual, particularly children and the more vulnerable, from abuse and exploitation. This will include offences of abuse and exploitation associated with prostitution. While kerb crawling will not be central to this exercise, the review will certainly have to take that offence, and views expressed about it, into account.

Ms Jones: I thank my hon. Friend for that answer. Does he believe that the power of arrest for kerb crawling should be extended to the police? Does he propose to introduce legislation and, if so, is it likely to be in the lifetime of this Parliament?

Mr. Boateng: I am absolutely committed—as are the whole of the Government—to ensuring that kerb crawling becomes an arrestable offence, and we seek to utilise the first suitable legislative opportunity to achieve that objective. I have met officers from Nottingham and from Wolverhampton to discuss the outcome of the piloting of the Association of Chief Police Officers guidelines on child prostitution in my hon. Friend's constituency. That scheme is teaching us some very important lessons about how best to deal with this menace, and particularly how to get at the pimps who continue to ply this evil trade.

Mr. Desmond Swayne (New Forest, West): How many of the prostitutes who provide services are under the age

of consent? To what extent is the Minister implementing measures to ensure that the lessons learned in Wolverhampton and the west midlands are extended to the rest of the country?

Mr. Boateng: We are taking all possible steps, with the Association of Chief Police Officers and the various child protection societies, to ensure that the lessons learned in Wolverhampton and Nottingham are recognised throughout the country. Those pilot projects show that a high proportion of young people who come to the attention of the police and social services are below the age of consent—some children as young as 11 are put on to the streets by their pimps and subjected to appalling sexual abuse by kerb crawlers. That is what it is: sexual abuse. It is not just another form of prostitution, but the sexual abuse of children. We will look to the review of sexual offences to ensure that the punishment fits the crime in this instance—which it does not always do.

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney, North and Stoke Newington): Is the Minister aware of the great concern about this matter in my constituency, expressed by, among others, the Amhurst Park action group—a long-standing activist organisation that has campaigned on this issue and met with the Home Secretary to discuss it? Those bodies will be pleased to hear that the Government intend to introduce legislation in this area. Does the Minister appreciate my concern that the legislation, which is supported by not just community groups but the Metropolitan police, should not be long in coming?

Mr. Boateng: My hon. Friend has been in the forefront of the campaign on this issue. Indeed, if my memory serves me well, it was the first issue that she discussed with me soon after my appointment as Minister of State. I have not forgotten that discussion—one seldom does in the case of my hon. Friend—and my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has met the Amhurst Park residents association to make progress on that matter.

Vulnerable Witnesses

12. **Dr. George Turner** (North-West Norfolk): What measures he plans to introduce to protect vulnerable witnesses. [74588]

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. Paul Boateng): The Government are committed to improving the treatment of vulnerable witnesses in the criminal justice system. Last June, my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary published the report of the interdepartmental working group on vulnerable or intimidated witnesses. That made more than 70 recommendations, and those that require legislation are included in the Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Bill, which will shortly be making its way to the House.

Dr. Turner: This is a problem that still figures large in my constituency, where many vulnerable witnesses remain frightened because of the criminals who live among them and the threats that they and their families make if witnesses inform on them. Does my hon. Friend agree that the measures must be followed by the spreading of good practice and that we must ensure that the police and magistrates know how to help? Does he further agree that there must be an element of bravery in our communities if we are to rid our estates of the criminals who live among the residents?

Mr. Boateng: My hon. Friend makes an important point. There is only a limited amount that we can do within the courts. All that we can do, we must do. For example, it will be important to make sure that screens are used and that the courts exercise their new power to clear the courtroom when some witnesses are giving evidence. All those proposals will be implemented. We need to ensure also that there is proper multidisciplinary liaison between the local authority, the police and the Crown Prosecution Service so that people are given the protection that will enable them to give their best evidence.

It is a question of getting matters right in the courts and giving judges and magistrates the power to regulate their courts in a way that will protect vulnerable witnesses while ensuring that, outside the courts, we focus attention on the needs of victims and witnesses.

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Aldershot): Does the Minister agree that some of the most vulnerable witnesses are those who risk losing their job if they fail to do as their employer asks? Should not the toughest action possible be taken against such employers? Given that close employees have been responsible for giving some of the most damaging witness accounts in a serious case of alleged political corruption in this country, surely the employer concerned should not be granted a British passport, and Mohammed Fayed should be deported?

Mr. Boateng: The hon. Gentleman demeans a serious debate by seeking to raise this issue in such a way. On reflection, bearing in mind his distinguished service on the Select Committee on Home Affairs, he might wish that he had used this opportunity to make serious points about encouraging employers to ensure that they support their staff when they are called on to give witness in the courts. Significantly, we should ensure also that we support whistleblowers who identify wrongdoing, when they come under pressure from their employer. The hon. Gentleman would have done much better to have devoted the time that he spent on his question to that issue.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Does the Minister agree that one of the great problems in finding the perpetrators of racist attacks and other violent crimes on housing estates is witnesses' fear of coming forward? Will he therefore reconsider the need to expand the professional witness service, whereby people can be neutral observers of anti-social activity on estates and help to catch the perpetrators of racial violence? I am sure that he is aware that such cases that collapse in the court because of a lack of witnesses are seen as appalling victories for racist violence on our estates and make the situation considerably worse.

Mr. Boateng: My hon. Friend makes an important point based, I know, on first-hand experience of tackling this sort of racist and anti-social behaviour in his constituency and elsewhere. We certainly need to take on board support for tenancy relations officers, estate officers and others and, yes, the role of the sort of witnesses that

my hon. Friend describes. In addition, we must make the best use of the anti-social behaviour orders that will be introduced as a result of our legislative programme. They give us an opportunity to build strong community action, which is designed to identify and then isolate those who harass people on our estates. That is something that we are committed to doing.

Sir Norman Fowler (Sutton Coldfield): With reference to the protection of vulnerable witnesses, I refer to the Macpherson report. Surely all that was required was for the Home Office to contact the inquiry team and question whether the publication of the names and addresses of witnesses put those witnesses at risk. It had nine days to do that. Will the Minister, even now, concede that that was the proper and sensible course to take?

Mr. Boateng: No. We had a duty to publish the report in the way that it was presented to us, and we carried out that duty.

Shopping Centres (Crime)

13. **Ms Sally Keeble** (Northampton, North): What steps he is taking to reduce crime in shopping centres. [74589]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Mike O'Brien): Crime and the fear of crime are major factors in the success, or otherwise, of town centres. Our new crime and disorder partnerships invite the business sector to participate in the development of strategy. In addition, the retail crime reduction action team, which was set up under the aegis of the Home Office, has recently published a guide called "Community Crime Reduction Partnerships: the Retail Contribution". This provides advice to the crime and disorder partnerships on how further to involve the retail industry in their audit and strategy development work, paying particular attention to town centres.

Ms Keeble: I thank my hon. Friend for that answer. However, does he agree that there is a problem with the displacement of crime from the larger shopping centres, which have security guards or which can afford closed circuit television, to some of the smaller suburban centres, which are highly prized by the local community? Would it be possible for some of the £170 million set aside in the Budget for law and order to go towards improving security in smaller centres through CCTV and other schemes to make people feel safer as they go about their ordinary business?

Mr. O'Brien: My hon. Friend is right to say that there is concern at some shopping centres. In his Budget, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor announced that an additional £170 million would be made available over the next three years for crime prevention where crime is highest. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary will make a further announcement to the House in the light of the Chancellor's statement. The money will be split between the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions and the Home Office and will commence in 1999–2000. Bids will be invited through a challenge fund from local crime reduction partnerships.

Police Personnel

14. **Mr. Oliver Letwin** (West Dorset): If he will make a statement on the number of policemen employed on 31 December 1998. [74590]

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Jack Straw): The latest available information relates to 30 September 1998. On that date, there were a total of 126,504 male and female police officers in England and Wales.

Mr. Letwin: Is the Home Secretary aware that beneath those figures there is a real and growing problem in rural areas? What plans does he have to help people such as my constituents in the Sherborne area who are currently served by rather fewer policemen than were serving their predecessors before the war?

Mr. Straw: I am, indeed, aware of the pressures on the police service, and I am pleased to say that we have increased police spending in Dorset, the hon. Gentleman's own police area, by £3.7 million, or 5 per cent.—getting on for twice the national average—to take account of exactly those pressures.

Mr. Gerald Bermingham (St. Helens, South): Does my right hon. Friend agree that to fight crime, it is not only policemen we need but the necessary equipment? Does he accept that a considerable gap is now beginning to develop between the type of equipment used by, for example, some sophisticated smugglers or corporate fraudsters and that available to police forces? Perhaps it might be a useful investment to upgrade the computers and other services available to the police.

Mr. Straw: I entirely accept what my hon. Friend says about the need to harness the best of information technology in fighting crime. One of the problems that we faced when we took office was that the police service had as many different information technology systems as there were police forces, and the systems did not communicate properly with other parts of the criminal justice system. One of the things that we are now doing is trying to ensure common and compatible systems for all parts of the criminal justice service.

Sir Norman Fowler: Does the Home Secretary agree that under the previous Conservative Government the strength of the police service rose by more than 15,000, whereas under this Government the strength of the police service is falling, and complaints are coming in from around the country—from rural areas and city areas—of police forces being left no option but to cut services and manpower?

Mr. Straw: I am astonished that the right hon. Gentleman should go on about the Conservatives' record on police manpower. I have the Conservative manifesto for 1992, promising 1,000 extra police officers, and the speech by the then leader of the Conservative party, the right hon. Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major), in October 1995, promising an extra 5,000 on top of the original 1,000. What happened? Six thousand extra police officers were promised between—*[Interruption.]* No, I am talking about the period after the right hon.

Gentleman left to spend more time with his family, not before. Six thousand extra police officers were promised between 1992 and 1997. That promise was comprehensively broken and instead, the number of police officers, far from rising by 6,000, fell by 469. One of the reasons why the Conservatives lost office was because of their broken promises on police numbers.

Abnormal Loads (Police Escorts)

15. **Mr. Andrew Mackinlay** (Thurrock): If he will introduce legislation to enable the police to charge for escorting abnormal loads. [74591]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Kate Hoey): We have no plans to do so.

Mr. Mackinlay: Will my hon. Friend accept my disappointment? The escorting of heavy loads by professional and highly skilled police officers causes a disproportionate cost to the council taxpayer. It is time that that was reviewed. Can my hon. Friend tell us why the Home Office cannot make available a total figure of the cost to local authorities of escorting heavy vehicles? Such a figure might alert her to the need to review the situation with some expedition.

Kate Hoey: As my hon. Friend is aware, we recently completed a public consultation on proposals to introduce private escorts for abnormal loads on motorways. Charging is not the answer. Police time should not be taken up escorting such vehicles on motorways. We are trying to find a solution that will ensure that lorries are properly escorted by qualified escorts. The police should not have to do that, except on minor roads. That is what the consultation document was about and what we have been considering. We shall publish proposals soon.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): Does the Minister accept that the hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay) is uncharacteristically wrong? Charges are not the answer. The answer is precisely as the Minister said—relieving police of the duty of escorting heavy loads. Police are for fighting crime, not for dawdling along motorways behind mobile classrooms and grain silos.

Kate Hoey: I agree entirely with the hon. Gentleman.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): Will my hon. Friend look closely at the matter of traffic policing, particularly in relation to lorries? May we hope that she will introduce a Bill that will deal, for example, with the issue of impounding unsafe lorries? The police may not be required for escorting heavy loads, but they are certainly required to carry out multi-agency checks to ensure that there are no unsafe vehicles contributing to deaths in our communities.

Kate Hoey: I thank my hon. Friend. We would certainly turn to her for her expertise, and to the Select Committee on Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs that she chairs, before we introduced legislation to do what she has asked.

Illegal Drugs (Prisons)

17. **Mr. Graham Stringer** (Manchester, Blackley): What measures he is taking to curb the smuggling of illegal drugs into prisons. [74593]

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Jack Straw): As part of an overall strategy that I announced on 25 January, a package of measures is to be brought into force from 1 April to deal with visitors and prisoners who smuggle drugs into prisons. Under those arrangements, visitors found smuggling drugs will normally be banned from visiting the prison for at least three months, and prisoners found or believed to be engaging in that activity will normally take all their visits in closed conditions for a period equivalent to a three months' entitlement. A number of improvements are also being made to security arrangements for prison visits.

Mr. Stringer: I thank my right hon. Friend for that answer. I welcome the measures that he has taken and the fall in the number of recorded drug-taking incidents in prisons. Does he agree that it should be possible within a closed environment to reduce drug taking to almost zero? That would have a symbolic impact on the fight against drugs in society generally. If we cannot control drugs in a controlled environment, it makes it much more difficult symbolically to control drugs in society at large.

Mr. Straw: I accept entirely that we must aim to achieve a situation in which there is no drug taking in prisons. As long as we allow so-called open visiting in prisons, people are likely—although it is deplorable—to try to smuggle in drugs. That is why I have significantly toughened up the sanctions on prisoners and on visitors, whether they are family or not, who seek to smuggle in drugs.

NHS Modernisation

3.30 pm

The Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Frank Dobson): Much of the national health service that we inherited from the previous Government was run down and shabby. Much of its investment in information technology had been an expensive failure. Much of its equipment was unreliable and let down both patients and staff. Patients waiting on trolleys had become a commonplace feature of the service. That is why one of the top priorities of the new Government is to modernise the national health service, build new hospitals, replace outdated and unreliable equipment and give patients quicker, easier and more modern access to health services.

We are already committed to investing an extra £21 billion in the NHS over the next three years. The biggest hospital building programme in the history of the health service is already under way. This coming year, at least £350 million will be invested in upgrading and replacing outdated equipment.

Today, I can give the House details of an additional £200 million to be invested in the coming year to speed up our programme to modernise the health service. That is made up of £100 million to be invested in modernising accident and emergency departments and, drawing on the example of NHS Direct, in improving rapid access to professional advice and help for patients. The second £100 million will come from the national lottery and will be used to step up the fight against cancer by helping to provide new and replacement equipment, such as linear accelerators, diagnostic machines and scanners, as well as extending the services provided by hospices. What better use could there be for national lottery money?

Earlier this year, I was able to announce that £30 million was to be invested to improve 79 accident and emergency departments around the country. That will be funded from the NHS modernisation fund. Last Tuesday, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor announced in his Budget that £430 million from the Government's capital modernisation fund had been earmarked for investment in the NHS, and that £100 million of that would be made available this coming year to modernise the health service. Between £70 million and £80 million of that money will be invested to modernise all those A and E departments that remain in need of improvement.

Those improvements will include special areas for children and easier access to X-ray, pathology and pharmacy services. The layout and furnishing of A and E departments will be improved to make them more pleasant and more secure. Video surveillance and alarm systems will bring greater efficiency and add to the security of both patients and staff. Some modernised A and E departments may incorporate an NHS Direct telephone point. All A and E departments that need improvement will benefit from some or all of those changes.

A survey by the Royal College of Physicians published early in 1997, before the last election, showed that less than half the hospitals with A and E departments had an admissions ward. Since that survey, the number of such hospitals without either an admissions ward or observation unit has been reduced to 22 out of 202. By the end of this initiative, only five will not have an admissions or observation unit—and all five have good hard reasons for not having one.

Proposals that are likely to be funded under the new accident and emergency initiative include the extension of the children's service at Royal Liverpool hospital and improvements at Sheffield children's hospital and in children's facilities at North Staffordshire hospital. In Ipswich, a major scheme includes improvements to resuscitation facilities and a separate children's area, and in Luton there are to be more resuscitation facilities and closed circuit television.

A total of £250,000 worth of improvements are intended at the Royal London hospital in the east end and a similar sum is to go to the Mayday hospital, Croydon. Large-scale improvements are intended at Southampton general hospital and a new observation unit and better facilities for the general practitioner co-operative are planned for Frenchay hospital, Bristol. Those are just a few examples of what is planned for hospitals in every part of the country.

This is the biggest programme of investment in accident and emergency services in the history of the NHS and it will cover every part of the country. By April 2000, every A and E department will have been modernised, or work will be well under way. It should ensure that patients are treated more quickly, more effectively and with greater privacy than ever before.

I am determined to ensure that both patients and staff get maximum benefit from the accident and emergency modernisation programme, so it is not just a matter of new buildings, new plant and new equipment. We have to ensure that the new and better ways of organising accident and emergency, such as emergency nurse practitioners and greater use of telemedicine, are taken up throughout the country. We need to speed up the spread of best practice, so I am setting up a team of professionals to spearhead that work. I can announce today that the team will be led by Mike Lambert, accident and emergency consultant at Norfolk and Norwich hospital.

The accident and emergency modernisation programme will be good not only for patients and staff, but for jobs—for builders who do the work on site and for firms that supply building materials and specialist fittings. Let me give just one example. The accident and emergency department at Portsmouth has just been refurbished at a cost of just over £1 million. It used materials that were supplied by more than 20 firms from all over the country. Orders, large and small, included locks from Walsall, paint from Darwen, weather-proofing from Slough, carpets from Swindon, wash basins from Rugeley, partition walls from Loughborough, wall units from Broadstairs—and the specialist security reception desk came from Glasgow. The accident and emergency modernisation programme will reflect such orders a hundredfold in the coming year.

The remainder of the £100 million from the Government's capital modernisation fund will be invested in improving direct access to the health service. The popularity of NHS Direct, the nurse-led 24-hour helpline, has demonstrated the public demand for rapid direct access to professional advice and help from the NHS. Following the success of the pilot schemes, NHS Direct has already been extended since Christmas to cover 5 million extra people in the black country, Essex, Nottingham and west London, and will cover 20 million people by Easter. Its success has shown that, given the chance, the talented staff of the NHS can do a brilliant

job, supplying what the public want. We are now considering an NHS on-line service to provide a website with on-line access to a wide range of health information.

Between £20 million and £30 million is being made available in the coming year to finance capital investment in further developments in direct access to the NHS, including pilot schemes for walk-in services. Those could include services that are provided by GPs or practice nurses located in or near A and E departments, out-of-hours services provided by GP co-operatives, and services in main streets or shopping malls.

As with NHS Direct, we want to work with the professionals to try out direct access, walk-in services in places and at times that are particularly convenient to patients. Some schemes may be confined to providing advice or directing patients to existing services for treatment or care. Others, particularly those associated with A and E departments, may provide treatment and care, there and then. That is intended not to replace general practice, but to augment it. All those ideas will go with the grain of both modern living and what the health professionals are already developing. The new Government are determined to give impetus to all that to help to create a new NHS for the new century.

That brings me to the extra £100 million that will begin to be invested in the coming year to augment existing NHS investment in the fight against cancer. In line with our election promise, we have set up the new opportunities fund to ensure that more money from the national lottery is spent on the causes on which people want it to be spent. Every time there is a discussion about what to do with lottery money, thoughtful people ask why some of it is not being used to combat cancer. Well, from now on it will be. Over the next three years, £150 million from the new opportunities fund will be invested in tackling cancer in the United Kingdom as a whole. In England, we want to make a major start this year by investing in new equipment.

The order making that possible was laid last week by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport. The direction that he issued at the same time makes it clear that the focus of the initiative in England will be on augmenting voluntary efforts to raise funds to provide new and better equipment, including breast-screening units, scanners and linear accelerators, and also on helping hospices and those providing palliative care. The aim is to provide additional equipment and to replace unreliable equipment. The money is likely to help to fund, for example, replacement linear accelerators at Christie hospital in Manchester, or new equipment for the diagnosis and treatment of cancer of the colon at Lewisham hospital, which my right hon. Friend and I visited this morning.

All that money comes on top of the extra funds already announced for the NHS, and will help the NHS in every part of the country to catch up with more modern standards of cancer diagnosis and treatment. The initiative has the strong support of Macmillan Cancer Relief, Marie Curie Cancer Care and the National Council for Hospice and Specialist Palliative Care Services. It is in addition to the extra £30 million that we have invested in breast and colorectal cancer services over the past 18 months, the further £40 million that we are making available in the coming year to combat breast, colorectal and lung cancer, and our commitment to speeding up specialist attention for people suspected of suffering from cancer.

The commitments that I have announced today will speed up the renewal and modernisation of the health service. They will make services more readily available and more dependable. At the same time, they will make it easier for the dedicated staff of the health service to provide quicker and better-quality services. That is possible only because we have a Government who invest public money wisely, and who have the right priorities.

Miss Ann Widdecombe (Maidstone and The Weald): I feel that the House would appreciate it if, before I deal with the detail of the statement, the Secretary of State explained how yet another of his Department's statements was leaked to the media before being delivered to the House.

Those of us who were up at the time will know that the 6 am news on Radio 5 Live contained a detailed report on the setting up of admissions wards in hospitals, which could have resulted only from a detailed knowledge of the contents of the statement. It also appeared on BBC teletext. The nurses' pay award statement was leaked to the press two weeks before publication. The Ashworth hospital statement was leaked to *The Daily Telegraph* one day before it was made to the House. The mental health statement was leaked to *The Sunday Telegraph* two days before publication. The social services statement appeared in *The Independent* and *The Guardian* on the morning of publication. The children's safeguards statement appeared in the *Evening Standard* on the morning of publication. The health spending statement, made in March 1998, appeared in *The Times* on the morning of its delivery to the House.

Is it not high time that the Secretary of State lived up to the undertaking that he gave the House in November 1998 to find the person responsible for that brazen contempt of Parliament, and to have that person dismissed? Perhaps he could tell us what progress he has made on that one.

In the course of the right hon. Gentleman's statement, he kept referring to the "new" Government. I should say that, after listening to the statement, the "new" Government are looking pretty old: old money recycled as new announcements, and old announcements reannounced. There was very little that was new in the whole statement. Will the right hon. Gentleman therefore tell us how much money has been taken from the so-called modernisation fund to fund the nurses' pay award? Did not the Government's own statement on the modernisation fund, in July 1998, say that the fund was intended for waiting lists, capital investment, education, staff training, primary care and mental health? Why, therefore, is it being used to fund regular expenditure on pay? If he plans on saying that the fund was always designed to do that, will he give the House a simple guarantee—that no project will be delayed that was to be funded from modernisation money in order to pay the nurses' pay award? Will he give us that simple guarantee?

Does the right hon. Gentleman also remember the Labour party's pledge in 1996 to establish a task force on trolleys and to monitor the number of patients forced to wait for treatment in that manner? Why has he broken that pledge? Is he not now essentially telling doctors how to manage their hospitals by requisitioning wards for use as a temporary stopping place for patients? Is he really satisfied that that is the best use of such space, given the strain that our hospitals are under?

[Miss Ann Widdecombe]

Would not a better solution to the problem of patients waiting on trolleys be to abandon the right hon. Gentleman's damaging waiting lists initiative, which has resulted in hospitals continuing to admit routine waiting list cases even though accident and emergency wards had patients stacked up on trolleys this winter? Does he agree with the view of Dr. Simon Fradd, deputy chairman of the British Medical Association GPs committee? He said:

"These well-intentioned but ill-informed initiatives put huge pressure on hospitals . . . there is a downward spiral of reduced resources and increased waiting times"?

Would the right hon. Gentleman care to calculate how many times now he has re-announced the modernisation fund and NHS Direct? Does he agree that he has been forced to do so again because, despite the huge tax take of the past three years, all he has to announce to the House today is an extra £100 million? Is that why we are not getting a proper Budget debate on health?

How many patients were left lying on trolleys because of this winter's health service crisis? Will the right hon. Gentleman guarantee that the dedicated wards that he has announced today will not reduce capacity elsewhere in hospitals? I should like a very clear answer to that question: in setting up those wards, will he be reducing capacity elsewhere?

On 9 November 1998, after the pre-Budget announcement, the Secretary of State announced £200 million expenditure. The NHS Confederation, however, said:

"This is really only next year's money paid early so that we can implement schemes that will save money".

Was it correct? Is the money that is being announced today really new money?

Has the right hon. Gentleman come to any conclusions on how NHS Direct—he has not told us today—will be organised nationally? National centres are likely to be more efficient and lead to more uniform standards, but may reduce co-ordination with local GPs, whereas local centres based in practices may lead to a lack of uniformity in standards. Will he take this opportunity to reassure GPs that the pilot scheme in Northumberland, which routed all out-of-hours calls to NHS Direct, will not be extended—as has recently been speculated—to cover in-hours calls, too? Given that today is, by my calculation, the third time on which he has made a statement on NHS Direct, surely he has now had the chance to form more detailed opinions on how the scheme will work in practice, rather than merely giving us vague words and principles.

Will the right hon. Gentleman confirm that any measures that he intends to put in place—including those announced today—to prevent a repeat of this winter's chaotic scenes of patients on trolleys will not, this time, be left until the last moment? Has he finally learned this winter's lesson—that money and schemes announced at the last minute, to grab topical headlines, do not produce much for the NHS? The winter, after all, is predictable.

Does the Secretary of State agree that next winter, trusts will be under greater pressure than ever as they struggle to adapt to his upheaval in primary care? What allowances is he making for that? Will he put money in place to ensure that the burden of extra bureaucracy imposed on the health service by his reforms does not reduce levels of patient care, as his waiting lists initiatives have done?

The right hon. Gentleman referred again today to £21 billion of extra money. Will he answer this simple question—so simple that I am sure that he has the answer at his fingertips? What was the total level of spending on the national health service for the financial year 1998–99 and what is the planned level for the financial year 2000-01? What is the difference—I can supply an abacus if he cannot manage the sum—between the two?

The Secretary of State concentrated heavily on the provision of new equipment to combat cancer. Does he agree that one of the main problems is the shortage of radiographers? Why is he concentrating on equipment? What plans does he have to address the shortage of radiographers?

The Secretary of State says that he is drawing his expertise from the Norfolk and Norwich hospital. I seem to recall that that hospital's imaginative solution to the winter crisis was freezer vans in which to stack the dead. He will note that the Portsmouth example that he gave will cost £1 million, yet he claims that the £70 million to £80 million that he has budgeted for will cover all accident and emergency adaptations. Is he saying that there are relatively few such adaptations left to make? If not, how will he afford them from that sum?

Finally, what progress have the Government made towards realising the Secretary of State's target of a maximum two-week wait to see a specialist after an urgent written referral for suspected breast cancer?

Lastly—[HON. MEMBERS: "Oh!"] Well, finally and in conclusion rather than just finally. As the Secretary of State has mentioned the NHS in shopping malls, will he acknowledge his debt to the private sector, which pioneered that practice?

Mr. Dobson: I shall try to answer as many of the right hon. Lady's questions as I can. She was a trifle inconsistent in her opening remarks, claiming that the matters that I was disclosing today had been disclosed earlier on television and radio and then saying that I had not said anything new. All the money is new money for the national health service because the Treasury funds had previously not been earmarked for the health service. They have now been earmarked. The £100 million from the lottery—to which the right hon. Lady made no reference, unless my ears were deceiving me—is certainly new money for the NHS and will be welcomed by all concerned.

The modernisation fund has many aspects. I announced that part of the nurses' pay award would be funded from the modernisation fund. That is not something that some Tory sleuth managed to spot. I drew attention to the issue myself because we had made prudent allowance for the fact that we needed extra money to pay the nurses to catch up with the pay that they lost during all the years that the Tories were in office.

The right hon. Lady talked about problems with radiographers. Radiographers cannot be trained in 10 minutes; they do not grow on trees. If there is a shortage of radiographers now, it is because they were not trained at any time during the 18 years that the Tories were running down the national health service.

The right hon. Lady appears to think that there is something wrong with wanting every accident and emergency hospital to have an admissions ward. If she wants to quarrel with that, she should talk to all the

accident and emergency specialists and to the Royal College of Physicians, whose proposals we are putting into practice. The Tories did not get on with them as quickly as they should have done.

The right hon. Lady referred to the Norfolk and Norwich hospital. It is certainly true that because so many people in the area died, the hospital did not have enough space in its mortuary to keep bodies. It had to do something to cope, and just because some ignorant hysterical newspapers decided that that indicated that something was wrong with the NHS, the right hon. Lady should not go along with it. One of the problems was that private sector undertakers were not burying or cremating people as quickly as they should have been, so the numbers built up.

The right hon. Lady referred to the work carried out in Portsmouth, which cost just over £1 million. Some of the schemes that I have announced today will cost as much, but many will cost much less. We are bringing all the A and E departments up to the necessary standard, in line with what local people want.

The right hon. Lady referred to NHS Direct, which has been a dramatic success story. If the professionals in any locality want the scope of NHS Direct to be extended to involve them more, we are willing to accept that, provided that we are convinced that the local NHS Direct can cope. No Government or Opposition should try to stand in the way of that; nor should any national representative body wish to stand in the way of developments requested by local professionals.

On the point about national or local call centres, my view is that we do not want a national call centre, but a limited number of local, or sub-regional, call centres so that people have a sense of ownership of that part of their local NHS.

I return to the point that the right hon. Lady managed to skirt around—that, as a result of my announcements today, more than £100 million will go into modernising A and E departments, and that £100 million from the national lottery will go into improving the diagnosis and treatment of cancer. I thought that she might have got around to welcoming that.

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): Does my right hon. Friend accept that millions of people prefer to hear good news Frank rather than whingeing Ann? Does he recognise the problems in Lancashire at the central hub unit for kidney treatment at Preston, and the satellites in Lancashire? Could additional resources be used to deal with a problem that we inherited from the previous Government?

Mr. Dobson: I thank my hon. Friend for his welcome. I know that the local health authority and the trusts in the area are looking at how they can better organise kidney services. When I visited Chorley and Preston, I met people from the Lancashire ambulance service, who operate the call side of the NHS Direct pilot. The nurses in Chorley hospital—who provide the advice—are up for what we are proposing, and they are willing to extend their activities to cover other parts of north Lancashire.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): The £100 million more for accident and emergency services, and for accident and emergency admissions wards is welcome. Will all the A and E department wards be extra wards with extra beds, rather than redesignated wards with redesignated beds? Will he undertake to the House that in a year's time, when the programme is complete, there will be enough consultants, doctors and nurses to staff those wards?

We do not give such a welcome to the £100 million for cancer services. Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that it is not reassuring but worrying to hear that, instead of what the Government see as a core part of the NHS programme—the treatment of people with cancer—being funded through the taxpayer by secure NHS funding, for the first time core NHS equipment, such as scanners and linear accelerators, will be funded not by the taxpayer, but by an uncertain revenue from the national lottery? Would not it have been better to secure funding for the health service before taking a penny off income tax and making the NHS dependent on insecure funding from national gambling?

Mr. Dobson: That was a limited welcome, I suppose. One of the advantages of modernising A and E departments and giving them full facilities is that it makes life easier for the staff and allows them to do their jobs properly. If an accident and emergency department does not have its own X-ray, or the pharmacy is miles away, or the trauma unit is somewhere else, it is very difficult for staff. We are trying to make departments more efficient and place fewer, not greater, demands on staff.

Whether the hon. Gentleman likes it or not—and whether I like it or not—huge amounts have come from the voluntary sector, rather than the national health service, for capital cancer equipment, especially with the development of scanners throughout the country. All that we are saying is that when, as in Lewisham, there is a local campaign trying to get together a few thousand quid to improve the service, we will put some lottery money in to match it or more. If he thinks, as the Conservative Government did, that it would be better to subsidise Eton college boating and athletics facilities or to give 24 million quid to the Churchill family, I will back my judgment that the public prefer our spending on cancer treatment.

Fiona Mactaggart (Slough): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the people of Slough, who are about to have a new accident and emergency facility, will be thrilled with his announcement? We do not have people waiting on trolleys, because there is not enough room for them in the present accident and emergency department, so they wait in ambulances on the forecourt, causing delays in the local ambulance service. I hope that the extra money will mean that we can have separate accident and emergency facilities for children.

Tory Members sneered when my right hon. Friend spoke about how the work in the Portsmouth accident and emergency department will bring new jobs. Does he agree that people who are employed have better health records than the unemployed and poorer people and that the Government's economic policy, making people more prosperous in work, will give us a healthier Britain?

Mr. Dobson: Indeed; I thank my hon. Friend for her welcome. I hope that the proposals will be implemented swiftly and effectively. I have heard Tory shadow Ministers and Back Benchers ranting on about the loss of

[Mr. Dobson]

jobs in manufacturing industry, but immediately I draw attention to how manufacturing jobs are being created by the investment in the national health service, they are reduced to mockery. Thousands of people throughout the country will get jobs as a result of the modernisation schemes. I am sure that they will welcome them and that, as my hon. Friend says, they will be healthier as a result of having a job and some decent wages in their pocket or handbag.

Mr. Michael Jack (Fylde): May I endorse what the hon. Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike) said? The time for talking is at an end, and kidney patients in Preston need action.

Will there be a review of the staffing requirements of those accident and emergency departments that will not benefit physically from today's announcement? Pressure on consultants and nursing staff often causes as many problems as inadequate physical capacity.

Mr. Dobson: I repeat what I said to my hon. Friend the Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike): the provision of kidney treatment in Burnley, including that in the right hon. Gentleman's constituency, is being carefully considered. He mentioned Preston hospital, and the nurse-manager of that hospital was made a dame in the New Year's honours list and is going to the palace today or tomorrow.

Mr. Jack: Answer the question.

Mr. Dobson: I am answering the question. The management of Preston hospital have managed it so well that here has never been a significant shortage of nurses. They have also provided the back up for NHS Direct. They run their hospital rather better than the managements of some of the hospitals nearby. Although there are some problems, it is clear—as even the odd Conservative might recognise—that the quality of management, and whether they involve and encourage their staff, can help to reduce staff shortages. That is what has been done successfully at Preston hospital.

Mr. Eddie O'Hara (Knowsley, South): Will my right hon. Friend join me in appreciating the excellent work of accident and emergency staff at the St. Helens and Knowsley hospitals, especially Whiston hospital in my constituency? Its new A and E department opened five years ago and, in the recent troubles elsewhere in the region, stood out as a beacon of excellence in coping with the winter problems. However, because of various problems—including closure of nearby facilities and the new accessibility of the hospital as a result of the new Knowsley expressway—extra pressure is already being put on that department. Will my right hon. Friend make funds available, from this tranche of money or the next, to extend the admissions observation ward facilities at Whiston hospital and to provide a care facility for self-referrals, which are adding to the more than 100,000 patients who pass through the A and E department every year?

Mr. Dobson: I thank my hon. Friend for thanking the staff at his local hospital for the excellent job that they do. We must ensure that, as circumstances—the layout of motorways, the erection of new houses, or people doing dangerous jobs that cause more accidents—change, we have an accident and emergency system that responds adequately. I will look into the points that he raised about his local hospital.

Mr. Eric Pickles (Brentwood and Ongar): The right hon. Gentleman mentioned several projects that would benefit from the reallocation. He did not mention Oldchurch. Was that an oversight? Surely, nothing is more deserving than the replacement of Oldchurch hospital, which the Secretary of State himself described as "sub-standard". When will work start on the new hospital for Oldchurch and when is it likely to be completed? We have been waiting six months from the date that we expected to receive an announcement.

Mr. Dobson: Oldchurch hospital did not become sub-standard through the wave of a magic wand on 1 May 1997, nor has it been run down especially since then. It has been run down over a long time, and we will replace it. If the hon. Gentleman possesses his soul in patience a little longer, he will get an announcement.

Mrs. Sylvia Heal (Halesowen and Rowley Regis): I welcome, on behalf of the health authorities of Dudley and Sandwell, my right hon. Friend's statement. The staff who work in the A and E departments in the local hospitals will greatly appreciate the fact that he has acknowledged their work and the need for extra funding. Will he join me in congratulating the staff of NHS Direct in the black country? I visited the service on Friday—it is part of the West Midlands ambulance service—and discovered that it had taken 3,600 calls in February alone. The commitment and enthusiasm of the nurses who staff the line are greatly to be admired. Will my right hon. Friend assure me that he will ignore the Conservatives' comments and continue to provide innovative ways of delivering a national health service to the people of this country?

Mr. Dobson: I thank my hon. Friend for her comments. The Conservative party seems unable to make up its mind whether it likes NHS Direct or not. I like it, and the public like it. It works, and it works better than anything that the Tories introduced.

Mr. Andrew Lansley (South Cambridgeshire): Will the Secretary of State confirm that he referred in his statement to two sums of money? On the first—the £100 million from the capital modernisation fund—will he confirm that page 67 of the "Financial Statement and Budget Report" makes it perfectly clear that that is not new money? Will he tell us how much of that £100 million was intended to be spent in 2000–01, and is, therefore, simply re-phased expenditure rather than new money?

Secondly, on the money from the national lottery, does the Secretary of State agree that everyone will be pleased to see money going into cancer treatment, but that there is a problem over the method of allocation of that money? There is great concern that, because the money is being directed through the NHS, it will not be additional money, while the national lottery should provide extra expenditure. Would it not be better if cancer care charities such as Marie Curie Cancer Care or the Macmillan nurses

could provide the means by which to direct that money? If provided in that way, the money would be additional and would provide the multiplier effect on the effort to raise money to which the Secretary of State referred.

Mr. Dobson: The very organisations to which the hon. Gentleman referred have welcomed what we are doing. They will be heavily involved in the allocation of funds, and we want to involve all voluntary organisations that raise money locally. It is not a bad idea to have money going into the health service in line with NHS priorities, and we believe that the method chosen is the soundest way in which to provide it. The money is additional.

The hon. Gentleman's other point was whether the extra £100 million for accident and emergency or direct access services was new money. Simply, it is. That money was not included in the comprehensive spending review for the health service.

Mr. Lansley: It was in the comprehensive spending review.

Mr. Dobson: No, it was not. Some £430 million has been earmarked from the generalised Treasury modernisation fund for use by the health service over the next three years. Of that £430 million, £100 million is being made available this year. That money is additional to the funds that had been announced previously for the health service.

Mr. Syd Rapson (Portsmouth, North): I thank my right hon. Friend for visiting Queen Alexandra hospital in Portsmouth recently. Everyone there praised him for providing money for a refurbished accident and emergency unit. Staff there will take the money, wherever it comes from. It is small minded and churlish not to grab the money with both hands and to welcome it.

My right hon. Friend's visit was hijacked to some extent, however, by the issue of Haslar hospital, Gosport. The hon. Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Hancock) is not here, but I am sure that he would say that that hospital's A and E unit also needs extra money following a period of having been run down. I hope that my right hon. Friend can say something in support of that hospital, but we welcome his statement today.

Mr. Dobson: The first hospital that I visited after I became Secretary of State for Health was the Boothroyd centre in Dewsbury, which goes to show, Madam Speaker, what a total creep I can be. The second was Queen Alexandra hospital in Portsmouth, which had a run-down accident and emergency department. It was a disgrace that the staff were expected to perform their valiant service in such conditions. It was there, too, that I met a nurse whose face had been slashed open by a yobbo who attacked her while she was trying to help. That is one reason why I have been so committed to trying to make life more safe and secure for those who work in accident and emergency departments.

Mr. Alan Duncan (Rutland and Melton): So are we.

Mr. Dobson: The hon. Gentleman may say that, but representatives of the British Medical Association tell me that they stopped talking to the previous Government about doing anything to improve security because Ministers used to tell them, "That's the sort of society we live in these days." *[Interruption.]* But it is truthful.

My hon. Friend the member for Portsmouth, North (Mr. Rapson) referred to the closure of Haslar hospital, which has been decided by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence. As I made clear on the day of my right hon. Friend's announcement, we owe it to the people of Gosport to ensure that top-quality services are available for them there. They should not be expected to rely for the bulk of their services on going to Portsmouth, which is a fair stride away if one needs urgent treatment.

Mr. James Paice (South–East Cambridgeshire): How many extra beds will be created in our acute hospitals as a result of the right hon. Gentleman's announcement about the creation of admissions wards? Or is it simply a redefinition of beds that are already there, under another guise?

Mr. Dobson: I cannot tell the hon. Gentleman the figures because all the details have yet to be worked out. In due course, that information will become available. As the hon. Gentleman ought to know, accident and emergency professionals and the Royal College of Physicians think that, even if some beds that were used for something else are used in an admissions ward, they will be being better used and the total benefit to patients will be greater than if they were not so used—[HON. MEMBERS: "Ah!"] Some will be entirely new, some will be new and additional and others will not. I am not pretending that everything is additional—I am not as silly as Conservative Members apparently are.

Ms Helen Southworth (Warrington, South): In view of the additional resources that my right hon. Friend has announced, may I offer him best wishes not merely for a happy birthday but for many happy returns to this House with more announcements of that type? Is he aware that, in the last few months of the Tory maladministration, ambulances were queuing up outside Warrington hospital with patients inside them waiting for admission to the accident and emergency unit? Will he assure me that Warrington hospital, which provides an accident and emergency service for the entire north Cheshire region and which has no adequate medical assessment unit, will receive some of the resources that he has announced? That would make the people there, who work extremely hard, very happy.

Mr. Dobson: I can say that the proposals for improvements to accident and emergency services at Warrington hospital are among the biggest of the projects that will be covered by my announcement.

Mr. Desmond Swayne (New Forest, West): Given the importance that the Secretary of State has rightly attached to expenditure on cancer care, will he confirm that the Government have abandoned the principle of additionality for lottery money?

Mr. Dobson: No. I should explain that this money is additional to the money that the taxpayer is finding for cancer treatment and also additional to the charitable funds collected by all sorts of civic-minded people

[Mr. Dobson]

throughout the country, who want their local services improved. Therefore, it is additional in two respects—additional to taxpayer's money and to voluntary money. Combined with the other two, the additional money will lead to substantial improvements in the diagnosis and treatment of cancer. Most people will agree that that is additionality, and they will welcome it.

Mr. Bill O'Brien (Normanton): I express my appreciation to my right hon. Friend for his statement and I appeal to him to extend NHS Direct throughout the region so that we can have the benefit of that service. May I also express appreciation on behalf of the people who work at Pinderfields general hospital in my constituency and at the Pontefract general infirmary, which serves my constituency, for the introduction of a scheme that will improve the accident and emergency units in those hospitals? The two units are very good, but I am sure that there is room to extend the facilities to help the patients who use them. Will my right hon. Friend undertake that the admission wards will be single sex? Unisex wards could cause difficulties because people are demanding privacy. Will he take that into consideration?

Mr. Dobson: We are committed to getting rid of, rather than introducing, mixed-sex wards. I hope therefore that all the additional facilities will be single sex. West Yorkshire will go on-line with NHS Direct early in April, and I will be there to do the opening ceremony.

Dr. Peter Brand (Isle of Wight): There appears to be a further extension of the scope of NHS Direct. Do NHS Direct services have to fit in with the health improvement programme determined by local authorities, to be delivered by primary care groups, or is a parallel primary care system being established? Is NHS Direct so named because it gives patients direct access to the NHS or because it allows the Secretary of State to have direct control over medical services?

Mr. Dobson: The hon. Gentleman—as he is a doctor I shall call him hon. and learned—is usually a bit better than that.

Mr. Duncan: It was a good question.

Mr. Dobson: The hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Dr. Brand) will be mortified to know that the Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan) thinks that he asked a good question; he may want to withdraw it. The fact is that NHS Direct gives people direct access at any time of day or night to a professionally qualified nurse skilled in the computer protocols and giving help, advice, reassurance and, in some cases, immediately summoning an ambulance. I am not directing it. I am pleased as Punch that I played a part in introducing it. It is direct access. That is what we believe in. All the other schemes that we are talking about are intended to augment the existing system and are carried out only if local people want them. We want to encourage local initiatives.

For further confirmation, I will say again, as I always do, that the general practitioner system is one of the glories of the NHS and of our approach to health care. We want to maintain and sustain it. All that we are doing is additional. We do not want to get in the way or undermine it. Many of the people who are bringing about those developments are GPs who see them as a way of extending the impact of general practice.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): I congratulate the Secretary of State on doing well in dragging money out of the Treasury to improve accident and emergency departments all over the country. He will also be aware of a problem that exists in the area that he and I have the honour to represent: inappropriate use of accident and emergency services by people who have difficulty in getting on to GPs' lists. They are often homeless or live in hostels or are in housing difficulty of some sort. What is he doing to improve inner-city GP services to ensure that GPs, rather than accident and emergency centres, are the first port of call for people with minor ailments and injuries?

Mr. Dobson: I would make two points. On improving GP services, when Sir Leslie Turnberg, a past president of the Royal College of Physicians, did his report on health care in London, 50 per cent. of inner London GP premises were substandard. The figure is now down to 33 per cent., and we are determined to keep up that progress.

Secondly, I differ with my hon. Friend about his reference to inappropriate use of accident and emergency departments. Feeling off colour may not be an accident or emergency but, as he knows, in many inner-city areas, people in such circumstances have traditionally gone to the local hospital for treatment. We want to ensure that the NHS responds appropriately to their needs by providing GP services, or on-call services at the A and E department, so that it does what local people want and meets local demand without an adverse impact on the provision of accident and emergency services. The health service must meet the needs of people and mould itself to local needs, not insist that local people mould themselves to the NHS.

Points of Order

4.24 pm

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I seek your guidance. Given the importance of maintaining the highest possible standards in public life, have you received any indication from the Prime Minister that he would like to make a statement in the House as soon as possible to correct the factually mistaken comment that he made in the House on Wednesday last week, when he suggested that there was a net £4.5 billion tax cut in the Budget—a claim that has since been comprehensively rebutted?

Madam Speaker: I fear that the hon. Gentleman is attempting to prolong Question Time by referring to last Wednesday's Question Time. The Prime Minister will be here on Wednesday for half an hour, when many Opposition Members will have an opportunity to question him on whether he wishes to correct that statement.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. From your knowledge of the Book of Genesis, the Book of Isaiah and the Gospel According to St. Matthew, you will know that the city of Nineveh is a biblical city that goes back some 6,000 years. The journalist Felicity Arbuthnot, who returned from Baghdad some hours ago, the *Jordan Times*, which is a reputable newspaper, and others have recounted that Nineveh—the old city—was struck by weapons. May we have a statement on the bombing of the cities of the ancient world in areas where there are said to be no defences; and on the whole human tragedy whereby the Tigris river has half the normal volume of water because of the unprecedented winter droughts that have affected Jordan and Iraq? My point is this: should the House of Commons avert its eyes from a human tragedy?

Madam Speaker: I have had no request from any Minister seeking to make a statement today.

Mr. Andrew Lansley (South Cambridgeshire): Further to the point of order raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow), Madam Speaker. Have you had any request from the Prime Minister or from the Leader of the House to come to the House to make a statement that, henceforth, the enforcement of the ministerial code of conduct should be the responsibility of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards? It is clear from the ministerial code of conduct that a Minister who offers misleading information to the House should come to the House as soon as possible to correct such misleading information, but that has transparently not happened in respect of information and answers to questions relating to the Budget and taxes.

Madam Speaker: I have not had any request to make a statement on that issue, but I see that the most distinguished Chairman of the Select Committee on Standards and Privileges is in his place in the Chamber as usual. No doubt, he will have noted that point of order.

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge): Further to the point of order raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow), Madam Speaker. You will be aware that the 22nd edition of "Erskine May", page 221, states:

"it has been the practice for many years to publish material in amplification of an answer to a parliamentary question or of a ministerial statement".

We all make slips of the tongue from time to time, so I seek your guidance as to whether, if I were inadvertently to describe a tax increase of £7.1 billion as a tax decrease of £4.5 billion, you would be in a position to direct me to ask that *Hansard* be altered at once, so as to ensure that the correct information was given?

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Aldershot): On a point of order, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: I realise that many of the points of order are related today, so may I ask whether the hon. Gentleman's point of order relates to that raised by the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow)?

Mr. Howarth: It does indeed, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: I might as well hear them all before making a ruling.

Mr. Howarth: It is a pleasure to find you in such a good mood today, Madam Speaker.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): She is always in a good mood.

Mr. Howarth: She is in an especially good mood today.

Further to the important point of order raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls), Madam Speaker. During the Budget debate on Thursday, I drew attention to the discrepancy between the Prime Minister's remarks and the words that appear in the Red Book. I suggested that the Prime Minister had misled the House, but withdrew that remark, saying that the right hon. Gentleman might want to make a correction in the House in due course, once he had had an opportunity to study the figures in the Red Book. Is it not a matter of concern to people outside that statements made from the Dispatch Box should be truthful and reliable? If a Minister, in the heat of the moment, makes a mistake, there should be provision to enable that Minister to make an apology, and the House ought to be great enough to accept such an apology.

Mr. Quentin Davies (Grantham and Stamford): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Quite frankly, I do not see how the matter can be taken any further. However, we might as well hear all points of order on this subject.

Mr. Davies: Is this not a thoroughly unsatisfactory state of affairs? The House has clearly been seriously misled—even if inadvertently—by the Prime Minister on the question of whether taxes are rising or falling. If the House, and therefore the public, have been seriously misled about such an important matter, it is not satisfactory to expect us to wait for a subsequent

[Mr. Davies]

Prime Minister's Question Time in the hope that someone might ask a question that will give the Prime Minister an opportunity to set the record straight.

Madam Speaker: I began in a good humour and I intend to finish that way. However, I remind the House that we have before us several hours' debate on the Budget. A Secretary of State is at the Dispatch Box and the Prime Minister will come to this place on Wednesday. I have no authority to require the Prime Minister to come to the House today, but he will definitely hear—certainly by the end of the day—about what has been said. A Secretary of State will open the Budget debate and I ask hon. Members to allow us to make sufficient progress so that I may call that debate.

Mr. Michael Jack (Fylde): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I raise a different subject entirely. At the beginning of her contribution, my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe) drew the attention of the House to the number of occasions when the Secretary of State for Health, in particular, and other Ministers have openly leaked the contents of statements that were to be delivered in the House of Commons. Matters must be important to justify a parliamentary statement. Before delivering statements, Ministers utter the words "With permission, Madam Speaker." under what circumstances might you deny Secretaries of State that permission? Perhaps it might be denied when they have broken the conventions of the House and leaked information publicly?

Madam Speaker: I would never seek to deny a Secretary of State permission to make a statement in this place. I agree with the right hon. Gentleman: when a Minister rises to make a statement, he always says "With permission, Madam Speaker"; that is now part of our vocabulary. However, no Minister or Secretary of State requires my permission to make a statement.

As to the right hon. Gentleman's substantive point, I repeat how much I deprecate leaks of any kind. I listen avidly to the morning news, including the 6 o'clock news to which the right hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe) referred, and every news from then on. I use my Walkman to listen to the news when I take a walk and I hear far too much information that is made public often days before it is revealed at the Dispatch Box. I shall continue to deprecate that practice for as long as it continues.

European Common Fisheries Policy (Referendum)

4.33 pm

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to make provision for the holding of a referendum on the United Kingdom's participation in the European common fisheries policy; and for connected purposes.

The objective of this Bill is twofold: first, to allow the British people the opportunity to state democratically how they wish Britain's fishing policy to evolve before any new European fisheries regime is established from 1 January 2003; and secondly, to support the statement of fisheries policy by the Marine Conservation Society, which refers to

"the concept of sustainable management of fish stocks whilst recognising the impacts of fishing on the marine ecosystem, in particular the environmental consequences of stock collapse, habitat destruction and the modification of predator-prey relationships".

It must be understood that the European common fisheries policy was never necessary according to the relevant criteria of all-stock conservation or fisheries management. It was introduced in 1970 to allow the vessels of existing common market countries whose own fishing grounds were depleted of stocks to exploit the well conserved waters of the then applicant countries for entry to the European Economic Community: Denmark, Ireland, Norway and the United Kingdom.

Shortly before the conclusion of the accession agreements, the six original European Economic Community members adopted regulation No. 2141/70, which laid down a common structural policy for the fishing industry, and regulation No. 2142/70, on the common organisation of the market in fisheries products. Those became part of the acquis communautaire, to which the United Kingdom had to agree as a condition of admission to the common market.

EEC regulation 2141/70, later replaced by regulation 101/76, required

"equal access to and use of the fishing grounds . . . for all fishing vessels flying a flag of a Member state and registered in community territory."

Thus was the principle of equal EEC access to a common resource established, the birthright of countless generations of British fishermen given away, and 73 per cent. of the common resource constituted by British territorial waters opened up to the depredations of continental fishermen.

The passage by the then Labour Government of the Fishery Limits Act 1976, which established the United Kingdom's 200-mile or median line exclusive fishing zone, had no effect, as competence for living marine resources had already been handed over to the EEC. That contrasts with the cases of Iceland and Norway, where establishment of 200-nautical-mile exclusive fishing zones had been the key to their sustainable, responsible husbandry for their own stocks, the preservation of employment in their fishing industries and the enhanced prosperity of their peoples.

The Fishermen's Association of Aberdeen, in a memorandum submitted to the EU Council of Fisheries Ministers in November 1998, stated that

"the quota system is responsible for the dumping dead of countless thousands of tons by weight and billions of individual fish"—

which is a

"principal cause of the overall reduction of fish stocks and makes a major contribution to pollution".

It goes on to state that the system results in

"highly inaccurate data in official fisheries statistics, thus rendering accurate scientific assessment impossible . . . It criminalises honest fishermen who are obliged to dump massive quantities"—

or

"to land quota fish illegally . . . It destroys direct and indirect employment through fleet restructuring and quota restrictions . . . it is having a devastating effect on the most vulnerable coastal communities . . . It has resulted in the growth of the trade in quotas, which ensures that ownership of the fleet is concentrated in fewer and fewer hands."

The memorandum also states that

"in the UK at least there is little or no financial aid to upgrade or modernise the fleet".

The Fishermen's Association's subsequent memorandum to the EU Council of Fisheries Ministers of February 1999 stated:

"The conclusion is that the present community policy on fishing does not exhibit a single positive feature. It is destroying the fishing industry, it is creating economic, social, environmental and ecological havoc, and it violates some of the fundamental principles of the European Union. There is no way that it can be reformed. There is therefore no justification for extending the present system, which should be wound up at the earliest possible moment as a matter of urgency, without waiting for the conclusions of Agenda 2000".

There now approaches a compelling conjuncture, with the imminent enlargement of the European Union and the end of the derogation by 2003 which has permitted sole British jurisdiction over fishing in United Kingdom coastal waters.

Furthermore, since the treaty of European Union, signed at Maastricht and later embellished at Amsterdam, gave the EU sovereignty over fisheries, as against the EEC competence over fisheries products under the treaty of Rome, it will be difficult for the United Kingdom, by ministerial negotiation alone, to secure EU unanimity in support of the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the common fisheries policy, which we require to safeguard fish stocks in the British exclusive fishing zones and to preserve the British fishing industry—let alone to safeguard sufficient resources of fish in our waters to allow traditional access by bilateral agreement to boats of other nations.

Her Majesty's Government, by their commitment to a referendum on possible participation in the euro, have officially endorsed the referendum as the approved democratic determinant of key British policy towards the EU, and rightly so. My Bill proposes the extension of that principle to a referendum to legitimise, by national majority ballot box endorsement, the treaty change necessary to secure the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the European common fisheries policy. Our people will thereby demonstrate their commitment to the ultimate supremacy of the British Parliament and the preservation of the jobs of brave British fishermen who deserve to continue to derive a livelihood from the well managed and well policed territorial seas of the United Kingdom.

4.40 pm

Mr. Ian Cawsey (Brigg and Goole): I oppose the Bill, but in doing so I seek not to divide the House but merely to place the counter-argument on the record so that people may take it into account should the Bill proceed any further.

I am not opposed to improving the lot of the fishing industry—I was, after all, born and bred in Grimsby, and have seen at first hand the devastation of the industry. However, the action of a Conservative Government back in the early 1970s cannot now be rectified by our withdrawal from the common fisheries policy. It is therefore wrong to pass a Bill offering false hope through a referendum.

I must make it clear that I am not against the use of referendums. The Government have used them several times since the elections, and they have been widely supported by the electorate. However, all those referendums were based on asking the public whether they wanted to change to a new and specified system. In this case, the reverse is true. The hon. Member for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson) seems to want a referendum on whether we should leave the common fisheries policy, but does not say what would take its place. In other words, he seems to want to ask people what they do not want rather than what they do want. That is not in the interests of the fishing industry.

The vagueness of that approach is not surprising or, indeed, inconsistent with the current approach to fishing adopted by the Conservative party. Whatever views hon. Members have on the common fisheries policy, it is worth bearing it in mind that it is a treaty obligation. Indeed, at Agriculture questions only last week, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, who is in his seat, was asked:

"What assessment he has made of the prospects of any EU nation unilaterally withdrawing from the common fisheries policy".

He replied:

"Such action would breach European Community treaty commitments and be incompatible with membership of the EC."—[*Official Report*, 11 March 1999; Vol. 327, c. 492.]

I think that the hon. Member for Ruislip–Northwood knows that very well. The reason he has introduced the Bill is not primarily to do with fishing, but has everything to do with his well known views on Europe. Indeed, if the European Union could collapse on the back of the CFP, he would be a happy man, but it would not be good news for our fishermen; nor would it be in Britain's national interest.

Even if people voted against the CFP in a referendum, how would the Government implement the result? We could do that only with the unanimous agreement of all the other European Union member states, which seems most unlikely. Would it help our fishermen? We would still need to protect fish stocks, and the issue of quotas and the returning of dead fish to the water would remain.

In previous speeches on this subject, the hon. Member for Ruislip–Northwood has cited Norway as a country that successfully goes its own way, but Norway has only a small fishing industry which has had problems with the management of its stocks and now has a ferocious enforcement regime. I am not sure that our industry would want to follow that course.

The Bill is wholly in line with the stance of Conservative Front-Bench spokesmen as they try to find an Opposition fisheries policy. The Tories, who signed up to the CFP back in 1971 and then reconfirmed it when they signed the Maastricht treaty under the previous Government, now seem, after 28 years of supporting the policy, to want this Bill in order to get out of it—or do they?

[Mr. Ian Cawsey]

In a fisheries debate on 15 December last year, the right hon. Member for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls), who speaks for the Conservatives on fisheries matters and who is in his place now, made it clear—*[Interruption.]* Oh, he is not right hon. I am sorry; I did my best. He made it clear that the Conservative party supported withdrawal. He reiterated that fact on 22 February this year, apparently with the support of the Leader of the Opposition. He was even given a supportive editorial in *The Daily Telegraph* the next day.

Since then, I fear that not all has been well around the kitchen table. The shadow Chancellor, the shadow education spokesman and the shadow agriculture spokesman have all pointed out the folly of this policy. The Leader of the Opposition, who is probably sympathetic to the Bill, nevertheless wrote an article in *Fishing News*, claiming that the Tories would regain control of our fishing grounds, but dropped any reference to withdrawal from the CFP. Indeed, after 28 years of adhering to the policy, he claims to have

"a completely new approach to fisheries".

If only we had known before what we had to do.

The editorial in *Fishing News* was withering—certainly not as complimentary as *The Daily Telegraph*—stating that the Conservatives were up in the air and had no realistic explanation of how they would fulfil their promise. The Scottish White Fish Producers Association said that the response of the Leader of the Opposition was

"a load of waffle which underpins why the Conservatives are in opposition";

and that the true Conservative policy on fishing was "Be vague with Hague." One can imagine the shadow Cabinet sitting round the kitchen table singing, "Fins can only get better".

The hon. Member for Teignbridge clarified the position at MAFF questions only last week. After speaking so passionately for withdrawal from the CFP, he said that the Tories' fisheries policy was that

"we rule nothing in and nothing out."—[*Official Report*, 11 March 1999; Vol. 327, c. 492.]

No wonder the hon. Member for Ruislip-Northwood has introduced his Bill. He must be exasperated by the antics of those on his Front Bench. Perhaps *The Daily Telegraph* could run a new readers' game—fantasy fishing league. Everyone could have a guess at what will come next from the Tory shadow Cabinet on fishing.

Last week my hon. Friend the Paymaster General accused the Opposition of having a "pick and mix" approach to the Budget. I suppose that we are witnessing the Conservatives' "all you can eat" policy on fisheries.

The Bill is a final attempt to say something—anything—on fishing. It is not realistic, for the reasons that I have outlined. Those of us who served in the Labour party in the late 1970s and early 1980s know what it must be like to be in the modern-day Tory party. We know that the further one gets from power, the more bizarre and unworkable one's policies become. To judge from the opinion polls and the Bill, that rule of thumb still applies.

When considering the Bill, Conservative Members should take heed of this advice:

"Withdrawal from the CFP would require unanimous agreement by EU member states. They would not agree to a 200 mile fishing limit. Even before we joined the Community, we only excluded all foreign fishing vessels from a 6 mile limit. We would pay a heavy price in other areas of EU policy which could damage vital national interests."

Wise words, taken from the Conservative party's policy guide for candidates at the last election, and the policy on which Conservative Members were elected. We could be witnessing a first—an Opposition who break their promises. Old Tory habits die hard.

I hope that hon. Members will reflect on all that has been said today and that the Bill, with all its shortcomings, will fail to make the statute book.

Question put, pursuant to Standing Order No. 23 (Motions for leave to bring in Bills and nomination of Select Committees at commencement of public business), and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. John Wilkinson, Sir Richard Body, Mr. Christopher Gill, Mrs. Angela Browning, Mr. John Townend, Sir Teddy Taylor, Mr. Richard Shepherd, Mrs. Teresa Gorman, Mr. Michael Fabricant, Mr. Gerald Howarth, Mr. Owen Paterson and Mr. Graham Brady.

European Common Fisheries Policy (Referendum)

Mr. John Wilkinson accordingly presented a Bill to make provision for the holding of a referendum on the United Kingdom's participation in the European Common Fisheries Policy; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 23 April, and to be printed [Bill 63].

Mr. Wilkinson: As the House knows, 23 April is St. George's day.

Orders of the Day

WAYS AND MEANS

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Question [9 March].

AMENDMENT OF THE LAW

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That it is expedient to amend the law with respect to the National Debt and the public revenue and to make further provision in connection with finance; but this Resolution does not extend to the making of any amendment with respect to value added tax so as to provide—

(a) for zero-rating or exempting a supply, acquisition or importation;

(b) for refunding an amount of tax;

(c) for varying any rate at which that tax is at any time chargeable; or

(d) for any relief, other than a relief which—

(i) so far as it is applicable to goods, applies to goods of every description, and

(ii) so far as it is applicable to services, applies to services of every description.—*[Mr. Gordon Brown.]*

Question again proposed.

Budget Resolutions and Economic Situation

[Relevant documents: The Second Report from the Treasury Committee, Session 1998–99, on the World Economy and the Pre-Budget Report (HC 91-I), and the Fourth Report from the Environmental Audit Committee, Session 1998–99, on the Pre-Budget Report (HC 93).]

4.49 pm

The Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Alistair Darling): Last week, the Chancellor delivered a better deal for Britain with a Budget for a fairer society, built on a strong and stable economy, which will ensure that everyone has the chance to share in rising prosperity by tackling child poverty, promoting work and opportunity and delivering a new £1 billion-package of support for pensioners.

All that is possible because we are beginning to see the benefits of sound economic management. We are leaving behind the instability—the boom and bust—that plagued businesses, individuals, and families in the past. We took the tough decision to make the Bank of England independent: a decision opposed by the Conservative party. The result is that inflation is low, long-term interest rates are at their lowest for more than 40 years, and mortgage rates are at their lowest level for 30 years. We have kept a tight control of spending, cutting the debts left behind by the Conservative Government. At the same time, we are investing £40 billion more in schools and hospitals.

The Budget continues to lock in economic stability by keeping public finances under control and delivering targeted tax cuts for enterprise, work and families. The Budget shows how economic efficiency and fairness go hand in hand. We are helping working people who are not wealthy by cutting taxes to reward work, and to make work pay. We are providing better help for parents and their children by cutting taxes, and helping parents when they need it most. We are doing more for pensioners, delivering on our promise to ensure that they share in the rising national prosperity being provided by our economic policies.

The Budget is helping the many, not just the few whom the Conservatives used to help. More than 20 million of the nation's households will gain from this Budget and from the previous one. We are doing all that within tight and prudent spending limits. As a result of our sound economic management and low interest rates, debt interest payments next year have been cut by £2.5 billion from their previous forecast—that is a total of £4 billion over the next three years.

We said that we would cut the bills of economic failure and re-focus spending on our priorities—schools, hospitals, families and pensioners. We have done that, and we shall continue to do so.

We are getting social security spending under control. In this Parliament it is growing at half the annual rate compared with that recorded in the previous Parliament under the Conservatives, when social security spending grew at 4 per cent.—in one year alone the increase in spending almost hit 10 per cent. The lower figure for this Parliament includes the working families tax credit.

Our sound economic policies, and our radical welfare-to-work initiatives, have helped bring unemployment down. Since the election, there are 400,000 more people in work. Long-term unemployment is down by half, as is youth unemployment.

We are getting spending under control not just by cutting unemployment, but by bearing down on fraud and error. We are confronting the Tory economic and administrative incompetence that we inherited. We are tackling housing benefit fraud and tightening the gateways to the benefits system. We are ensuring that we pay the right amount of benefit, but only to those people who are entitled to it.

When we came into office, two out of five income support claims were paid without enough evidence. We have changed that. This year alone we have saved £200 million in income support by getting those payments right. During this Parliament, we will save £1 billion by taking the trouble to ensure that we get those payments right first time. That £1 billion will be available to meet the Government's priorities elsewhere. We shall do more to control our spending, and will switch money to meet our priorities.

In our first two Budgets, and in the comprehensive spending review, we are committed to spending £4 billion a year to help pensioners and families. By controlling our spending we can afford to do more to help those who need it most.

We are also planning for the future, to ensure that social security spending remains affordable, manageable and effective. We are controlling spending in the long term so that, year after year, Budget after Budget, we can afford to do more for those who need it most—just as we have done in this Budget and the previous one. Our Welfare Reform and Pensions Bill now going through the House offers plans for the long term. Its radical structural reforms will help us to meet the needs that we know we shall face in the future.

The best way to help people to tackle the causes of poverty and to prevent future poverty is to help people into work. Benefits can treat the symptoms of poverty,

[Mr. Alistair Darling]

but they cannot tackle its causes. It is easy to send out a giro, but a giro cannot get people a job, or improve their skills or education. We are tackling the causes of poverty by building a strong, stable and enterprising economy with employment opportunities. We are tackling poverty through our radical welfare reform programme, which is driven by our principle of work for those who can and security for those who cannot.

That is why we introduced the new deal, which helps to get people back to work, including the young and now the over-50s too. We have introduced a new £750 grant for in-work training, and a new employment credit that is worth £60 a week when people move into full-time work after six months or more on benefit. It guarantees people aged over 50 a minimum income of £175 a week in their first year back at work.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): In his speech, the Chancellor made great play of the fact that people on the minimum wage would pay taxes and still qualify for benefit. Under the Government's proposals, how many years will it take for people to be able to earn the minimum wage and not pay tax on it?

Mr. Darling: The minimum wage will be introduced this April, so everyone will qualify for it from then. The Chancellor made it clear that all our reforms were geared to ensure that people got the best possible return that they could by going into work. That is all part of our strategy to get people back into work, as is the change of culture introduced by the new single gateway, which offers a new contract for people, balancing their rights and responsibilities. The minimum wage will benefit nearly 2 million low-paid workers, two thirds of them women.

We have launched the first ever national child care strategy to help to overcome barriers to work, and to ensure that parents have access to quality, affordable and reliable child care. Our policies are already making a difference. We are already seeing the benefits of our prudent and sound management of the economy, and of our tax and benefit reforms. The new deals for the young and long-term unemployed have already helped nearly 120,000 people into jobs or training.

The Budget builds on all that with further tax and benefit reforms that deliver our commitment to make work pay and to help those who need it most. The Government are determined to deliver. This is a Government who have kept their promises on tax which we made at the election.

We kept our promise to cut VAT on fuel, but we did not do just that. We also introduced extra help with fuel bills for pensioners. We have also helped pensioners with the new minimum income guarantee, the reintroduction of free eye tests and by offering concessions on their bus fares. Of course, we are doing more for pensioners in the current Budget. We have also raised child benefit by a record amount.

Mr. Francis Maude (Horsham): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Darling: I will certainly give way to the shadow Chancellor. He believes that our spending is unaffordable and reckless. I would be interested to hear whether the Conservatives support our plans to increase help for families and pensioners.

Mr. Maude: The Secretary of State has just said that the Government have kept the promises on tax that they made before the election. Will he explain how the Prime Minister has kept his promise that he had no plans to increase tax at all?

Mr. Darling: I would be delighted to relive the general election—for Labour Members, it was an extremely pleasurable experience. Indeed, we cannot see too many action replays of those happy days in April and May 1997, but let me make it absolutely clear that what we said during the general election was that we would not increase the basic or top rate of tax. Despite the fact that the Conservatives tried every day—when they were not squabbling about Europe—to get us to promise more than that, we stuck to the promise that we would not increase the top or basic rate of income tax. We have kept to that promise.

Mr. Maude: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Darling: No doubt the right hon. Gentleman wants to get to his feet to congratulate us on going further than that: we are reducing the basic rate of income tax.

Mr. Maude: Will the Secretary of State explain what he understood the Prime Minister to mean when he used the precise words:

"We have no plans to increase tax at all"?

How does the Secretary of State interpret that?

Mr. Darling: As I spent much of the general election campaign listening to the Prime Minister, I know exactly what he said about the top and basic rate of tax. *[Interruption.]* The right hon. Gentleman should be cautious because, although he was not in the previous Parliament—he unfortunately lost his seat—the Conservatives are in no position to lecture us on keeping promises on tax. We well remember the 22 Tory tax rises—every one of them.

The right hon. Gentleman should look at the manifesto and the countless interviews that the Prime Minister and the Chancellor conducted during the election campaign. Every time, they repeated the promise that we have kept: we would not increase the basic rate or the top rate of tax. As I said last Tuesday, the Chancellor went even further than that by reducing the basic rate of tax and introducing the lowest starting rate of tax for many years, so we have kept the promises that we made in the election.

We will deliver on every promise that we made in the manifesto during the election because we are determined to help low and middle-income families—I know that the Conservative party does not know what I am talking about. Helping those families is very important, which is why we introduced the 10p rate of income tax—the lowest starting rate of tax for some 35 years. The basic rate of tax will be at its lowest level for 70 years from next year—it will fall to 22p in the pound—and no family will pay net income tax on earnings of less than £235 a week. We are also introducing and increasing working families tax credit—another measure that the Conservatives oppose,

and are pledged to repeal. As a result, every family working full-time, with children, is guaranteed a minimum income of £200 a week, or £10,000 a year. The Conservative party is pledged to get rid of that.

Mr. Michael Jack (Fylde): What, in money terms, is the Secretary of State's definition of "middle income"?

Mr. Darling: If that is the best that the right hon. Gentleman can do, it is no wonder that the Conservatives are in their present position. Most people recognise that this Government are helping people on both low and middle incomes as the Conservative party never did—especially people on lower incomes.

Our reforms of national insurance will help to make work pay. We are giving employees an overall cut in contributions worth £2.5 billion a year. Our reforms will also help to make work pay by lifting 900,000 low-paid people out of national insurance payments altogether, while at the same time protecting their entitlement to benefits. Moreover, we are reforming the national insurance scheme for self-employed people in order to reduce the burden for those with lower profits, encourage the start-up of new businesses and make the system fairer.

Mr. Steve Webb (Northavon): As the Secretary of State knows, at present child benefit and family credit are deliberately paid to mothers rather than fathers, in the belief that is of greater benefit to the children. The strategy outlined by the right hon. Gentleman leans heavily on tax credits, which, typically, will go to fathers. Does he worry about that shift from mothers to fathers?

Mr. Darling: There is no such shift. In the case of family credit, it is possible for parents to choose to whom it should be paid, and in the case of working families tax credit and child care tax credit we have been careful to ensure that will still be possible, because we have anticipated the difficulties to which the hon. Gentleman has referred. He need not be concerned.

Another of our reforms will also help people to get into work: we shall give lone parents two weeks' income support after they start work. Along with housing benefit, which they can keep for four weeks, that will make it far easier for them to find employment. All these measures are fair, prudent and effective.

Mr. Maude: The Secretary of State has been keen to seek refuge behind the specific nature of the commitments and promises made on taxes and taxation rates before the election. Does he recall the poster published by Labour—I have a copy here—saying

"Income Tax Rates Will Not Rise"?

How does he reconcile that with the decision in the Budget, to which the Chancellor mysteriously failed to refer, that many people's marginal rate of tax should rise from 20p to 23p in the pound?

Mr. Darling: The right hon. Gentleman is wrong about that, as he is about just about everything else. He really will have to do better than brandishing Labour party posters—although I am glad that he has kept them: they may be a salutary reminder to the Conservatives of what they did when they were in power.

We have introduced a new starting rate of 10p in the pound, and a new lower basic rate of 22p, which will come into force next year. I think most people will recognise at the next election, as they did at the last, that they can trust the Labour Government to tell the truth about tax.

Mr. Maude *rose—*

Mr. Darling: One moment, one moment. I understand that the right hon. Gentleman hopes to wind up the debate, if we ever reach that happy point.

I am pretty sure that most people remember exactly what happened under the last Conservative Government, who made promises about tax which they knew they could not keep and which they wilfully broke in Budget after Budget. During the general election, we made specific promises. We were cross-examined on those promises, quite properly, and we have kept to them. Although this may irk some Conservative Members, I remind them that it is this Government who have reduced the basic rate of tax as part of an overall, coherent tax-reforming strategy.

Mr. Maude *rose—*

Mr. Darling: I shall give way to the right hon. Gentleman once more, but that will be the lot.

Mr. Maude: The Secretary of State is now alleging that, for his purposes, a pledge made on a poster that was published extensively does not amount to a pledge. Nevertheless, if he will consult the Paymaster General, she would tell him—if she can remember the figures—that because the 20p rate has been abolished, the marginal rate of income tax is now 23p for those whose taxable income is between £1,500 and £4,300, and whose marginal income tax rate is currently 20p.

Mr. Darling: One has to consider the tax changes in the round, and consider the national insurance payment reductions that we announced at the same time. *[Interruption.]* I am more than happy that the right hon. Gentleman should brandish that poster, both now and on every day between now and the next general election campaign. People will remember that whereas they could not trust the Tories on tax, they can trust the Labour party on it. We are delivering a tax strategy and a national insurance payment strategy which are designed to help people to get back into work, ensure that work pays, and which are far better and more coherent than their predecessors. He should by all means keep that poster, as he will undoubtedly need it during the next general election campaign.

Last year, the Chancellor promised a substantial increase in support for children, and the Budget delivers on that promise. It is a scandal—for which the previous Government must bear much responsibility—that, in the final year of the 20th century, a child can still be born poor, live poor and die poor. Every child deserves a decent start in life, and we are determined to ensure that every child gets it.

We have already begun, with the record increase in child benefit, to tackle child poverty, and radical initiatives such as the £540 million sure start programme will help young children from deprived communities to

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get a decent start. The Budget delivers more help. Next year, we are increasing child benefit by even more—a 3 per cent. increase—which is on top of next month's record increase. From April 2000, for the first time ever, child benefit will be worth at least £15 for the first child and £10 for other children. The Government are therefore delivering big increases in child benefit, to provide help and real security for more than 12 million children and their families. From April 2001, we will deliver a new children's tax credit, with a tax cut—worth up to £416 annually—for 5 million families.

The combined result of the new children's tax credit and increased child benefit will be that, by April 2001, families who received £11 a week in 1997—at the time of the previous general election—for their first child will be receiving £23 a week. That is more than double what they were receiving under the previous Government.

Cutting taxes, increasing child benefit and introducing the working families tax credit will significantly boost the incomes of the 1.4 million low-paid working families, thereby helping 3 million children—as we also promised to do at the previous general election.

Mr. Webb: I welcome extra support for low-paid families. Nevertheless, the Government said in the Budget that, in the medium term, they wanted to develop a streamlined system of supporting families. Now, someone in a low-paid job will receive child benefit, child credit, child care tax credit and working families tax credit. Is that the type of simple system that the Government want? Why did they not introduce a streamlined system now rather than introducing a messy one first?

Mr. Darling: The hon. Gentleman is an academic and takes a keen interest in these matters. The Chancellor said that he wanted a streamlined system because—as the hon. Gentleman was right to say—the current system is quite complicated and can be difficult to understand. However, there are two problems. First, it always takes time to introduce a new system, as one must be confident that the new system will work and deliver payments most effectively and efficiently. Secondly, if we did nothing before introducing the new system, children growing up would miss out on the help that most of us agree is necessary.

In all our tax and benefit changes, therefore, we have chosen a judicious policy mix, one consideration driving that decision is the need to provide help as soon as we possibly can, consistent with our prudent management. The second consideration is to make the structural changes necessary to deliver more efficiently all the tax and benefit changes. We are on the case, and we are getting there. However, to do nothing until we have completely re-engineered the system would not be appreciated by those who would lose out meanwhile.

Another important element of our strategy to help the poorest families is an increase of nearly 30 per cent. in all income-related benefits for children under 11. We want to ensure that all children are looked after properly and that their families have the means of support to ensure that they get the same opportunities as everybody else.

We are also introducing the new sure start maternity grant to replace the existing social fund maternity payment from next year. That will help 200,000 families by doubling the amount that they receive for a new baby from £100 to £200. One in four children born will benefit from that help. We are also doing more to protect the health of pregnant women and their unborn children by extending entitlement for maternity allowance to women on low wages, helping 14,000 mothers each year. From August next year, self-employed women will also benefit from a more generous maternity allowance, which we are increasing by 15 per cent.

We are helping children today because they need that help today. We are helping 700,000 children out of poverty, delivering on another manifesto commitment. In this Budget, we are ensuring that those children have better prospects, better opportunities and the chance of a better future.

We are also concerned that we should help pensioners, to ensure that they share in the rising prosperity of the country. We are providing significant new help for pensioners, with a £1 billion package of support. We are determined to do most to help those pensioners in greatest need, so we are delivering on our proposal in the pensions Green Paper that I published last December, by uprating the new minimum income guarantee in line with earnings in April next year. This year a single pensioner will get £75 and a couple will get £116. From next year, a single pensioner will get around £78 and a couple will get £121. That is a significant amount of help for some of the poorest pensioners in the country. From April next year, the poorest pensioner couples could benefit by nearly £800 a year compared with the help that they received from the previous Government. That is a real boost for the incomes of the poorest pensioners. The Government are delivering real security that was not there during the 18 years that the Conservatives were in power.

Mr. David Rendel (Newbury): Does the Secretary of State accept that the poorest pensioners are those who are not on income support, who will not benefit from the minimum income guarantee?

Mr. Darling: As I pointed out to the hon. Gentleman at Social Security questions last week, we made it clear in the pensions Green Paper that we recognise the problem of the nearly poor pensioner—someone with modest capital or a modest income from an occupational pension. We are determined to do more to help those pensioners. In the mean time, we have to tackle a problem that has built up over many years. There are too many pensioners who are very poor. They will benefit from the minimum tax guarantee.

Mr. Rendel *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Darling: There is no point in the hon. Gentleman shaking his head. I understand that he is campaigning for the leadership of his party, so he ought to be aware that at least one member of his party does not agree with him. The hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) thinks that the minimum pension guarantee is a good thing. That is one vote gone before he starts, unless he can convince his hon. Friend to change his mind. The Government are doing more to help pensioners across the board.

Mr. Rendel: Not the poorest.

Mr. Darling: Let me set out what we are doing to help pensioners. We are taking 200,000 pensioners out of

income tax. By definition, they were not the poorest pensioners, but that will mean that two thirds of pensioners will not pay any income tax. We want all pensioners to share in rising prosperity, so we are increasing the new winter payment to £100. That is a fivefold increase in the amount that they currently get and will benefit 7 million pensioner households. That is a major step in our fight against poverty. More than 10 million pensioners will benefit from the help that this Labour Government are delivering.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green): The Secretary of State talks about increasing the winter fuel payment. Why did he not simply increase the basic state pension? Is the price of fuel going to increase by the amount that he has increased the payment, or is there some other reason?

Mr. Darling: We wanted to deliver a significant payment to every pensioner household during the winter. Many pensioners find that in winter, increased fuel use and other costs mean that they will greatly value the additional single payment of £100. Most pensioners will welcome the additional help, and will recognise that the Government are doing more to meet other priorities as well.

Mr. Geraint Davies (Croydon, Central): My right hon. Friend may know that that measure was warmly welcomed by Stella Hague, the mother of the Leader of the Opposition. On income tax, will not the change to a 10 per cent. income tax rate—taken together with the marginal rates of 20 and 23 per cent.—offer a net saving to all taxpayers, because—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael J. Martin): Order. It sounds as though the hon. Member for Croydon, Central (Mr. Davies) is trying to make a speech.

Mr. Darling: My hon. Friend made two good points, one of which was that nearly 2 million low-paid people will benefit from the 10p starting rate. That is why it is such a useful addition to the tax regime. On his second point, I have no idea what the mother of the Leader of the Opposition thinks. If she welcomes our pension proposals, perhaps she is urging her son to embark on a reshuffle to get some better quality on the Opposition Front Bench.

I would be interested to learn, in the next half hour or so, what are the Conservative's proposals. Since the Budget, the Conservatives have been strangely silent—apart from the usual squabbling on Europe. There has not been much talk at the kitchen table over the weekend. I would be interested to know whether the Conservatives still adhere to the line that our spending is unaffordable and that, therefore, they would reverse our spending plans.

We are giving significant help to families with children and to pensioners. It would be interesting to know where the Conservatives stand on that. We know that they oppose our increased spending on the health service, housing and education. Let us hope that, this afternoon, they will tell us whether they support our proposals to give more help to families and to pensioners, or whether they support our plans to reduce the basic rate of tax—something that they were unable to do for much of the time that they were in office. Perhaps we will hear what the Conservatives would do.

In contrast to Conservative policies, the Budget will help 20 million households throughout the country. Those households are getting a better deal from the Government because we are promoting enterprise and securing a stronger economic future. We are controlling spending, while providing extra money for schools and hospitals. We are providing a better future for millions by cutting taxes to promote work, to help families find work and to help pensioners and the poorest in society.

It is a prudent and fair Budget, and it is a better deal for this country. I commend it to the House.

5.18 pm

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green): Last Tuesday, the Chancellor produced his third Budget, three features of which I wish to deal with today: first, the way in which the Chancellor mentioned only what he considered to be the good things, preferring to leave unsaid many bad things—changes by stealth; secondly, the ending of the special place of marriage in the tax and benefits system; and thirdly, rising tax.

I know that the Secretary of State for Social Security does not want to be taken back to this matter, but we will run through it one more time. Last week, the Prime Minister, when confronted by my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition about taxes, responded by saying that taxes had been cut. Perhaps he was economic with the truth, or perhaps he was intimated by his right hon. Friend the Chancellor, who was sitting next to him. One way or the other, even the Prime Minister admitted the week before that taxes are rising; yet a week later, he said something else.

In the *Financial Times* of 21 September 1995—this point was made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Horsham (Mr. Maude)—the Prime Minister said that he had

"no plans to increase tax at all."

That is a straightforward pledge, and it is fair that Labour in government should be measured by that pledge. However, the Government do not seem too happy. The fact remains that the two previous Budgets have increased taxes by approximately £40.7 billion over this Parliament, and taxes will rise in the coming year by £7.1 billion. It is the overall burden, not the headline income tax that matters. The overall burden of tax is what the public have to pay, not what the Chancellor wants to publicise. The public are presented with what appears to be a reduction while the Government are busy taking more money out of their pockets.

As my right hon. Friend the Member for Horsham said, look how the Chancellor abolished the 20p rate and attacked the public through changes in national insurance. The Chancellor said not one word about any of that in the Budget speech. Budget speeches are presentations by a Government, but it is fair to present both the good and the bad news and give a reasonable idea of exactly what is happening.

Let us consider what the Chancellor did not say.

Mr. Geraint Davies: Does the hon. Gentleman not accept that the net effect of the changes is a cash reduction in the amount of income tax that people pay?

Mr. Duncan Smith: As usual, the hon. Gentleman has got it completely wrong. The Red Book shows that the

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tax burden will rise over the Government's period of office. The public do not want to hear nonsense about fiddled cash figures; they want to know what they will actually pay and the reality is that they will pay more tax. If he does not like that, he should not have stood on Labour's manifesto in the general election.

The Chancellor told us that he was introducing a children's tax credit to replace the married couple's allowance. He did not say that he would get rid of the allowance in 2000-01 but not introduce the children's tax credit until a year later. There was nothing about that in his speech. That manoeuvre nets the Treasury, on Red Book figures, £1.6 billion—a little windfall tax—in that one year. All married couples—with or without children, pensioners, rich or poor—will lose. It is as simple as that.

In getting rid of the married couple's allowance, the Chancellor did not say that he was getting rid of widow's bereavement allowance as well. I do not recall a word about that in the speech; remember, this comes after the previous Budget's reduction of the allowance by 10 per cent from April 1999.

Mr. Christopher Leslie (Shipley): Would the hon. Gentleman retain the married couple's allowance at the existing rate if he were in power?

Mr. Duncan Smith: When we get back into power we will reinstate the special place of marriage in the tax and benefit system. We have an absolute pledge to change what the Government have done. We will deal with specifics when we come into government, but we have made that pledge.

Mr. Geraint Davies: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Duncan Smith: No. The hon. Gentleman had his moment and he lost it, so he can forget it now.

Getting rid of the married couple's allowance was a major move. The Chancellor did not talk about the national insurance increase, but Library figures show that when all Labour's reforms to employer's national insurance charges have been implemented, thanks to the changes to the upper earnings limit people earning more than £27,000 will be worse off.

The Chancellor did not tell anyone that the plans for social security spending add another £1 billion to projected totals. Page 159 of the Red Book is clear about that. The Secretary of State and his colleagues failed to add in their little shimmy over the working families tax credit. They increase spending and say that it is a tax reduction of more than £5 billion a year, which is nonsense. We should add that back in, making the figure £6 billion, which is a net increase of £2.5 billion, counting the £1 billion to which I just referred.

The Chancellor did not tell anyone that the Government expect a rise of at least 400,000 in unemployment benefit claims as a result of the three Budgets. The National Audit Office report makes that clear. The Government know that and have allowed for it. Because of that specific problem, they will have to increase social security spending. We are now in the wonderful position that a Government who talked about lowering unemployment—the Secretary of State just mentioned lowering it by 400,000—are planning to increase it by 400,000. Perhaps the most devious way in which the Government have fiddled the figures is their constant pretence that the working families tax credit is indeed a credit, which it is not. The Chancellor mentioned none of that.

What the Government should have done is to apologise for the raid they made, when they first came to power, on pensioner incomes and savings of £5 billion a year through the abolition of the advance corporation tax dividend tax credit. The National Association of Pension Funds pointed out, even before the Budget, that a pensioner expecting a reasonable income in retirement will find it reduced. The association calculates that someone aged 35, with a starting salary of £10,000 per year rising to £32,000—roughly a 4 per cent. increase per annum—over 30 years, would have retired on a pension of £14,721, but would now retire on a pension of just over £12,000. That is a direct result of the Government's change in their first Budget. I would have congratulated the Government if they had admitted how damaging that tax change has been and had rectified it in this Budget, but they did not take the opportunity to do so.

The Budget did not contain anything for the saver. For example, while the Government have lowered the basic rate of income tax to 10 per cent. on a very narrow band, they have not done the same for savers, who will continue to pay tax at 20 per cent., rising to 40 per cent.

The confirmation that the Government will link the minimum pensions guarantee to earnings was announced in such a way as to confuse people. The real result of that change will be a huge increase in means-testing. As the years go by, more and more people will be trapped in the income support line and the disincentive to save will increase rapidly.

Figures from the Library show clearly that under the current arrangements, the proportion of pensioners on income support could rise from one in five to one in three by 2050. Taking into consideration the projections for the rise in the number of pensioners, those figures also show that the Budget will mean that spending on income support will rise, at today's prices, from just under £4 billion to some £20 billion by 2050. The Budget will do all that, and it will still act as a massive disincentive to saving. That is a huge rise in spending, which will fall on taxpayers, and it comes from a Government who talked about breaking the dependency culture. The Prime Minister did not waste a day before saying that he would change the dependency culture.

Pensioners did not ask for that change in the Budget. Almost 1 million pensioners do not claim income support, so it is perhaps one of the Chancellor's stupidest decisions to change the pension arrangements in that way. I can think of nothing to recommend it. Furthermore, it now appears that the Government have admitted that they have got it wrong. The Chancellor is fond of saying that the married couple's allowance was neither about married people nor was it an allowance. The minimum income guarantee is not a minimum, nor is it a guarantee. When a Treasury spokesman was asked about that, he said:

"There will be some pensioners in a position where it doesn't quite do that. They will not get the minimum income guarantee in particular circumstances. That principle is something which is being looked at".

An official from the Department of Social Security said:

"There are going to be people"—

who—

"have no other form of income other than the state pension . . . which ministers are aware of."

All the nonsense about a minimum income guarantee is utter rubbish. It is all about income support and people who will not qualify for it, but their incomes could be lower than the income level that qualifies people for income support.

Mr. Phil Hope (Corby): Is the hon. Gentleman aware that some 113,000 pensioners in Northamptonshire will benefit from the winter fuel payment of £100 for every pensioner household? Why did his Administration, when they were in government, fail to provide any extra assistance for pensioners during the winter, when they have most demands on their income? If the Conservatives were ever to get back into power, would they take away that £100 from pensioners?

Mr. Duncan Smith: What a total load of nonsense. We changed income support levels for pensioners and the hon. Gentleman knows very well that his allegation is rubbish. He raised the question of winter fuel payments, which I have always thought a cock-eyed way to increase pensioner income. If, as the Secretary of State says, the Government have the means to increase pensioner incomes, why did they choose to do it in that way? Are they telling us that, as a result of their policies, fuel prices have rocketed since they came to power and they have to cover that? I do not believe that they are telling us that, so we must ask why they are acting in this way.

Age Concern said that it would have been better if increases had been put directly on to the basic state pension. Scope commented, revealingly and interestingly, that if there was a problem about winter fuel payments, why had not the Government done anything about disabled people who are not pensioners but who suffer much the same problem? Scope concluded—as others must have done—that there must be some other reason for the Government's action. If winter fuel payments were a problem, the Government would have sorted out the problem across the board. The difficulty cannot therefore lie in rising fuel prices.

I suspect that there is another reason for the Government's action, and that if we really probe we will find out what it is. The Government know that if they had put the money on the basic state pension, they would have been locked into a higher base level—and would have to increase the pension from that level—for years to come. The Government would not want that.

Therefore, the Chancellor tried, very cleverly, to find a way of saying, "We will increase pensioner incomes today, but we will not be locked in for the future." That will allow the Government either to cut the payment or to freeze it in years to come. Dare I say that after the next general election the Government may say, "Look, we have kept fuel prices down and it is much better now than it was, so there is no need for the increased payment and we can freeze it."?

Mr. Webb: I have a lot of sympathy with the hon. Gentleman's point about the winter fuel payments, but he said that income support should not rise in line with earnings because that implies more means-testing. However, the previous Government linked pensions to prices, and I assume that the hon. Gentleman sticks by that policy. What, therefore, is his strategy for helping poorer pensioners?

Mr. Duncan Smith: I will reveal my strategy, but not today. *[Interruption.]* I see no reason to do so, and I have discussed the point with the hon. Gentleman before. When we return to power, we shall ensure that pensioners will be better off. What the Government are doing will not make pensioners better off, but will mean that anyone who tries to save or to get off state assistance will progressively find that there is no point in doing so. That is my point about the link to earnings—there is a better way.

I shall produce proposals—*[Interruption.]* If the Government want to vote for us at the next election, they are more than welcome to do so. I would not blame them for it; I certainly would not vote for the current lot. It seems strange that Labour Members do not even want to vote for themselves but are desperate to find out our policy. They will know it soon enough.

Mr. Chris Pond (Gravesham): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Duncan Smith: No, I want to make some progress.

The point about winter fuel payments is clear: the Government are engaged in a cynical little game. They know that they have no intention of making that sort of change to the basic state pension. They would much rather see their disincentive hurt some pensioners.

Mr. Pond: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Duncan Smith: No, I am making progress.

Mr. Quentin Davies (Grantham and Stamford): They want to talk about anything but the Budget.

Mr. Duncan Smith: My hon. Friend is right; they are desperate to talk about anything but what is in their Budget. I am not surprised by that because the Budget is such nonsense. We will talk about it, however.

Abolition of the married couple's allowance—miserable as that measure is in itself—will also affect pensioners. Existing pensioners will keep the allowance, but another vulnerable group will lose it. Anyone born after 1935 will lose £197 of income, as the Secretary of State has admitted. Over the last few years before they retire, those people's investments are, for obvious reasons, low yielding and low risk. They need a stable fund for investments and annuities. It will be impossible for that group, as they approach retirement, to make the necessary adjustments to recoup their loss. That is compounded by the problem of the falling annuity rate.

We have warned the Secretary of State about that problem before, and we have asked him to do something about it. The Chancellor clearly had the opportunity to deal with the problem in the Budget, but by doing nothing about the annuity rate and by making certain that those approaching retirement will lose income from the married couple's allowance, he has made the problem worse.

[Mr. Duncan Smith]

For example, a couple on a joint income of about £26,000 will find that their income will be cut by about £512 a year as they approach retirement. I asked the Library to run some figures on how the annuity rate problem plus the allowance problems will hurt them. The annuity rate problem alone is serious. The Secretary of State knows that when the Government came to power a man aged 65 with a wife aged 62 who had a £100,000 compulsory pension annuity would have had an annual income of £7,000. That same annuity today would yield less than £5,500. Alternatively, he would need an annuity of £130,000 today to yield £7,000. We have warned the Government that they should do something about that—we will even try to probe them about it in the Standing Committee on the Welfare Reform and Pensions Bill.

Furthermore, from April 2000 the abolition of the widow's bereavement allowance will hurt women pensioners who are widowed. The Chancellor's note to the press on the subject was interesting. He said that widows would be more than compensated by the new widow's allowance in the Welfare Reform and Pensions Bill. He failed to point out that the payment would not be made to women over pensionable age.

Not a word was said about all of that in the Budget speech—it was locked away in secret—which sends a powerful message from the Government that the Prime Minister and the Chancellor do not care for those who choose to save in the long term. In the past two years, the Government have messed up the arrangements for savers with their pension proposals and the ACT dividend tax credit abolition, and have taxed them more and more. The relationship between the long-term saver and the Government is now complex and painful.

Arguably as important, if not more so in the long term, is the position that the Government have taken on marriage. On the married couple's allowance, the Conservative party disagrees with the thrust of the Government's policy—that is no surprise, given the Secretary of State, his predecessors and his colleagues in Cabinet. Their contempt for marriage is now clear—[HON. MEMBERS: "Oh!"] Labour Members may go on about that, but their policy is what it is all about. I was particularly interested in two opinion polls. The first appeared in *The Guardian* on the day before the Budget. When asked whether married couples should have a special tax allowance, almost 70 per cent. of respondents said yes; only 24 per cent. said no. The findings were backed up by a poll in *The Mail on Sunday*.

I have said that the Conservative party is pledged, on returning to office, to reinstate the special position of marriage in the tax and benefit system. It is important to recognise that abolishing the married couple's allowance and not replacing it for one year will hurt individuals. A person on a low income of about £6,000 a year, who does not have children, will lose £188. In the first year, a person with a child will lose £167 because they will not have the much-vaunted children's tax credit; a person with two children will lose £152; and so forth.

Mr. Darling: Will the hon. Gentleman answer two questions? First, if he thinks that the married couple's allowance is so important, why did he cut it substantially when he was in power? Secondly, what did the Leader of the Opposition mean when he said last year that,

"if we were going to phase out the married couple's allowance we should have replaced it at the same time with a new allowance, better targeted on families who really need the help".

That is what we have done.

Mr. Duncan Smith: I will come to what the Government have not done. To answer the original question, successive Governments—Labour and Conservative—have got that one wrong. The Secretary of State may have forgotten that I was not a member of the previous Government, although I was in the party that supported it.

If the right hon. Gentleman had asked his officials to calculate the figures for him, he might have argued with the Chancellor about the allowance. They would have told him that in the 1950s, married couples did not pay tax until they were on about 124 per cent. of manual workers earnings. Before the Budget, such people paid tax at something like 68 per cent. of earnings. It is worse today. The Government may not like it, but is incredible that they should come in saying that they did not like what the previous Government did but justify what they are doing now by saying that the previous Government, or the Government before that, did it. Have they no ideas of their own? Have they no idea of what they are doing? The Government's real reason for the change is that they oppose the structure of marriage.

Mr. Pond: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Duncan Smith: No; I have taken enough interventions.

Those who suffer from the change to the married couple's allowance will see just how wrong-headed this policy is. It is nonsense to chase the children with the money without any sense of structure. That has been proved on both sides of the Atlantic by report after report.

I suggest that the Government read with great interest a book that I have been reading written by one of their own, an intellectual in Princeton who was once at the forefront of the feminist movement, Sarah McLanahan. She wrote about what affects the upbringing of children, and made it clear that the single most important factor that benefits and assists children in the long run is the institution of marriage. The Government simply say that marriage is irrelevant. They will be judged at the next general election, and I will take great pleasure in being one of those calling for them to be judged.

Mr. Geraint Davies: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Duncan Smith: No, I want to make some progress. The hon. Gentleman keeps putting his foot in his mouth, and I do not want to give him another opportunity.

If the Chancellor was so certain that he had the money and wanted a change, why did he give the money to children at the expense of marriage? I do not understand that unless there is a clear message.

Mr. Darling *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Duncan Smith: It is at the expense of marriage. The right hon. Gentleman need only look at the Red Book to see how the figures flow. The Chancellor saved some money, but transferred the bulk to the children's tax credit.

It is interesting that Julian McCrae of the Institute for Fiscal Studies, having considered the new children's tax credit, says:

"This has all the difficulties that would have been associated with taxing child benefit".

The Secretary of State will not surprised to find that I agree.

The Government shied away at the last moment from taxing child benefit, although I suspect that deep in their hearts, they want to do it, and will do it. They tried out another scheme as a run to see whether they can do child benefit later. As the IFS points out, the Government's new means-tested sliding scale means they will get into all the problems that were in over the proposals to tax child benefit. The change will lead to dishonesty for the simple reason that, as the Government know, it will be in people's interest not to declare their relationships so that they can avoid the new tax.

The change will penalise marriage because those who are honest about their relationship will find the Government bearing down on them. It will particularly hurt single-earner households because of the ridiculous nonsense with the sliding scale, whereby two earners in a household on £30,000 each could end up receiving the money while a single earner on £38,000 got nothing. That is the absurdity of this. It is fraught with difficulties and complexities. The Government have got into a twist. What they really want is a means-tested benefits system. This is only the start; the most important thing is that this is all part of that process. It is not just the abolition of the married couple's allowance; each notch makes marriage that little bit less viable.

The Government cannot pretend that they were elected on 1 March 1999, as they try to do. They pretend that this is their first Budget—that there were not two Budgets beforehand. They try to disown quietly the tax increases of the first two Budgets. They like to crow about surpluses. In the short term, tax increases create surpluses, but in the long term they have a huge and hard effect on those attempting to work and save.

Mr. Malcolm Wicks (Croydon, North): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Duncan Smith: No, I shall not give way.

The third Budget gave us a real insight into the heart of the Chancellor and the Prime Minister. It contained a huge attack on marriage, coupled with massive redistribution by stealth from average earners to a state-based, means-tested social security system. The Government try to call those measures tax credits, but they all amount to the same thing: extra taxation, which will make people more, not less, dependent on the state and negate other measures the Government take. The Budget will make marriage break-up more, not less, likely. The Government go along kicking away the supports for the most important structure in the community, but they will be judged.

Mr. Darling: Does the hon. Gentleman seriously believe that people choose to get married or to separate because of tax considerations? Surely most people marry because of something higher than that.

Mr. Duncan Smith: The Secretary of State says that nobody gets married because of the married couple's allowance, but he knows that the greater the pressure piled on, the more difficult it is for married couples to stay together and the less likely it is that unmarried couples will get married—all the figures for the past 30 years show that. The Government are barking mad if they really believe that that is an argument for getting rid of the married couple's allowance.

The Government appear to understand the price of everything, but the value of absolutely nothing, and they demonstrate less and less interest in saving long term. They will hurt the more positive aspects of life in the community—people saving, working, getting married and attempting to look after their children in the most balanced way. They have all the hallmarks of a Bart Simpson Government: they are set on creating dysfunctional families and a dysfunctional society.

Labour Members waved their Order Papers in approval on Tuesday, but next year on the same day the British people will be waving their fists, because the Government have broken every single pledge. Mr. Blair's first pledge was not to increase taxes, but he has done so by £40.7 billion over the lifetime of this Parliament. Mr. Blair's second pledge was to reduce the cost of welfare—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman knows better—Prime Minister is better.

Mr. Duncan Smith: The Prime Minister—I used his name in case the public did not know it—promised to reduce the cost of welfare, but he will have increased it by almost £40 billion by the time he leaves office. Mr. Blair talked endlessly—[HON. MEMBERS: "Oh"] It is hard for us to remember that the Prime Minister is a human being, but it will become easier as the years go by. The Prime Minister talked endlessly about supporting marriage, but he kicks away the supports for marriage, increases the taxation of married couples and makes them more dependent on the benefits system.

The Government say one thing, but do another. Their motto should be:

"O what a tangled web we weave,

When first we practise to deceive!"

After two years and three Budgets, the web has become bigger and more complicated. For a few years, the Prime Minister liked to sound just like a double-headed eagle, but every day he sounds more like a turkey.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I remind the House that between 7 pm and 9 pm, Back Benchers' speeches will be limited to 10 minutes.

5.48 pm

Mr. Robert Sheldon (Ashton-under-Lyne): It is a great surprise to me that the main message from the hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr. Duncan Smith) is that he wants to retain the married couple's allowance. The abolition of that allowance is one of the two measures in the Budget that I most welcome.

This is the first Labour Budget that has been without constraints, either from small majorities or inherited economic crises. In 1964, the Labour Government had a

[Mr. Robert Sheldon]

majority of five, and in 1974 they did not have one at all; both Governments had to deal with the prospect of an election that could come at any time. Each Government had a five-year programme, but only a matter of months before the electorate had, once again, to give their verdict, so those Labour Governments accelerated their programmes. Instead of preparing their measures during the early years, with the final results coming some years afterward, the measures were all compacted within a few months; but few Government decisions can produce results in so short a time scale. Policies were introduced too quickly and, following subsequent elections, the Governments had to retrench. As a result, they incurred the odium of what has come to be called "tax and spend". The Governments spent too soon before the results warranted such expenditure.

As well as being the first Labour Budget that is free from the constraints of a small majority, it is the first that is free from commitments by the previous Government. Before coming to office, Labour accepted the most important constraints of both the rates of income tax and the expenditure plans. It is only now, as we move to the plans for the Government's third year, that relative freedom is at hand. As a result, this is the first Budget that I have been able to welcome for more than 30 years—and that includes the Budgets in which I was involved to some extent. I am not one to praise Chancellors of the Exchequer unduly—although the three previous Labour Chancellors were pretty good considering their electoral constraints—but this Budget combines imagination and competence.

Not all the Budget measures will be free of problems—that is to be expected—but the Chancellor of the Exchequer looks to the long term and seeks sensible solutions, something that I expect to be a continuing feature of this Government. That is particularly true of mortgage interest relief and the married couple's allowance, whose removal required a Chancellor of the Exchequer who was determined to end those two nonsenses. Frankly, I never expected to see those policies introduced. I strongly opposed the decision of Margaret Thatcher to increase mortgage interest relief to £30,000 in 1983. She wanted to be seen as the friend of the property-owning democracy. No one is against that, but Mrs. Thatcher ignited runaway house price inflation.

Under the Thatcher Government, trading up and buying a more expensive house became a way of making money. It was not a means to a secure, comfortable and enjoyable life, but an investment—and the very best investment for most people in this country. Instead of encouraging productive investment, people were entranced by the notion of living more luxuriously while receiving tax advantages for doing so. Over the years, tax advantage for home occupation multiplied. Schedule A, the capital transfer tax, capital gains tax, the inheritance tax and mortgage relief gave advantages of a kind that should never have been available to that extent. Such expenditure was a form of consumption free from tax. It was a shameful escape from reality that many of those who bought during the big housing boom had cause to regret when the market finally woke up.

The married couple's allowance is a relic of the pre-war attitude to income tax. Historically, income tax was an imposition only on those with middle and higher incomes. It recognised, through the allowances, what were considered the essential costs of such taxpayers. For those in the middle and upper income groups, the costs included the cost of maintaining a wife in a society in which few wives worked. That was the reason for the married couple's allowance. As the income level at which people entered the tax system was lowered, it was discovered that many more married women were working for a living. Under war-time conditions, the allowance was promoted as a means of getting women into work: it was an incentive.

Now that the normal expectation is for married women to work when their domestic conditions allow it, the measure has become more than an anomaly: it has become further nonsense. To have ended one outstanding or one difficult-to-erase anomaly would have been an achievement, but to have removed both is a tribute to my right hon. Friend. He has brought about a practical reform of the tax system that will advantage all future Chancellors of the Exchequer.

I welcome the 10p starting rate of income tax. It is an aspect of the more progressive income tax system that I have always wished to see introduced. I understand the arguments of those who call for an increase in personal allowances, but self-assessment provides the opportunity for a fully progressive system along the lines of the American model, with rates increasing with levels of income. Before self-assessment was introduced, a basic rate that applied to most taxpayers was essential for the operation of a complicated system. We now have the opportunity to introduce multiple bands. I accept that we shall have to introduce a higher rate band in due course, and I hope that other intermediate bands will eventually follow also.

This Budget, like all others, must be viewed in an international context. It is most important to take account of the way in which the world's economy is dependent more upon the United States now than at any time since the 1950s. The United States deficit is keeping many weak economies afloat. The question is: how can we be sure that it will be sustainable? The euro may, in time, come to be an alternative to the United States dollar, with international obligations similar to those that the United States has, to a large extent, borne alone.

One of the benefits that should eventually follow Britain's entry into the euro is a wider perspective that should flow naturally from the power that the new currency will acquire. For many reasons, our absence from the euro is the greatest issue of this Parliament. I am sure that we shall join eventually, but we could have played a valuable role influencing the shape of current events.

As to the health service, it is clear that costs will rise faster than the rate of inflation or even growth in the economy. The population is ageing and, as wants are met, health will become perhaps the major area of increased expenditure. The time is coming when we shall need to think more about either private medicine—which I do not favour—or a special national health service tax.

Anyone who has served in the Treasury has a visceral feeling about hypothecation—the road fund licence still casts its shadow 70 years later. One important weakness of hypothecation is that it does not take account of changing patterns of priorities in expenditure. However, as I have said, one certain aspect of health is that demand

will increase into the indefinite future. It may be that people will be more willing to accept a national health service tax when they can see the consequences of that expenditure, than other taxes that disappear into the vast generality of public expenditure. The time has surely come to explore sensibly the introduction of such a tax.

One important question is whether the Chancellor of the Exchequer was right to reduce income tax from 23p to 22p. I believe that he is right to do that both if the world economy turns down and if it does not. In fact, the Chancellor of the Exchequer's actions will be even more justifiable if he should need to maintain demand in the event of a downturn. It would be a case, on the one hand, of the economy being able to afford it and, on the other, of there being good counter-cyclical reasons for introducing it.

In this Budget, the Chancellor of the Exchequer has made use of his new-found freedom to act. He has had the space to defer the fruits of a Labour Government until they have been earned and he has done what all past Labour Chancellors wished to do. An important consequence of the Budget is that the Chancellor has helped to bring about a reconciliation between traditional Labour and new Labour. That valuable achievement must be added to his many others.

5.59 pm

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): I listened with interest to the speech by the right hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Sheldon), and especially to his point about the penny off income tax. If the purpose of that measure is some form of macro-economic demand management, one wonders why the Chancellor announced it a year in advance when he could not possibly have known what the trading circumstances would be. The Chancellor did not refer to the demand role because he announced the measure in the last sentence of the Budget and offered no explanations whatsoever. It will be interesting to see whether the right hon. Gentleman's predictions are correct.

Last Tuesday's Budget contained some good things—although fewer of them than the Chancellor pretended. There were also rather bad points in the Budget and, naturally, the Chancellor did not give much explanation of them. Never, in my 16 years in the House, have I heard a Budget that was more selective in its facts or misleading on so many issues. It was impressive on the day but, the closer one examines it, the more it unravels. This was a Budget of deception and half-truth. It is in complete contrast to the Chancellor's claims that he wants to promote transparency and openness. In fact, nothing could be more complicated and impenetrable than the details of the Budget.

We welcome in principle many of the proposals in the Budget—many of which are long-standing Liberal Democrat policies—including the shifting of taxes on to pollution, the raising of the national insurance threshold for the low-paid and the graduation of vehicle excise duty. However, the Chancellor will be forced to admit that the latter was too modest, both in amount and in the level of car size at which it is introduced, to affect people's behaviour or their ability to alter their behaviour.

Inside and outside the House, I have expressed the view that increasing the personal allowance is a much more effective way of helping people on low incomes than introducing the 10p tax rate. The process has made the tax system a great deal more complicated than it was before the Chancellor came to power. He certainly has not simplified the system and, if my hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) catches your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, he will want to draw the attention of the House to more details of that.

The Secretary of State for Social Security did not appear to understand my intervention about the minimum wage, so I shall clarify it. The Chancellor said that the minimum wage will be introduced at a rate that, at the current level of personal allowances, means that anybody who earns the minimum wage and works full-time will pay tax on that wage and be eligible for benefit. He indicated that he wanted to end that situation.

I was asking the Secretary of State how many years it would be, under the Government's policies, before people who earn the minimum wage and work full-time would be able to do so without paying any tax. The Secretary of State seemed not to understand the question or to have an answer, partly because, I suspect, the Government's strategy addresses itself not to taking people on the lower end of the scale out of tax, but to creating a complex array of tax allowances that are spread thinly across all taxpayers and leaving people on low incomes paying taxes at levels at which they qualify for benefit.

I want now to concentrate on other aspects of the Budget—material that has been buried away in the small print—most of which Liberal Democrat Members do not welcome. The Budget was so misleading and economical with the truth that I agree with Conservative Front-Bench Members that not only has it led to the Prime Minister definitively misleading the House, but the House would be entitled to ask for a supplementary Budget statement to allow clarification of many points that are shrouded in mist. I shall endeavour to help the House by pointing out a number of problems that could be put right.

First, let us consider the Chancellor's growth forecast. He presented the Budget as if he were leaving that forecast unchanged, which he does not. Growth for 1998-99 was revised downwards from 2.25 to 1.75 per cent. That will cut tax revenues by between £3 billion and £5 billion a year over the forecast period. That is a big change, which the Chancellor did not acknowledge in his speech. It would have been helpful if he had done so, because many points flow from that.

My second point of clarification also relates to growth. While repeating his growth forecast for 1999, the Chancellor neglected to make an important point: the mix of growth will change significantly from the forecast that he made in the pre-Budget statement in November. He has had to acknowledge that, as we have been warning him for a year, manufacturing industry will be in recession in 1999. There was no reference to that in his speech, but the papers and the Red Book make it clear that the central forecast for manufacturing growth decreases from 0 per cent. at best to minus 1.25 per cent. That is interesting, because the Chancellor has, at the same time, revised upwards his forecast of domestic demand growth to about 2.25 per cent. The 1999 export growth forecast has also been cut, to 0.5 per cent., even though British export markets are forecast to grow by 5.75 per cent.

Those are pretty stark figures. They mean that we have a forecast of a seriously unbalanced economy with exports grinding to a halt in spite of continuing strong growth in

[Mr. Malcolm Bruce]

our export markets. That ought to tell us something. If the Chancellor will not even acknowledge the problem, how can we develop a policy to confront it?

The Chancellor forecasts that, during 1999, the gap between the growth in manufacturing and the growth in domestic demand will be 3.5 per cent.—in favour of domestic demand, of course. That is the biggest gap since 1986. It means that, since 1996, we shall have had four years in which domestic demand has grown 12.1 per cent. faster than manufacturing output. That is an incredible transformation of our economy, and not for the better.

Is it not time that the Chancellor woke up to the fact that we have a seriously uncompetitive exchange rate level and that joining the euro involves not only the commitment in principle that the Government are telling us that they have made, but policies in practice to lock in sustainable convergence, including a competitive exchange rate? As I have said on several occasions, even if Britain is not in favour of joining the euro, we still need a competitive rate and we need to reduce our interest rates.

My third point of clarification relates to the net effect of the Budget. The Chancellor presented his Budget as a giveaway Budget and got all the headlines that he wanted. He implied that everyone was a winner and would benefit. On the other hand, he wanted us to believe that it was a highly prudent Budget. If the Budget was all that the tabloid newspapers said the next day, the Bank of England and the Monetary Policy Committee would presumably be putting up interest rates at their next meeting, but the reverse is the case. In its macro-economic and fiscal stance, this was a conservative Budget. The Chancellor was putting on a double act, according to which audience he was choosing to address. On the day, this was a giveaway Budget but, to the City and the Bank of England, it was a prudent Budget.

The Chancellor said:

"I am . . . able, with my Budget measures today, to boost purchasing power over the next three years by £6 billion".

I should have thought that, while the Monetary Policy Committee is wrestling with inflation, that was not what it wanted to hear. However, it is of course nonsense. Research by the House of Commons Library reveals that the reduction in current receipts is more than fully offset by a reduction in planned public expenditure of £14.4 billion over three years, so the Chancellor has simply changed the basis of his figures to fit the circumstances. That reduction is all achieved by reducing the annually managed expenditure totals by £14.4 billion.

That brings me to my fourth point of clarification. The spending reduction of £14.4 billion was not mentioned in the Chancellor's speech, but it explains why there is no fiscal boost in the Budget. Over the next three years, there will be a £14.4 billion reduction in public spending, which is an £11 billion reduction in current receipts and a cut of £4 billion in borrowing. Where is any of that made clear in the Budget statement? One would look long and hard for that.

Social security spending is mentioned in the statement. The Chancellor said that

"over the next three years, social security spending, including unemployment . . . is set to be significantly lower than previously forecast".

The Secretary of State for Social Security acknowledged in his opening remarks that that is not true. Table B13 on page 159 of the Red Book shows that social security spending has been revised up by £1.9 billion since November. That tells us that, on my fifth point, the Chancellor is talking plain nonsense about social security spending. To suggest that it is going down, when the Secretary of State for Social Security has now admitted that it is going up, is pretty deceitful.

Taxation is the sixth point on which I seek clarification. According to the Prime Minister, this was a tax-cutting Budget. According to the Prime Minister, taxes are coming down for all families. According to the Prime Minister, the tax burden will rise more slowly under Labour than was planned under the Tories. Well, each and every one of those claims by the Prime Minister is in fact false.

The Chancellor is on record as saying many of the things that the Prime Minister said. He said:

"this Budget will cut tax rates".

He also said that the Budget delivers tax cuts. Is that really true? I am grateful to the Library for clarifying the matter, because the Budget does not cut taxes. Many of the items in table 1.3 of the Red Book are spending measures, not tax changes.

According to the Library, a couple of days after the Chancellor's statement, the Budget adds £100 million net to taxation over the next three years. That is the Library's analysis of the Chancellor's own figures. It is not a tax-cutting Budget. Of course, that ignores completely the council tax, which is due to go up by £1 billion next year or, even allowing for inflation, by £700 million.

What of the Prime Minister's claim that taxes are falling for all families? This is my seventh point. Taxes over this Parliament will be £41.8 billion higher on a cumulative basis as a result of all Labour Budgets and, so far, £2.9 billion higher in respect of council taxes. Those are taxes that all families pay, so the claim that all taxes are coming down for all families is not sustainable. That claim is, frankly, utter rubbish.

As a Member of Parliament for a Scottish constituency, involved in debates on the Scottish elections, I find the Government's lectures to those of us who want an honest debate about taxation priorities wholly unacceptable. The Government preach honesty and openness and claim that they are cutting taxes while they are in fact putting them up. They then complain about people who want an honest debate and genuine presentation of priorities. Those of us who have addressed those issues head on, and are prepared to debate them with the people of Scotland, will take no lessons on taxation from the Labour party. The Government are going to have to do better if the debate is to be conducted on a genuine choice of priorities between parties offering different programmes that are honestly presented and honestly costed.

The issue of the tax burden—point No. 8—is one that has been kicked around several times, but I have had an analysis of it done by the Library. It shows that the Government's presentation of the figures does not compare like with like because of the treatment of the working families tax credit and the upward revision of the size of the economy on which, of course, the burden of taxation is based.

The adjusted series produced by the Library shows that the pre-Labour, or previous Conservative Government's, planned tax burden would be 36.8 per cent., compared

with 37.6 per cent. now, on a comparable basis. That is an increase in anyone's book—so much for the Government's claim about taxation.

The Government are wrong to pretend that taxation has not been rising. In the previous Parliament, the Conservatives effectively told people to vote for them because they would cut public expenditure to cut taxes, but what actually happened was that taxes went up and public expenditure went up even more, and the national debt doubled. Labour came to power, saying that it would not put up taxes but would boost public expenditure. What has actually happened is that the burden of taxes has continued to rise at more or less the same rate, while the increase in current expenditure on public services in this Parliament is half that delivered by the Conservatives. In other words, the extra taxes are being used to sort out the structural deficit inherited from the Conservatives, and are not delivering either the public spending levels that the Conservatives attack as profligate, or the spending levels that the Government seem to believe will sort out the problems in health and education—far from it.

While the tax burden has risen by 4 per cent. of gross domestic product since 1992, the amount of public spending as a share of GDP is falling fast. Under the Tories, spending as a share of GDP averaged 43.1 per cent. over the previous Parliament. In this Parliament, it is expected to average 39.6 per cent. of GDP—a difference of nearly 4 per cent. Taxes are rising as a share of GDP and spending is falling, the difference being used to close the huge structural Budget deficit. The incompetence and dishonesty inherited from the Tories has been continued for two years on the same basis by Labour. In fact, I wonder whether the time is right to start asking which twin is the Tory in terms of presentation.

A Budget leaflet was to be distributed by the Government as part of their campaign for more openness on taxation and spending. In principle, the Liberal Democrats favour the idea of a tax contract if it is about telling people what taxes they are paying and what services they are getting. What we are not in favour of is party propaganda funded by the taxpayer, controlled by the Government and not independently tested.

What happened to the Government's tax leaflet, which we were expecting to be told about on Tuesday? Why was it not even mentioned? Clarification of this—point No. 9—came on Friday, when a Treasury official inadvertently admitted to my office that the leaflets had had to be withdrawn because of inaccuracies. Fifty thousand leaflets paid for by the taxpayer are apparently to be pulped. That is a shambles. I am not in favour of the Government issuing untrue statements, but I suspect that it is only the difference between the untruths that is at issue, rather than the fact that the leaflets were untrue. If the Government cannot produce objective information that has been independently audited, it might be better if they pulped the whole idea. There should be a genuine objective assessment of what is going on, not a tax-funded propaganda exercise.

The final point of clarification relates to public services. The Chancellor said that he would

"announce more money and more capital investment in schools, hospitals, transport and fighting crime."—[*Official Report*, 11 March 1999; Vol. 327, c. 173-78.]

In fact, there was no new money, only allocations from an existing fund. Instead of announcing a genuine boost to schools and the health service, the Chancellor decided to spend his largest allocation of Budget money—more than £5 billion over two years in the second half of this Parliament—not on the hard-pressed health service or on investment in education, but on cutting the basic rate of income tax. That is the Government's priority, and it is exactly the same as that of the previous Government, whom we threw out.

The measure was presumably designed to wrong-foot the Tory party, although I cannot see the point of wrong-footing a party that has two left feet—or should that be two right feet?—and cannot walk in a straight line. No one is listening to the Tory party, but people are listening to the Government. The Chancellor had the scope to spend more money on education and health within existing public spending totals. We know that because he took £4.4 billion off the spending totals.

Labour Members will no doubt flood in to support the Budget at 10 pm but, if they think that what the Government have done in their first two years and what they plan to do for the next two or three years of this Parliament will sort out the atrocious mess in our public services, they will be deeply disappointed and will have a hell of a job convincing their constituents that a Labour Government made the difference that they had hoped. People will know that the Labour party decided to abandon its commitment to education, education, education and its commitment to rescue the health service from crisis and decided to go for Tory-style tax cuts. Ministers seem to have been persuading themselves that the problems of health and education are sorted. I advise Labour Back Benchers to be very careful when they have to defend cuts in services or failure to develop services over the next two or three years.

After two years of Tory cuts, it is possible that there will be some improvement over the next two years. It is possible that some of the pledges of the early years will be delivered in the late years of this Parliament, but is that the height of the Labour Government's ambition for those services? Is that all that we shall get? Surely we need more ambition if we want to rebuild a world-class education system. Surely the NHS needs more than crisis management and the odd windfall from the lottery when the Government feel that they need a headline.

When the Chancellor invites us to vote for a 1p cut in the standard rate of income tax, rather than investment in health and education, we will certainly vote against it. We are quite clear about our response to the Government's policies. Yes, we need to raise the take-home pay of the very low paid, but there are much more efficient ways of doing that than a 10p tax rate. Yes, we need environmental taxes that will alter people's behaviour, but that will not be delivered if people do not understand the tax system because the Chancellor is making it infinitely more complex.

Above all, we need a Government who recognise that health and education need investment first, before we go for tax bribes and tax cuts that cannot be justified because the education and health services have not had the investment and development that they need. That is why the Liberal Democrats oppose this deceitful Budget.

6.21 pm

Mr. Terry Rooney (Bradford, North): I support my right hon. Friend the Chancellor's Budget, including many of the significant changes that he has made in

[Mr. Terry Rooney]

social security, especially on the theme of making work pay. The Budget builds on the minimum wage, which is to be introduced in a couple of weeks. It will benefit some 2 million people by an incredible amount—as much as two thirds—which just shows the poverty pay that has existed in this country for far too long.

The Budget also builds on the wonderful success that has been achieved for the 18 to 24-year-old group through the new deal. The 53,000 youngsters who are now in work were previously offered an alphabet soup of training schemes, but no real prospect of employment.

The working families tax credit will be a significant monetary and behavioural advance on the failings of the old family credit system. It will improve not only people's prospects, but the way in which they view work and apply themselves when seeking work. It is to the credit of the Chancellor and the Department of Social Security that it has been agreed that those who receive maintenance will have that disregarded in the computation of working families tax credit. It was one of the greatest failings of the Child Support Agency from the outset that people with children who received benefit got no benefit from any maintenance paid. I welcome that important change.

The hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) made some interesting but illusory observations about whether a 10p tax rate was a good or a bad thing. Throughout the 1980's the people whom I represent saw that the tax burdens of people on high incomes were substantially reduced, while the tax burden of those on low incomes increased every year. If the people whom I represent can get some of that cake back, fair enough—and about time, too.

Thank goodness we have seen the back of the failed disability working allowance, with the advent of the disabled person's tax credit. In nine or 10 years, the number of claimants of disability working allowance rose to the superb figure of 13,000. What a miserable effort that was. With the simplicity of the disabled person's tax credit, people with disabilities will have an incentive to go to work and to stay in work, because they will get the financial reward due to them.

Single parents on income support who move into work will keep their income support for the first two weeks, on top of any earnings. That is another significant incentive, which will help people over the difficult initial period between benefit ending and the first pay cheque arriving.

The best thing about the Chancellor's proposals to make sure that work pays is that they raise hopes and expectations. For far too long, people believed that it is better to be on benefit than in work. Sadly, that was often true, because of the poverty pay over the past 20 years. Now we are raising hopes and expectations. Like many of my hon. Friends, I represent estates where two, three or four generations have never worked. It is accepted as the norm. It is not seen as unusual that brothers, sisters, uncles, aunts, grandparents, mother and father do not work.

The Budget abolishes not just poverty of income, but poverty of expectation. If we can raise our young people's expectations, the effect on our society will be dramatic—not least the effect on the crime rate.

With respect to the changes affecting children, I particularly welcome the change in maternity allowance. It has been a scandal that low-paid women received no maternity allowance at all because their income was below the arbitrary lower earnings level. I am slightly disappointed that the new rules apply only to those earning more than £30 a week, but I expect that my right hon. Friend is saving any improvement on that as a bonus for next year, when the lower limit will be abolished. I see a smile from my hon. Friend the Member for Wallasey (Angela Eagle) on the Front Bench—I live in hope.

The maternity grant was set at £100 in 1988 and has never changed since. Anyone who has any experience of children knows that the cost of kitting out a new baby is greatly in excess of £100, so I warmly welcome the doubling of maternity grant. In addition, under the proposals in the Employment Relations Bill, 2.3 million women will benefit from the extension of maternity leave from 14 weeks to 18 weeks. The reduction in the qualifying period from two years to one will benefit another 1.4 million women. At last that aspect of work is being addressed.

I welcome the new children's tax credit. I find it incredible that anyone could suggest that people's decision to get married or divorced would be based on anything as trivial as the married couple's allowance. Not only because of the reduction in the rate and the tax benefit over the years, but because of the anomalies built into the system as regards who qualifies for the allowance and who does not, it is time the Chancellor got rid of it.

The Opposition Front-Bench spokesman, the hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr. Duncan Smith), spoke about the stresses and strains on families. The biggest strain on a family occurs when children arrive and one wage is lost. The Budget puts money back into people's pockets to encourage them to deal with those issues when they arise. When they have children and their earning power is reduced, the Government's measures will assist them.

I have always found pensioners the most difficult group to please. I have been staggered over the past week to discover how widely welcomed the Budget has been. The minimum income guarantee is now well understood, which was not the case last year. It is well understood that it will be earnings-linked, so the poorest pensioners will gain from the increase in the national wealth, which has not occurred since 1981.

Some 17,000 pensioners in my city, Bradford, will benefit from the £100 winter fuel payment. The Chancellor has wisely made efficient use of resources to help those who need it most. The payments could have been spread a lot thinner, to benefit every single pensioner, but there would have been much less jam for each household that genuinely needs it.

That measure builds on the significant proposals in the Green Paper on the state second pension and on stakeholder pensions, which will target resources on those with the lowest earning capacity. The state second pension is a significant redistribution of resources and will help the lowest earners throughout their working lives.

In the past few years, we have rightly had debates and statements about pensions mis-selling. It is time we focused on the performance of life assurance companies and their investment records. Mention was made earlier of annuity rates, which are going down, as happens at a time of low inflation. However, there is a 32 per cent. difference between the best and the worst performing

annuity providers. That is far more damaging to people's pension prospects than anything else that is happening at the moment.

The difference between the performance of the best and the worst with-profits policies is 27 per cent., and for stand-alone, with-profits policies it is 50 per cent. The best unit-linked policies are eight times better than the worst. When people invest their money, they need to know that it is being invested wisely and with the best investment houses. The Financial Services Authority should examine the performance records of the different providers over a given period—the longer the better—and if their investment policies are as bad as that, they should be ruled out of the market. People need to know that they will get a decent and sensible return on their investments, instead of the miserable performances that far too many of these investment houses are producing.

I welcome the Chancellor's statement about a code of practice on mortgages, but it is sad that mortgages are still excluded from any of the regulatory bodies. Mortgages are the biggest single investment that people make in their lives, and they should have far greater statutory protection. Codes of practice are fine, but we have seen in the past that they are torn up by unscrupulous people. The sooner the mortgage framework comes under the FSA's remit, the better.

May I make a plea to the Secretary of State for Education and Employment? Too many of us are completely ignorant of financial matters, whether it be pensions, investments or mortgages. *[Interruption.]* It is sad that some hon. Members act as though they are still at school. There is space in the national curriculum, particularly in the fifth and sixth forms, for our children to receive some basic education on the principles of investments, lending rates, annual percentage rates, mortgages and so on. Too often we expect people to leave school, go to work and start to make these decisions without any knowledge to back them up.

This Budget, like many others, seeks to influence people's behaviour. It is my firm belief that this is a good Budget. It will help to make work pay and to provide better opportunities, particularly for younger and poorer people—the people whom I represent in Bradford, North. I am delighted with the measures that the Chancellor announced last week, and I look forward to seeing them implemented.

6.33 pm

Sir David Madel (South–West Bedfordshire): I have an industrial constituency that is heavily dependent on motor vehicle manufacturing and on suppliers to that industry. I was particularly interested in the comment of the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry on 10 March:

> "First, we must invest in British capabilities—in particular, our world-class science and engineering base and our skills."—[*Official Report*, 10 March 1999; Vol. 327, c. 409.]

That view is in the background when the Government wrestle with the problem of deciding whether they should give grant aid to the Rover plant at Longbridge for the new model. I know of the difficulties in deciding whether to give grant aid, but if it were given to Longbridge there would be a free-for-all in the car industry in applications for grant aid. I assure the Government that, if that were the case, we in south Bedfordshire and Luton would regard ourselves as part of the "all".

Further questions arise over the problems at Longbridge. Have we got the boundaries right, whereby some areas of the country qualify for grant aid and some do not? Can we be sure that we have got it right? Should we give money just to keep a factory going or should we give it for a specific purpose, such as to launch a new model or a new engine? If we do that, we need to know whether it is within European Union rules.

Ministers' speeches in the Budget debates have been littered with references to science and the environment. In my view, grant aid should be available in the drive for cleaner and more fuel-efficient engines for the car industry, regardless of where a company is situated in the United Kingdom. That would, at long last, provide a level playing field for the motor industry.

On the changes in vehicle excise duty, of course a cut in duty for small cars is welcome. That will be introduced on 1 June. In my view, however, there has been faulty thinking in the Treasury and by the Inland Revenue about the engine size that should benefit from the £55 cut. The Government have fixed it at 1100 cc, but I believe that it should have been 1400 cc, for two reasons. First, 1400 cc is recognised by the Treasury as a ceiling above which higher taxation kicks in for the purposes of taxing free fuel provided to employees by employers. Secondly, the Treasury has admitted that the size of the engine is a poor guide to environmental performance. Surely the Government want to get more people to drive super-minis—not souped-up minis—and 1100 cc is an unrealistic engine size. The Government should think again about this measure—they have time before 1 June—and go for cars up to 1400 cc.

That leads me inevitably to the 6 per cent. increase in the fuel escalator, which, decoded, means steeply rising annual petrol prices. I shudder to think what we would be paying if world oil prices were not as low as they are now. The Government have been incredibly lucky, because there is now an abundant supply of oil, whereas in the 1970s we thought that oil was in permanently scarce supply. We all know how unstable the middle east is: if a Government are overthrown or there is a violent change of Government in the middle east, supplies may suddenly be reduced or cut off. That was certainly the case in Iran in 1979 when the Shah was overthrown. The Government must think again about the fuel escalator, which I believe has outlived its usefulness and is fundamentally wrong.

The Government are being unrealistic if they go on thinking that the bus can replace the private car. I am beginning to get the impression that far too many people in this country do not want ordinary people to own a car. The most realistic public-private partnership—we hear a lot about that—is to make it as easy as possible for people to drive in their car to a station and get on a train. I accept that that cannot be done all over the country, because we cannot cover the country with railways.

It is wrong of the Government to think that, somehow or other, the bus can magically replace the private car. In 1963, Professor Colin Buchanan, in his report on traffic in towns, said that the majority of journeys by car in this country are relatively short journeys, and cannot be done by bus. That is as true now as it was in 1963.

[Sir David Madel]

I should like to say a word about the Government's attitude to business and their desire to help business. In the Budget last year, the Chancellor of the Exchequer said:

"For 12 months from July, first year capital allowances for small and medium-sized businesses will be set at 40 per cent., continuing our commitment to boosting long-term investment."—[*Official Report*, 17 March 1998; Vol. 308, c. 1101.]

That statement took us to July 1999. It was repeated this year: the 40 per cent. allowance will go on to July 2000. Beyond that, we do not know what will happen. That is an avoidable uncertainty for business. The Government should make it clear what they will do on capital allowances for the rest of the Parliament. They made it clear in 1998 what they would do for one year. They have it made clear again. They should now go further.

On page 41 of the Red Book, the Government say something interesting under the grand title "Helping businesses to succeed." We all wish business to do so, but at paragraph 3.45 the Government say that they believe that they also have

"a role to play in supporting small businesses through the provision of advice and in particular by helping them to minimise the cost of complying with regulations."

The way in which to reduce business costs is to reduce the number of regulations. That is what business wants more than anything else. It would like a couple of other things, too. It would like the road-building programme to stop being slashed and to be restored, so that businesses would find it easier to get their goods to market. It would also like local planning authorities to take a more friendly attitude towards businesses that want to set up shop in various parts of the country. That is the sort of practical help that can be given to businesses. It is missing from the Budget.

I end with a point in relation to the Red Book that underlines the Government's philosophy and worry over the Budget. On page 99, there is a rather nervous statement on income tax in 2001-2002:

"In the Treasury's view, an amendment of the Scottish Parliament's tax-varying powers is not required as a result of these changes"—

in other words, the changes that the Government are making in income tax. It is interesting to note that cutting the basic rate to 10p is a repeat of what the then Chancellor, Mr. Norman Lamont, did in 1992: he introduced a lower rate of tax.

The language being used now is exactly the same as was used by the late John Smith, but for John Smith substitute the Scottish National party. It is now saying what John Smith said in 1992, but the climate is different. There is a huge demand for more money to be spent on health and education. The Chancellor is taking a colossal gamble in what he is doing on income tax north of the border; he may come badly unstuck.

6.42 pm

Mr. Jim Cunningham (Coventry, South): I remind the Opposition that the Government are spending at least £40 billion on education and the national health service. Most Opposition Members seem to have forgotten that. More important, I should like to support the Chancellor and his Budget. Indeed, for the first time in a long time, we will see a surplus of £4 billion this year and a net public borrowing requirement of £1 billion. Compare that with the £28 billion deficit that we inherited and we are starting to move, certainly from my perspective, in the right direction.

Nor should we forget what happened to families under the Tories. What they called free markets only broke local economies and smashed families. This is a strong family Budget that builds on previous initiatives and puts families and children at the heart of our policies; it builds on the working families tax credit, child care tax credit, the minimum wage and the fairness at work proposals. I am sure that many people will view the Budget as a step in the right direction.

Many people will welcome the second increase in child benefit—to £15—the continuation of benefit on entering work, and the raising of the minimum income guarantee to £200 a week. Again those are strong measures to deal with poverty. Incidentally, those measures have been endorsed by the Low Pay Unit and the Child Poverty Action Group, so there is some support somewhere for the proposals, even if not among Opposition Members.

We need stable families. They form the bedrock of a successful childhood and consequently better attainment at school, by building on sure start, special educational needs and the rebuilding of crumbling schools. Those are vital, too, in relation to quality of life.

I warmly endorse the £100 million for inner-city schools: a vital part of rebuilding the fabric of our inner cities. We will also give £2,000 to each school to buy books. There will be 1,000 computer learning centres and an initiative to train 370,000 teachers in computing. Those are quite radical programmes.

We can see that the Government have started to build some secure foundations step by step, so that our society can improve. It was often said that we could not have both environmental concern and economic growth. The Chancellor has shown how we can look at, and do something about, both. Corporation tax will be cut to 30p from April. The small business rate will also be cut. In my constituency, many small business people will welcome that. Given that these are tough times, the Chancellor is prepared to take tough action to tackle business problems, rather than let business flounder, as it did with the hollowing out of our economy in two major recessions under the Tories.

The environment was often neglected by Tory Governments. Labour Members welcome the new, revenue-neutral incentives to cut carbon dioxide and, importantly, the special packages that the Government are prepared to introduce for high users. We particularly welcome, especially in my constituency of Coventry, South, the one thing that marks the Budget out as a truly reforming and modernising Government's Budget: the research and development tax credit.

The Government are prepared to underwrite one third of R and D. That is welcome relief in Coventry, which has major employers such as Jaguar, Peugeot and GEC. That will greatly benefit and underpin our manufacturing economy for the long term. I am sure that many hon. Members will remember what happened 10 or 15 years ago under the previous Government. Unemployment in Coventry was between 15 and 18 per cent. It was once known as a boom town.

For small companies that often find it difficult to fight court cases, the strengthened powers of the Office of Fair Trading are particularly welcome—something that the Conservative party, despite all its protestations, failed to secure in 18 years of rule.

Additionally, many older people will be grateful for the Budget. Already, we have had a cut in VAT on fuel, the minimum income guarantee of £75 and better regulation of the utilities. I welcome the attempts to do something for pensioners, particularly the raising of the minimum income guarantee to £78 and £121 for couples, the linking of the minimum income guarantee to earnings and the increase in winter fuel payments to £100—a 500 per cent. increase—not to mention the removal of most old age pensioners from income tax. Clearly, it is a Budget for the most vulnerable in society—the very same people whom Conservative Members spent 18 years walking all over and doing nothing about.

The Budget did not stop there. It made provision for hard working people throughout the country—those who are in low-paid work, or who were thrown on the scrap heap by the Tories. Building on the new deal for the young and long-term unemployed, the Budget has introduced a 10p starting rate, helping people not next year, but next month. There is a cut in the basic rate of income tax. In addition, the Government's proposals for ESOPs—employee share ownership plans—will give workers a stake in their firms. The generous tax incentives will put a long-term bias into our sometimes short-termist economy.

Most important for many former industrial workers, certainly in my constituency—the issue has been raised many times with me—there will be a new deal for the over-50s, guaranteeing £170 per week. Contrary to what Opposition Members have said, the new deal has worked and will continue to work for that particular group.

We are getting down to the nitty-gritty by concentrating on education for all. Thus I welcome the individual learning accounts with tax-free contributions and £100 supplements for basic skills. That will mean a new start for many people and it will underpin the new deal by helping people in the long term.

May I ask my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security to have another look at occupational pensions and the contributions as they affect genuinely disabled people? If he cannot look at the subject again, will he at least review it yearly to see how the system works out?

We have a Government who listen, learn and put into practice what Britain needs. The Chancellor has delivered a family Budget, a pensioners Budget, a workers Budget and an enterprise Budget.

6.50 pm

Mr. Michael Jack (Fylde): When I asked the Secretary of State to tell me how he would define "middle income", he was unable to answer—having chastised Conservative Members for not being in touch with the "middle income" group. That was interesting; it reveals just how in touch Ministers are. The fact that the right hon. Gentleman could not answer such a basic, simple question showed that, in reality, Ministers are out of touch.

The Budget clearly demonstrates that the arcane art of smoke and mirrors that typifies the Treasury's activity in producing any of its documents is as alive and well as it ever has been—although I think that the Chancellor must have consulted Mr. David Copperfield, the well-known illusionist, on how to put his Budget together. There were plenty of clever tricks, and some people are still wondering how they were performed; but performed they were, and earlier speakers have demonstrated that financial pigeons will come home to roost.

This Budget struck me as one produced by a man who liked fiddling with things—a man who liked "toys for the boys". This man could not put the financial machine down; he had to fiddle with lots of things in an attempt to secure the headline the next day. The Budget lacks coherence, purpose and direction. I always want to know what the Chancellor's philosophy is, but, in this instance, I was struggling. Was it a philosophy of long-term tax-cutting? Was it a philosophy of long-term growth? Was it a philosophy to control Government expenditure in relation to gross domestic product at a particular percentage? Was it a philosophy to simplify the tax system? I do not think that it was any of those. As some commentators have observed, this Budget looked more like an accountants charter, given the complexity and the variations that it brought to play. There was a little bit of an allowance here, and a little bit there. This Budget is very difficult to understand.

The ordinary citizen will wonder what happened to the Government's support for the reform of the tax law rewrite. The Budget was silent about any progress that has been made, and we can see why: the Chancellor was embarrassed by the added complexity that he was incurring.

The headline that appeared in, I think, *The Sun*—"Every One a Winner"—was a triumph of spin, but also a triumph of inaccurate reporting. The Budget featured a grand lack of transparency. There is the way in which the 20p tax band was dispatched: it was not mentioned. There is the fact that the Chancellor stood up in the House of Commons and said that the 10p rate of corporation tax would affect companies that made a profit of up to £50,000. That was true, but the Chancellor forgot to add that the benefit stopped at £10,000. Finally, there is the wonderful statement that old age pensioners, if they are married, will be able not to pay tax on £15,000. When we look at the fine print, we find that it is necessary to add together two personal allowances and a married allowance, and still to have the flexibility within the marriage to move income about, to take full advantage of that provision. As I said at the outset, this takes the arcane art of smoke and mirrors to new heights.

The Chancellor should take some of his own advice. This is the Chancellor who told us, to justify his fiscal rules, that he would have everything audited by the National Audit Office. I challenge Ministers, including the Chancellor—if the Chief Secretary makes a note of this, I may receive an answer at the end of the debate—to agree to submit an audit of those promises before the Budget is published, so that, when the public want to understand what is in a Budget, they will have a clear statement of its implications. The Chancellor should not be frightened of that proposal. If he has good news and believes in his own philosophy, transparency should be the watchword.

It is difficult to digest and understand all the proposals. Given that the Government have said that they will produce a freedom of information Act, now is the time for the charade that we have seen in the Budget to stop. There should be audits and transparency revealing

[Mr. Michael Jack]

the winners, the losers and the implications of the Chancellor's measures. After all, this is not the Chancellor's Budget; it is our Budget. It is the Budget for the people of this country, and they deserve better than they were given this year.

One argument that will doubtless ping-pong back and forth for some time concerns the level of taxation. "Budget 99", the Treasury publication, suggests an inescapable mathematical outcome. If we look at the tables presenting the results—still to come—of previous Budgets' tax increases and netting them against what the Chancellor claims to be reductions in the current Budget, we find that in the financial year 1999-2000 there will be £2.6 billion in extra tax, that in the following financial year there will be £3.6 billion extra tax, and that in the year after that there will be £4 billion extra tax. Never mind about the percentage of GDP, or other such considerations; those are the cash increases that will be taken out of the UK economy in the form of extra tax. For the Chancellor or, indeed, the Prime Minister to equivocate for a moment on that is for them to defy simple mathematics. Those are the tax-raising facts.

It is interesting to observe what happens when it comes to telling the truth about this Budget. Much was made of the newspaper headline that I quoted earlier, but the Library and the Institute for Fiscal Studies confirm that some 4 million households will lose from the Budget.

Another thing worries me about the transparency of the Government. On 11 December 1996, when I was Financial Secretary to the Treasury, I had to answer an embarrassing and difficult parliamentary question. It was embarrassing and difficult because it showed some of the problems with which we were grappling when we were in government. The question—which can be found in column *190* of *Hansard*—concerned the effect of that year's Budget, account being taken of gross earnings, national insurance contributions, income tax payable, VAT, other indirect taxes and that awkward thing for this Government, the council tax, on the real take-home pay of the citizenry.

When the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) tabled the same question recently, the Government shuffled their feet. They said, "We want to see how we should construct our answer." They enjoyed the answer. The present Home Secretary, the right hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw), tabled the question every year following 1981. It went to the heart of how the Budget affected people with incomes varying from 50 per cent. of average earnings to 2000 per cent.

Will Ministers reinstitute the answer to that question? It is the most telling analysis that I know of the effect of the Budget on the individual citizen. If Ministers will not do that, will they tell the House why they will not answer the question? We want to know what the effect of the Budget is, but it is clear from their refusal to answer the question as originally tabled that Ministers now find it deeply embarrassing.

I also hope that Ministers will come clean about some of the Chancellor's huge assumptions, to which other hon. Members have drawn attention. Half a per cent. off his growth figures means that public sector net borrowing will rise by £6 billion, current expenditure will be £1 billion higher and current receipts will be £5 billion lower. We hear little from Treasury Ministers about that.

This was supposed to be a Budget about employment and investment. Given all that the Government have said about investment criteria, will the Minister who replies to the debate explain why chart A6, on page 141 of the Red Book, shows that business investment up to the year 2001 is on a falling track? That does not seem to show a great deal of confidence on the Government's part in their own measures to stimulate investment. There are some cyclical explanations in the body of the text, but the document should have told us what the effect of the Budget would be on business investment. The Government have already been rumbled by some of today's speakers, who have pointed out that key factors such as our exchange rate competitiveness and interest rate levels have far more effect on investment than any of the Budget's window-dressing measures.

The Government talk about helping small and medium-sized enterprises to raise money. I should be intrigued to learn why Ministers did not go further—as the British Venture Capital Association suggested in its Budget submission—by providing some encouragement to companies that wish to raise money by means other than straightforward borrowing from a bank. The British Venture Capital Association made an interesting case that the use of equity finance or other forms of debt finance could help in raising capital. Why have Ministers rejected that idea? If they really want to ensure availability of long-term capital funding for investment and provide help in raising funds, particularly for small and medium-sized enterprises, they should have acknowledged the association's sensible proposal.

Labour Members have made much of the so-called help that the Budget will give to the elderly. I am concerned about the many hundreds of thousands of people who fall on the other side of eligibility for state help—the pensioners who are trying desperately to look after themselves by using their own means, or those who are trying to plan for their retirement.

Annuity rates have been mentioned in the debate. However, many of the pensioners I am talking about will gain little comfort from the extra money that they will receive in heating allowance, as that will simply compensate them for loss of tax credit on the modest savings that they have already put away. They will discover that the savings they still have will be subject to a 20p tax rate, not the much-vaunted 10p starting rate. Eventually, widows will find that the changes in the state earnings-related pension scheme reduce their income.

Most importantly, pensioners seeking to capitalise on the equity in their homes will find that abolition of mortgage interest relief at source—MIRAS—greatly increases the cost of home income plans. Currently, people who are able to obtain MIRAS in home income plans receive tax relief at 23p—not at the reduced 10p rate, the rate at which current non-pensioner householders receive MIRAS. The Government seem to be kicking very hard against those who have saved hard and want to use their own resources to look after themselves. The Government failed to look after them in those Budget measures.

Much has been made about those who have children. However, an interesting article in *The Daily Telegraph* confirmed that the Budget will have some delayed effects. Earlier in the debate, I asked the Secretary of State for

Social Security if he knew the definition of "middle income" precisely because of that article, which considered the case of the Fellowes family.

David and Kirsten Fellowes have an income of £35,000 and two children. It is perfectly true that, in tax year 1999–2000, the Budget's combined changes to tax, national insurance, MIRAS, child benefit and petrol duty will leave them better off by £191. However, in 2000–01, when the changes to higher rate national insurance take effect, the picture will change dramatically, and the Fellowes will be £240 a year worse off.

The case of the Fellowes demonstrates the dishonesty for which the Budget caters. On the basis of Budget headline figures, people might think, superficially, that they will be better off. However, once they start examining the Budget's detail, they will discover that they will be worse off.

Among the millions of householders who will be worse off are married couples—who are losing the married couple's allowance and MIRAS—who have no children. Perhaps such couples have a dependent relative whom they look after. Where in the Budget is there help for those people? Help is there none. They will feel that the Government's tax treatment of them has well and truly kicked them in the teeth.

The Government talked in the Budget about helping to create employment opportunities. It is ironic that, on the last day of the Budget debate, the organisation Manpower published a survey stating:

"The survey shows that the economy has the worst job prospects for six years, which does not bode well for the coming year."

Yet, Ministers tell us that the 10p starting rate will be the saviour in addressing those issues. I tell them that it is wrong to use the tax system to try to stimulate employment. We should have raised the personal allowance to remove some people completely from tax liability.

Earlier in the debate, my hon. Friend the Member for South-West Bedfordshire (Sir D. Madel) spoke eloquently and correctly about the inappropriateness of the Government's proposals on vehicle excise duty. The proposals are wrong. Ministers should have provided much greater incentives for manufacturers to produce environmentally beneficial cars, and not have opted merely for a sneaky way of raising even more money from motorists. Today's duty reduction on cars with engines no larger than 1100 cc is the precursor to big tax rises for those owning other types of cars.

The Budget kicked the rural economy very hard, and dashed any claim that Labour might make to be the friend of the countryside. Not only will increased diesel costs increase the cost of transport in rural areas, but any measure in the Budget to address the issue of farm costs went completely by the board. Rural Britain is suffering—probably worse than anywhere else—because of the Government and the Budget.

As I said, worse is round the corner for the British economy. It is a great pity that the Budget was not more transparent about the real prospects for our economy.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. I remind the House that the 10-minute limit on speeches has now come into operation.

7.6 pm

Mr. David Kidney (Stafford): If we were to go outside the House and ask people to tell us what they believe should be the core values of our society and what they think are the basic needs of people in our society, I believe that at the top of their list, or very close to it, would be shelter: access to a home for all those who want one. I should like to concentrate on the Budget's consequences for housing policy.

First, however, I should like to say how very much I disagree with Opposition Members who complain about lack of transparency in the Budget. Perhaps they think that, last Tuesday, the Chancellor should have stood at the Dispatch Box and read out the Red Book, so that no detail was left unmentioned. I welcome the openness that the Chancellor has introduced into the Budget process, just as I applaud the Government's code for fiscal stability, the golden rule on investment and the sustainable investment rule. I welcome the Government's publication of pre-Budget reports. I also remind Opposition Members that, this year, there have been two detailed consultation papers, on the proposed business energy tax and on the variable vehicle excise duty.

The accent in this year's pre-Budget report was on productivity measures. In most of the first 30 minutes of the Chancellor's Budget speech, he concentrated on enterprise and business. He announced in his speech yet further consultation on new measures, such as the all-employee share ownership scheme. It is therefore not right for Opposition Members to complain of a lack of transparency or openness.

In the world of housing, we do not seem to use the term "boom and bust" which is so popular in the world of economics. Why not? Was not one of the legacies of the previous Tory Government a great boom and bust in housing, in the late 1980s and early 1990s? Was there not a huge house price explosion at the end of the 1980s, followed by a great recession—in which people lost their homes, with record numbers of mortgage repossessions and cases of negative equity?

Almost 70 per cent. of households are owner-occupiers, who welcome economic stability, just as businesses do. The Budget made little mention of housing, and two specific provisions were probably unwelcome to people in the housing world—the end, next year, of MIRAS and higher stamp duty for the few who buy houses worth more than £250,000. However, there are countervailing forces at work on those measures. The interest rate cuts of the past six months have already brought substantial gains to those with variable rate mortgages. With higher stamp duty comes greater price stability at the higher end of the market, avoiding the excessive price increases of the past. The surveys by the Halifax and the Nationwide for the past year disagree, putting house price inflation at 4.4 per cent. and 7.4 per cent. respectively. Looking forward to this year, the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors forecasts house price inflation of 4 per cent. The Council of Mortgage Lenders and the Association of British Insurers made an announcement shortly before the Budget speech about an accord on what I might call MPPI 2—a second variation of the mortgage payment protection insurance policy that has been in circulation for some time. I hope that the scheme will be widely taken up and will protect more people from losing their home when they lose their employment.

[Mr. David Kidney]

In the Red Book and the second of the two press notices from the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions came the announcement of a forthcoming Green Paper on housing policy. That is welcome, because although the Government introduced the capital receipts initiative soon after coming to office, providing a boost for housing finance, there has been a lack of debate about the direction of housing policy. I think that there is a lot to look forward to in and outside the Green Paper. For local authorities, there is the duty to achieve best value, the difference that resource accounting might bring to housing finance and the new housing inspectorate. For the registered social landlords sector there will be a change to rent structures. I sincerely hope that there will also be an increase in the grant rate for building new homes for rent. We know what the Government are likely to announce on the funding of supported housing. We have seen a Government consultation paper on modernising the buying and selling process for homes. I hope that during this Parliament we shall achieve justice for all leaseholders. Lastly, the most knotty problem to overcome is the reform of housing benefit. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry made a significant announcement the day after the Budget that comparative information will be published for customers on mortgages and those on other credit.

That might sound like a list of positive measures, but there is no reason for complacency. Last year there were 59,700 mortgage repossessions and 31,000 households in the social and private rented sector suffered eviction orders. Homeless households continue to present themselves to local authorities at a rate of 100,000 a year. Hidden homelessness is probably much greater.

Against that background, spending on housing has been encouraging, but not great. In revenue terms, Government spending on local authorities and registered social landlords is about £2 billion a year. Housing benefit costs the Government about £11 billion a year. Income support mortgage interest payments cost the Government about £500 million a year. MIRAS will cost the Government £1.4 billion next year. On top of that, the capital receipts initiative will raise £5 billion for spending during this Parliament. The comprehensive spending review brought £3.9 billion extra for the next three years. However, it is a pity that the announcement of the end of MIRAS does not coincide with an announcement on additional resources for housing.

My pessimism increased when I read the weekend news reports that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister is leading the drive to reduce spending on housing benefit. I hope that the Chief Secretary will deal with that point when he replies to the debate. We all expect the crackdown on housing benefit fraud to continue, but I hope that the Green Paper also leads to several desirable outcomes for those at the sharp end of reduced investment in housing. The attack on homelessness that was set out in the social exclusion unit policy on rough sleepers should be driven home relentlessly. I want wider choice to enable people to have the housing that they want. That means that local authorities and registered social landlords will have to build more homes. We need greater flexibility of tenures. I sincerely hope that there will be greater provision of social housing in rural areas. I also hope that housing finance will be reformed to end the current labyrinthine systems. We need more transparency, so that we can see where we get value for money.

I hope that there will be a change to housing benefit so that it supports the Government's welfare-to-work policies rather than hampering them. We need changes that protect the lowest income households from the risk of losing their home. Those are the developments that I hope for in the housing policy Green Paper later this year. I urge the House to ensure that housing policy gets its fair share of time in this place, reflecting the priority that I believe that the public give to it.

Finally, I should like to stray from the subject of housing to a more general consideration of the effect of the Budget. The hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) rightly identified that—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I am afraid that the hon. Gentleman's time is up.

7.17 pm

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): I am pleased to follow the hon. Member for Stafford (Mr. Kidney), because housing is very important. I shall deal later with the need for adequate resources for housing renovation, which is a considerable problem in many areas, particularly the old industrial areas.

The Budget is a parson's egg that pretends to be an Easter egg. It is, to say the least, a scrambled egg. It is difficult to see the various parts of any egg that has been scrambled so comprehensively; only after adequate scrutiny do bits of the egg become more apparent. As matters become clearer, the worst parts of the parson's egg will become more evident.

There are some measures in the Budget that everyone welcomes, including the winter allowance, the provision to help small businesses and the support for renewable energy. However, there is a fundamental dishonesty in the way in which the Budget has been put together—or at least in the way in which it has been projected. We heard the Chancellor predicting increasing current surpluses year on year. The Red Book shows increases in public expenditure of £30 billion or £40 billion a year. The Prime Minister has claimed that there is a £4.5 billion net tax cut. Those three factors cannot simultaneously be true. They do not add up. We are comparing different aspects of the figures that are not comparable. That will catch up with the Government sooner or later.

There appears to be a fundamental shift in new Labour's philosophy away from an emphasis on public services towards the Tory policy of lower direct taxes. We do not find that attractive. The proposed reduction in income tax from 23 to 22 per cent. will cost £2.2 billion. That money could have been better spent on other areas. To compensate for that, indirect taxes are being raised by enough to reduce the national debt. However, there is a higher calling for that money than using it to reduce the national debt.

If every Member of the House put his hand on his heart, he would say that it was difficult to remember people coming to his constituency surgeries over the past two years to press him for a reduction in the standard rate of income tax. Equally, he would know that, in every surgery, every week, people asked for assistance with

student fees or grants, help for pensioners and disabled people, improvements to the health service and increased expenditure on housing renovation.

Spending is required on a plethora of desperately needed services. The £2 billion represented by a reduction of 1p in income tax could have been much better spent on those matters. That would be the priority of my constituents, and we would rather that the £1.8 billion used to introduce the 10 per cent. tax rate had taken people out of tax altogether.

The proportion of gross domestic product represented by general Government expenditure is still 1 per cent. below the level under the last Tory Government. In 1996-97, the figure was 40.4 per cent. For the coming year, it is projected to be 39.4 per cent. That 1 per cent. difference represents £8 billion, which is needed for health, education, housing and other services in my constituency. It would have been much better had that money been used to avoid taking £700 million a year away from disabled people, as is implicit in the Welfare Reform and Pensions Bill.

I wish to refer to the way in which the Budget will impact on rural areas, such as mine. The great increase in petrol prices will be the last straw for many rural areas, particularly those areas where there are low incomes. In the western part of Wales—the old counties of Gwynedd and Dyfed, for example—income per head stands at 75 per cent. of European GDP per head. In these scattered communities, people must travel far to find work and to find shops. The increased fuel charges will mean increased costs in the shops, exacerbating the problems in rural areas in a way that could have been avoided. This year, it is one step too far.

We need some thinking on how to improve transport and to get transport that is environmentally acceptable for rural areas, rather than using a tax mechanism that hits the poorest hardest, and makes it more difficult for them to find work.

I am concerned also about the effect of the Budget on the parity of the pound. My worry is that the value of the pound will remain too high. We know what that has done to manufacturing, tourism and agriculture—all three of which are the bases of the economy in my area. The Bank of England guidelines need to be broadened so that employment, as well as inflation, is taken on board.

How will the Budget help the economy of the poorest areas? I am thinking of those areas awaiting an announcement on objective 1 status within the new EU structural funds—an announcement which may come later this month, although it may be delayed until May. Are we to get objective 1 status for the western part of Wales and the old coalfield areas? That is justified, as Wales has the lowest GDP of any country or region in Britain, but it has not yet had objective 1 status. To take advantage, it will be necessary to get matched funding—as will be the case for Merseyside, South Yorkshire or Cornwall.

Unless there is additional Treasury money, in terms of the EU additionality rule, to provide that matched funding—or at least a good proportion of it, as we cannot look to the private or voluntary sectors to raise more than a small proportion—we will not be in a position to take up the objective 1 funding that may be available. Between 2000 and 2006, as much as £1.5 billion to £2 billion may be available for Wales, and equal sums may be available for the other areas to which I have referred; yet we will not be able to take it up if we cannot find the matched funding.

The Treasury has consistently refused to show a willingness to find that matched funding, and we need a statement that the Budget's provisions are adequate to meet those requirements. The money is needed to increase living standards and incomes per head in some of the poorest areas of these islands.

Equally, we need a statement on the implications of the Budget in terms of regional assistance. We know that the Department of Trade and Industry is reconsidering its regional map, and we need to know how that will work, what assistance will be available for companies and whether those companies in objective 1 areas will be eligible for full development area status. Again, that will have implications for the Treasury and for the Budget.

In Wales, the Budget will be judged on how it helps to create new jobs; at present, we are losing jobs. The Budget will be judged on how it helps to increase GDP per head; it is not clear how that challenge will be met. It will be judged on how it secures greater social fairness and equity; there are some small moves in the Budget towards that, but I would have liked more far-reaching moves. There is a question also about the way in which the Budget will sustain and develop effective public services, and that is where the priorities have been wrong.

There is much that remains to be proven in the Budget. When the National Assembly assumes responsibility in Wales from 6 May, these questions will come home to roost, and we will have to live with the consequences of an inadequate Budget for this year.

7.26 pm

Dr. Desmond Turner (Brighton, Kemptown): I must take issue with the curmudgeonly remarks of Opposition Members about what was a carefully crafted Budget. Officially, we are not supposed to call it a redistributive Budget, but it is wonderful to see how many people at the lower end of the income scale are benefiting from it—people who, throughout 18 years of Conservative government, were robbed year after year by Tory Chancellors, who took money directly out of their pockets and gave it to higher-income earners. This Budget has reversed that process without skinning anybody. That is quite an achievement, on which I commend the Chancellor.

The Chancellor has proposed measures that will underpin growth and stability within the British economy. It is a totally different kind of Budget—it is integrated, and hangs together—from those we were used to from Tory Chancellors, which might have been written on the back of a fag packet.

The first matter which I wish to raise is not remotely concerned with social security, for which I apologise—it is the climate change levy. I wonder how consistent the scale of the levy is with the £50 million identified for promoting the use of alternative and renewable sources for producing energy. Government policy is that we should be aiming to produce 10 per cent. of our energy from renewable sources. However, the Budget proposes that 3 per cent. of the money to be taken by the climate change levy should promote replacement by renewable sources. I wonder whether the Chancellor will wish to review that matter in future Budgets, as a further

[Dr. Desmond Turner]

stimulation of the commercial advantage to producers using renewable sources would help to achieve that policy aim.

The implications of the royal commission's excellent report on continuing care for the elderly will have a considerable price tag. The royal commission tackled a problem that had defied some of the best brains in the country, and tried to find a rational answer to the totally unsustainable situation left to us by the implementation of the care in the community legislation in 1993, taking the burden of domiciliary or residential home care for the elderly away from the Exchequer and handing it to local government, with inadequate resources, making individuals pay, even if their means were modest.

The transfer of responsibility was the worst poisoned chalice ever received by local government from central Government. I was involved in implementing the change in my local council, and it was an horrendous job. Many stresses and injustices were exposed. It got to the point where there were so many problems that in some areas there was a race between the undertaker and the social worker; sometimes the undertaker won because there were not sufficient resources. Local government was made to do a deeply unpleasant job of rationing which it was not set up to do.

If we adopt the royal commission's main recommendations, we will return to the principle to which we have adhered for most of the post-war years—of the state paying for the care of elderly people. There is a great deal of justice in that. The report is excellent in its analysis and demonstrates conclusively that there is no way in which the problems can be tackled through private insurance—the figures simply do not stack up, and the premiums would be insupportable—but that, if the burden is spread across the state and paid for from general revenues, the system will be sustainable, affordable and just.

It is essential that the Government adopt the principal recommendation that personal care, as opposed to board and lodging, be paid for from general revenues. That has a cost, which the royal commission estimated at between £800 million and £1.2 billion a year. I do not have total confidence in those estimates, because they seem to be calculated from the premise of existing service levels, which I know are inadequate.

The eligibility criteria are unsustainably tight, and some extraordinary things have happened. In some authorities, before a person can receive a care package or residential placement they have to wait for someone else to die. There is an extraordinary policy of one out, one in. I do not know of a social services authority whose community care budget is not overspent, however harshly it rations the care that it delivers.

A more realistic assessment of the likely cost of providing an adequate and sustainable service would be £2 billion. Given my right hon. Friend the Chancellor's magnificent capacity for finding money in the back pocket, that is peanuts, but it has to be found. Society can and must afford it. We must find the means. A society may be judged by the way in which it treats its sick and elderly, and we must face up to that challenge.

One way in which extra revenue could be raised, should it be necessary—drastic measures may not be needed—is to reconsider the ceiling on national insurance contributions, which was set when marginal rates of taxation on high earners were extremely punitive. Was there not a time after the war when the income tax rate was 19s 6d in the pound? In those days, there was some justification for capping national insurance contributions.

I am not making specific suggestions, but I ask my right hon. Friend the Chancellor to re-examine the national insurance system. If the cap were removed, the blow could be softened by reducing the percentage contribution, but making it payable across the whole income spectrum. It is just a thought that—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman's time is up.

7.36 pm

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): Last year's Budget was a triumph of style over substance. In this year's Budget, the Chancellor has progressed in the former and regressed in the latter. I want to focus on tax, regulation and tobacco smuggling, for their handling of which the Government deserve a triple condemnation.

It is clear that Ministers believe that the British people are taxed too little, although they did not say that before the general election. The Labour party manifesto explicitly stated:

"How and what governments tax sends clear signals about the economic activities they believe should be encouraged or discouraged, and the values they wish to entrench in society."

From the record of his first three Budgets, the Chancellor has given a people's performance of a very curious sort. They have been people's Budgets: people who have mortgages, people who are married, people who own cars, people who put petrol in cars, people who have pensions, people who acquire savings, people who buy houses and people who run businesses all face a higher tax burden as a direct consequence of the Government's decisions.

Let us scotch once and for all the absurd untruth peddled by the Prime Minister at Question Time last week that the Budget represents a net tax cut of £4.5 billion. It does nothing of the kind. Anatole Kaletsky is not ordinarily a supporter of the Conservative party, but in *The Times* he described that prime ministerial utterance as a straightforward untruth.

By the end of this Parliament, there will be an additional £40.7 billion in tax and regulatory costs. In the coming financial year alone, the tax burden will be £7.1 billion higher as a result of the Chancellor's decisions. The cumulative impact of his Budgets is that, at the end of this Parliament, people will pay about £19 billion a year more than at the end of the previous Parliament. That is the reality, as distinct from the propaganda with which Ministers regularly favour us.

I want to draw attention to two especially acute and serious examples. The first is the savage increase in excise duty on petrol. That will hit people in rural areas especially hard, not least in my Buckingham constituency, and my constituents have not been slow to make their protests heard about the Chancellor's move. I quote from one letter from an 81-year-old constituent, Mrs. Zettl, from Buckingham, who wrote to me:

"Those of us who are lucky enough to run a car suffer so much from the constant increase in petrol. Without my car I would have to get rid of my dogs as I cannot take them for a walk in a built-up area. I would have no social life as my friends are scattered round

the villages. At 81 years old I am too old to bicycle or wait in draughty unheated bus shelters for buses which run at the wrong time, if at all, and in this violent age, I do not like to walk in lonely places in the dark."

She adds that she works voluntarily for two small charities, neither of which can afford to reimburse her petrol costs, and in pursuing her duties for them she is obliged to visit people in remote and outlying areas. She is the sort of person who will be affected. She has been clobbered by the Budget and she is very angry about it. The gas guzzling Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions may not be too bothered and the Chancellor may be insouciant about the effects of what he has done, but my constituent is angry and she has not hesitated to tell me so.

The second significant measure that will be damaging is the colossal rise in national insurance contributions for self-employed people, amounting to £240 million a year. The Government have the brass neck to introduce that damaging change under the chapter in the Red Book entitled "Increasing Employment Opportunity". This is a tax-raising Government and £533 million of the additional tax take during this Parliament will be paid by the people of the county of Buckinghamshire.

It is clear that the Government believe that this country is under-regulated. Before the election, the then shadow Chancellor said that Labour would not impose burdensome regulations on business because it understood that successful businesses must keep costs down. The right hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson) said:

"we have no intention of introducing any legislation that presents a burden on business and reduces the competitiveness of British firms."—[*Official Report*, 25 November 1998; Vol. 321, c. 214.]

But that is what the Government have done. Some 2,400 additional regulations have been introduced. For example, the fiendishly complex working time directive regulations alone take up 72 pages of A4 paper and the national minimum wage regulations, until amended, take up 112 pages of A4 paper.

What have Ministers had to say about regulation during the Budget debates? There was nothing about it in the Chancellor's speech, nor in the statement on competition by the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry or in his 36-minute speech on Wednesday in the continuation of the Budget debate. Instead, he talked about the establishment of the Small Business Service. The biggest service that the Chancellor of the Exchequer could do for small businesses is to get out of the way, let them make their products, market their products, sell their products and be successful.

To cap it all, the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry said to the House, in what should have been a joke but apparently was not:

"I am reviewing arrangements for business rescues".—[*Official Report*, 10 March 1999; Vol. 327, c. 367.]

That might be wise, in view of the likely exponential increase in the number of candidates for rescue. Small businesses will need rescuing from the sea of regulation under this Government, which is now deeper and more hazardous than any that British companies have previously had to negotiate. The Government are increasing regulation.

Finally, I turn to the subject of tobacco smuggling. The tobacco industry in this country is important and it yields substantial revenue of some £10.25 billion a year, £8.5 billion of which is excise duty. The Government are pursuing a damaging and ineffective policy. In opposition, the hon. Member for Bristol, South (Dawn Primarolo), who is now Paymaster General, castigated the then Conservative Government for closing their eyes to the implications of their tobacco taxation policy which, she said, was providing opportunities for tobacco smuggling. She said that the Labour party had made clear its views on the health issues involved, but the problem could not be tackled by taxation. Now she has performed a complete tergiversation. The effect is that the Exchequer is suffering to the tune of £1.5 billion a year, foreign tobacco industries are prospering and international crime syndicates are thriving at the expense of British industry.

The Budget will not create jobs, it will destroy them. It will not boost competitiveness, it will sap it. It will not make this country richer, it will make it poorer. It is a bad, thoughtless and damaging Budget. Above all, for those of us concerned about standards in public life, it is a dishonest Budget and it deserves to be rejected by the House tonight.

7.46 pm

Kali Mountford (Colne Valley): I had intended to confine my remarks to the effects of the budget on women and children; however, having heard some of the comments in the debate, I wish to widen my scope a little, even though time is short. Listening to some of the contributions from Conservative Members, one would think that they had completely forgotten their record in Government. As the hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr. Duncan Smith) was speaking, I remembered the many cuts his Government made in pensions in general, and SERPS in particular, and in help for people on income support. I was alarmed by the hon. Gentleman's comments on pensions and the help that the Government are giving to pensioners, because he seemed to reject some of the boldest and most imaginative changes to pensions that we have seen since the war.

In particular, Conservative Members have mentioned the minimum pension guarantee. In my constituency, in the local authority area of Kirklees, 210 couples and 920 single pensioners are on income support. All those pensioners will benefit from the increase in the minimum pension guarantee. Conservative Members have not told the House what they would do. They seem to be saying that they would take away that money from pensioners, but we did not hear what they would do for pensioners or what their record was when in office. I would like to hear an explanation of why they did nothing about the uptake of income support. When they discussed what was wrong with the minimum pension guarantee, their only resort was the shortfall in the take-up of pensions. It is true that the second state pension, when it is introduced, will get around the problem of uptake, but we need to do something about it today.

This Government are doing something about the 23 pilot areas examining the problem of take-up of pensions. However, when I visited a Benefits Agency office recently, one member of staff asked me, "Why is there so much talk about the poorest pensioners? After all, we can do nothing for them." While we have that attitude, we will not be able to do anything, but at least we now have a Government who have started to reverse that trend.

We also heard some talk about philosophy from Conservative Members. However, the right hon. Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack) gave us a list of measures, not

[Kali Mountford]

a philosophy. This is a Budget for the long term, but it is not a philosophy. It is a set of measures. The right hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) also said that this was not a Budget of philosophy, but he referred to particular measures that he would like to see. In my opinion, the philosophy of the Budget is its implementation of the values of this new Labour Government. Those values consist of support for people who need it at the time when they need it most, and in whatever situation they find themselves. The philosophy is an old one: help for those who need it most, and contribution from those most able to make it.

Of course, the people most able to contribute are those who are in work. The Budget encourages work, enabling work to flourish. In considering how to make work pay, we must first think about jobs, and this is a Budget for jobs. The textile industry has declined over the past 15 years in my constituency, so measures for research and development and for product development are of great benefit. One problem with the textile industry is that its product is often not wanted in the marketplace. Any help for investment in new capital or for research and development must benefit my constituents.

My constituency has a flourishing small business sector, but I would like it to flourish further. The measures to help small businesses to start up and to develop must create a trend towards new jobs. My constituency is in a rural area, and new jobs will greatly benefit people who live in large travel-to-work areas. The extra £20 million a year for rural transport will also benefit them because levels of pay mean that many cannot afford a car. People depend on rural buses and trains, the kind of service completely undermined by the previous Government's privatisation programme.

My main subject, however, is women and children. I wanted to hear some gratitude from Conservative Members for the help offered through child benefit. However, I am not surprised that they do not welcome either universal benefits or the increase in them. The hon. Member for Gainsborough (Mr. Leigh) provided an example of their thoughts during the Second Reading of the Welfare Reform and Pensions Bill, when he said:

"Why do we hand out child benefits to everyone, irrespective of income? Why do we not make parents responsible? Why do we allow young people to become a charge on the state?"—[*Official Report*, 23 February 1999; Vol. 326, c. 268-69.]

That remark signals the philosophy of Conservative Members. They talk about marriage as though it were the only thing that a Budget should protect. However, the main feature of a family that requires our protection is children.

Marriage is a good institution, and I support it—I am, after all, actively engaged in it myself. However, I did not marry in order to get the married couple's tax relief or any other allowance. I got married because I was in a happy partnership and I wanted to continue it and to build a safe and secure family. Families consist of children—the focus of marriage, and the focus of the Budget. Vulnerable children deserve society's support, and they should be able to expect it. An increase in child benefit helps both mothers and families. In particular, it helps the poorest children, and surely everyone must welcome that.

Also welcome must be increases in the children's tax credit, which replaces the married couple's allowance and which shifts the focus of society on to a philosophy that we should support—the philosophy of the family. The country's resources are being targeted at those who most need them—the most vulnerable and those least able to have a say in what society spends its money on.

If we should not spend our money on children, what does deserve our resources? Children, especially those who live in poverty, should be our focus. Consider a child's progress from birth. The Government are investing more money in the maternity benefit denied to the poorest women for too long. A woman on an income of only £30 a week will be entitled now to maternity benefit, and that must help her health and her expectation of returning to a job and a proper income. It must be welcome.

I am surprised that Conservative Members have not welcomed our support for the child. Nor have I heard them welcome sure start for children. Yet children's early years are those in which they must benefit the most to thrive. No child will thrive in school who has suffered total deprivation—not even a proper diet—in his or her early years. Sure start gives mothers and children an opportunity to flourish. The Government's philosophy is clear in their focus on children, and I hope that the House will support that philosophy.

7.56 pm

Dr. Vincent Cable (Twickenham): The nature of Budgets has changed radically in recent years. Until recently, they were about the problems of managing boom and bust and about macro-economics. By a combination of good luck and, to a degree, good management, the monetary and fiscal outlook is more stable, and the character of the Budget has changed. Budgets now are essentially about changing people's behaviour—using taxes to encourage savings, investment, long-term investment, environmentally sustainable behaviour, hard work, getting back to work and so on.

That is all very well up to a point. Some tax incentives perform a useful role. The Budget contained small measures that have not really been noticed, such as the lifting of employees' national insurance contributions at the bottom end as an incentive to work. The Government have not had a great deal of credit for some positive initiatives, such as incentives for the over-50s to go back to work. Good behavioural changes are being introduced through budgetary means. However, the problem of that approach to a Budget by a hyperactive Chancellor is that the tax system is becoming increasingly complex and full of contradictions. I should like to highlight just a few in my 10 minutes.

First, it is clear that the Government understand the importance of marginal rates of tax as an incentive. That is why we no longer live in a world in which there are 98p rates at the margin on savings and unearned income. That is why the Government claim to disapprove of the Liberal Democrat proposal for a income tax rate of 50p in the pound on taxable income over £100,000. They argue that it would be a disincentive.

The Government do not seem to appreciate, however, that the Budget is creating high rates of marginal tax at key rates in the tax range. There is a specific point—about £28,000 to £30,000—at which a single earner in a family with children will start to pay the 40 per cent. higher rate of tax, but will simultaneously lose the child's tax credit, which tapers out at that point. That person will also pay a higher rate of employee's national insurance contributions because of the lifting of the upper limit.

Such people are the type about whom the Government claim to be concerned—the middle-income middle managers, heads of schools or junior doctors—but who will pay very high marginal rates of tax. I believe that those high rates have crept in unintended, but they result from complicated over-manipulation of the system.

Another example may illustrate the same point. There were big cheers on Budget day when the Government introduced a 10p rate of corporation tax. The right hon. Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack) has already made the point that that rate is illusory in that it applies only to the first £10,000. However, the situation is more complicated even than that. Between £10,000 and £50,000, the marginal rate will be higher than the rate that applied previously—it will be 22.5 per cent. rather than 20 per cent.

The disincentive to risk and entrepreneurship is being increased among precisely the type of people whom the Government are supposedly trying to help. It has been done by accident, but the various interventions and incentives being given through tax mean that practices such as those are becoming progressively greater.

A second example that, at first sight, appears to be a bold and positive innovation in the Budget, is the new energy tax, which will come into effect after a delay. In principle, many of us like the idea of taxing pollution and using the revenues to offset against the cost of employment. Having helped to write the Liberal Democrat party's policy on the subject five years ago, I am tempted to claim that imitation is a form of flattery. However, when one looks at the detail—or the detail that there is, as the Red Book does not give much—the measure is clearly not imitation. The tax has the potential for enormous problems, which will come back to haunt the Government in time.

Most people who have applied themselves to designing carbon taxes say that, first and foremost, such a tax must be applied upstream and kept simple: tax a barrel of crude oil or gas at the upstream end, tax a tonne of coal from the mine, and let the market do the rest. Tax energy once. The Government desperately want to avoid being accused of taxing household energy, so they have introduced their carbon tax at the downstream end. Every company, large and small, will be taxed on its energy use, which could become a nightmare. There will be numerous points of taxation and many companies run different types of business—some will be charged at a higher and some at a lower rate.

Consider the practical problems that will arise when the Government try to tax electricity use in a typical company—electricity is the main form of energy used by many. Uncomfortably, electrons do not arrive with little labels, saying, "I come from a nuclear power plant," or, "I come from a coal plant," which one can hand to the Inland Revenue. Electricity will be charged at a uniform rate. People who use electricity from renewable sources or gas plants, which use relatively little coal, will be charged at the same rate as people who use electricity from coal-burning stations, and that is ludicrous. The purpose of the carbon tax, which is hailed as an effort to contribute to preventing climate change, will be nullified.

Furthermore, the Government state in the Red Book that energy-intensive industries will be taxed less heavily than others. The situation is potentially ludicrous: companies will be penalised for using renewable energy and for not being energy intensive, which is the opposite of what the tax is designed to achieve. All the problems stem from the attempt to hedge around households and protect them from energy taxation.

The third point is the impact of the Budget on savings. I want the Government to answer a simple question at some point during this debate. Have they worked out the impact of this Budget on personal savings? I had hoped that, as the Secretary of State for Social Security opened the debate today, he would have said what the Government propose to do about the savings disregard in the social security system, something that is a massive disincentive to saving for people at the bottom end of the scale.

At present, the Inland Revenue and the Department of Social Security assume that savings can produce yields of about 10 per cent., and that is totally unrealistic. The savings disregard needs to be lifted enormously if people are to be encouraged to save. We have seen no Government initiative on that.

The right hon. Member for Fylde described how the 20p rate applies to small savings from unearned—that is, interest—income. Next year, people will be hit by the double whammy. They will be hit by the 20 per cent. rate on small interest income combined with the loss, from last year, of the tax credits on dividends—that was one of the most deplorable features of last year's Budget. The Government even acknowledged the fact that they had made a mistake, but were technically unable to unravel it.

Low-income savers will be hit by both measures at once. Also, pensioners and small savers will find the savings tax regime complicated. Those who have interest income from building societies on top of their state pension will be paying their 20p. Another group who have superannuation schemes from their companies will be paying 10p and 23p. Some pensioners will face a combination of the two. All pensioners, however lowly, will be strongly advised to get a tax accountant to sort all of that out.

That is one of the central lessons of the Budget. A whole set of measures, which in isolation might be well conceived, when put together will create a nightmare of complexity in which the only ultimate beneficiaries will be accountants rather than the taxpayer.

8.4 pm

Mr. Stephen Hesford (Wirral, West): So far, the debate has been confusing. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Colne Valley (Kali Mountford). It begs the question, is the debate about measures or philosophy? I want to deal with the philosophy behind the Budget.

Some members of the Labour party—I certainly know some in my constituency party—ask whether this is the first Budget of a real Labour Government. I can understand why. I ask the House and the wider public to look at the Budget as the third Budget of this new Labour Government. One has to see it in that context, not taken out of context, or fiddled about with as, with respect, the hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) fiddled about with various measures. He did not seem coherent about what he wanted from policy.

The right hon. Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack) asked what was the coherence and purpose behind the Budget, and that is the question that I hope to answer. When my right hon. Friend was created Chancellor, he found a deficit of

[Mr. Stephen Hesford]

£28 billion—a public spending black hole. He found that social security spending was heading out of control, much because of fraud. Those are the issues that we have begun to tackle in a series of Budgets and other measures. What he found created a difficulty. For the first two years, we had to live within inherited spending plans. There were severe restraints in certain areas, which caused alarm to Labour Members. The public asked what the new Labour Government were about.

The history of previous Labour Governments—certainly those of recent memory in the 1970s—was optimism when the party came to power, optimistic social policy spending at the beginning of the Government, followed by the brake, which was applied half way through the term in office or towards the end in a storm of economic uncertainty. This country could not have repeated that and that is what we had to avoid at the beginning of this Parliament. I suggest that we are doing so.

That is the backdrop to what my right hon. Friend the Chancellor calls prudent management of the economy—the traditional Labour aim. The history of the party has not, of course, always been favourable in that regard. We have not always attained economic stability. We are doing so now and we will do so for the next two to three years until the next election. The value of sterling has not crashed. Interest rates are falling and we are weathering the storm of the south-east Asian difficulties while 40 per cent. of the world is in recession. Inflation is stabilising at the target rate of 2.5 per cent., Government borrowing is under control and coming down at less than 40 per cent. of gross domestic product and is due to fall in the next two years at an annual rate of 2.5 per cent. per annum. That is stability and it is the backdrop to the Budget.

As Labour Governments—and the country—have found to their cost, the Labour party cannot achieve anything if there is an economic crash or a perceived or actual lack of economic confidence and that it is then voted out of office. If we are out of office, we cannot put in place the measures that many of my right hon. and hon. Friends have already mentioned.

I want to put the Chancellor's measures in the context of his Labour predecessors and set the scene about what has gone wrong in the past with a brief review of four Labour Chancellors. The response of the Labour Chancellor in the 1929 Government to the economic crash was simply to ask for cuts in unemployment benefit. That split the party, and it took almost a generation for it to recover from that mismanagement. Stafford Cripps in the 1945–50 Government applied a credit squeeze and rationing from 1948. Roy Jenkins, now Lord Jenkins, applied a credit squeeze in 1969 and 1970. In the 1974–79 Government, Denis Healey, now Lord Healey, famously said that he would tax the rich until their pips squeaked. Those measures were attempted, but we ended up going to the International Monetary Fund cap in hand, followed by the winter of discontent.

In summary, two former Labour Chancellors ended up in different parties, while two, indirectly or directly, split the party. Three presided over financial crises, Lord Jenkins having taken over from Lord Callaghan, who devalued in 1967. In effect, all lost the following election, two losing majorities of 96 and around 140. That is not good for the country and certainly not good for the party. There is a coherent philosophy behind many of the measures that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor outlined in this and previous Budgets.

What do the Opposition say about the Budget? The Liberal Democrats' bladder continues to ail them: they want to spend the 1p again and again. Unfortunately, that condition is often accompanied by excessive wind, some of which we heard tonight.

The Tories are against the rise in petrol duty. The Conservative party is the polluter's friend. They are hypocritical into the bargain because it was they who set the measures in train in the previous Government. The Tories are against the £40 billion increase in spending on the health service and schools. What do they want to put in its place? That is a rhetorical question. They are against the new deal. Many of my constituents across the range—the young and single mothers, and now the disabled and the over-50s—are benefiting from it.

The Tories ask where the £8 billion that the Chancellor was able to save against previously forecast social security spending came from. It came in part from the Government's success in putting people back to work: 400,000 jobs created since 1997. Thousands of people in my constituency continue to benefit from those measures. It is an £8 billion improvement on what we would have got under the previous Government because they would not have embarked on those measures. They would not have had the money to play with. That is how my right hon. Friend will pay for many of the measures on families and the elderly, to which I shall come shortly.

Conservative Members want to continue their policy of grinding the 6 million senior citizens on basic pay, many on income support, into poverty. They do not want the linked minimum pension—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael J. Martin): Order.

8.15 pm

Mr. John Randall (Uxbridge): Last week's Budget was greeted by Labour Members with much enthusiasm, but rather like a boozy night out, what seemed like a good idea at the time has been followed by a nasty hangover. The Red Book makes less than pleasant reading. All Chancellors tend to gloss over the bad news and hide the detail, but this one has turned the practice into a veritable art form. That makes it more difficult for the ordinary public fully to grasp the overall implications of the Budget for themselves and for the economy.

In opposition, the Government said that they wanted to simplify the tax system. That would have reduced the earnings of accountants and lawyers and made the cost of government clearer to taxpayers. Unfortunately, the opposite has happened. There are now no fewer than 54 personal tax rates compared with four 10 years ago. We have become more reliant than ever on experts to filter out the truth.

Let me turn to the Budget's consequences for some of the things that directly impinge on many people's everyday lives. It has made petrol the most expensive in the developed world when oil prices have fallen to an historic low. Since 1997, pump prices have risen by 15 per cent. while the price of crude has fallen by a third. The average price of petrol in Britain is 68.6p per litre, compared with 15.9p in America and 41.1p in Greece.

I know that the Chancellor has defended that as an environmental measure, but, sadly, he is treating the motorist as a cash cow for the Treasury.

Since the above-inflation duty escalator was introduced in 1993, car traffic has grown by about 2 per cent. a year. It is failing in its primary function of reducing the number of journeys made. Millions of drivers depend on their cars. This tightening of the screw particularly affects the elderly, the disabled and those who live in the country. Such people have no alternative to using the car. There will be Labour Members who say that the Government are only continuing the strategy of their predecessors, but if something clearly is not working, it is not working, whoever was responsible for its introduction. In case I am accused of being too partisan, may I say that I welcome the tax break for employers and employees who encourage use of public transport? I believe that it is time for more carrot and less stick.

In addition to the high cost of petrol, several concerns have been raised about the decision to provide a £55 road tax discount for the 8 per cent. of cars with engines below 1100 cu cm. According to the Automobile Association, many such cars have less environmentally friendly engines than bigger, more modern cars. That will give drivers a perverse incentive to hold on to less eco-friendly cars. An AA spokesman said:

"This £55 could mean the difference between scrapping the car and putting it through one more MOT."

What at first sight seems to be an environmentally friendly measure turns out on closer examination to have precisely the opposite effect.

On top of the high cost of petrol for the ordinary motorist, there is the increased burden on the road haulage business. The vehicle excise duty increase will push the duty on a 38-tonne, five-axle lorry from £3,310 to £5,750 a year, compared with £296 in Spain, £459 in France and £651 in Holland. The European average is £1,100, compared with £5,750 here in the UK.

It is not difficult to see the impact that such large tax differentials are having on our road haulage industry. British hauliers currently carry 1.65 billion tonnes of goods a year—about 81 per cent. of domestic freight. That can only be threatened by the punitive tax regime being created by the Government.

The Road Haulage Association has launched flagging out packages to its members, to encourage them to register their vehicles abroad. The Freight Transport Association has warned that up to 53,000 jobs could be at risk as a result of the combined increases in duty on diesel and excise. Already, some estimates put the loss in revenue to the Treasury at £400 million, rising to £1 billion by 2002, as a result of hauliers buying their fuel in mainland Europe. The combination of taxes and fuel duty is slowly but steadily strangling the road haulage industry.

Another sector of the economy that is suffering is the tobacco and drinks trade. Duty on tobacco and alcohol continues to fan the flames of the black market for cigarettes and alcoholic drinks. It is estimated that 1.5 million pints of beer are smuggled into the UK every day, which damages the long-term prospects for the brewing industry, especially small independent brewers. High duties are helping to fuel the black market and attract the involvement of organised crime. It would be helpful if the Minister gave the House some indication of the long-term approach to tobacco and alcohol duty.

It may be that the case against tobacco is a foregone conclusion; the only problem is that the current strategy appears not to be working. As for alcohol, and barring this year's freeze in duty apart from on sparkling cider—a matter that was ignored in the Chancellor's speech—the general upward trend in duty will continue. Most people enjoy a glass of beer or wine, but resent having to pay so much in duty while the unscrupulous engage in criminal activity through smuggling.

Why should the Government continue to use the drinker as a sitting duck, squeezing more and more from every pint of beer or glass of wine drunk? It might not be politically correct or fashionable to champion the British drinker or driver, but given that many of our constituents fall into those categories, I feel that it is right and proper to air their concerns tonight.

8.22 pm

Mr. Paul Goggins (Wythenshawe and Sale, East): The principal challenge facing any Member who speaks at nearly 8.30 pm on the fourth day of the Budget debate is to find something different to say or a new point to make. I have concluded that that is probably impossible, although I have noticed that those who speak today have one advantage, which is that they speak after the weekend, having had a chance to get away from the politics and punditry of Westminster and hear what their constituents think about the Budget.

I shall talk about two particular groups of people who have spoken to me over the past few days while I have been in my constituency. The first group are the pensioners whom I met on Friday and Saturday. They are fairly typical of the 21,000 pensioners who live in my constituency. Many will benefit from the Government's commitment to uprate the minimum income guarantee in line with earnings. It is worth remembering that the single rate of £78 and the couple's rate of £121 announced in the Budget mean that there has been an increase of nearly £10 for single pensioners and £16 for pensioner couples on the equivalent rate when the Labour Government entered office.

Some of the pensioners in my constituency will benefit from the tax changes, including the new tax threshold which raised 200,000 pensioners out of tax altogether; but all the pensioners to whom I spoke were agreed on one point: the high point of the Budget was the £100 extra help with their heating costs that they will receive next year and in subsequent years. They did not expect such an announcement and they were absolutely delighted to hear it. Pensioners in my constituency view that, along with free eye tests, the reduction in VAT on fuel and the extra money that they know is going to the national health service, as a clear indication that the Government are serious when they say that they want to help today's pensioners as well as set a framework for future pensioners.

The second group are the parents and teachers in the three schools in my constituency that I visited on Friday. At each school, I met parents who were delighted with the announcement on child benefit—from next year their oldest child will qualify for £15 each week, and each subsequent child for £10 each week. Likewise, teachers were delighted with the announcement that every school is to receive £2,000 next year to purchase new books. The drive to literacy is extremely important and teachers are crucial to that effort, but without new books they cannot succeed in the task.

[Mr. Paul Goggins]

Like other hon. Members, I read the more abstract analyses of the Budget over the weekend. As I mulled over some of the millions of words that have been written about the Budget since last Tuesday, I was struck by the way in which many commentators used two words—"fairness" and "redistribution"—as though they were interchangeable. In fact, they are quite different: fairness is a value and a political objective, whereas redistribution is a method or means of achieving that political objective—at least, it can be. I say "can be" because redistribution can go in either direction, as my hon. Friend the Member for Brighton, Kemptown (Dr. Turner) said. I well remember the 1988 Budget, which took £4 billion out of benefits and fed it back through the tax system as a reward to the better-off.

That and similar policy decisions had, by the middle of the 1990s, led to one in four people in this country living in a household that had less than half the average income, and one in three children being born and brought up in poverty. By that time, with the exception of New Zealand, ours was the most unequal industrialised society in the world. The impact on the community in terms of crime and ill health was plain for all to see. It is right that progressive redistribution has been an element in the three Budgets of this Parliament, because the better-off should shoulder a fairer share of their responsibilities.

I welcome the announcements on national insurance, such as the increase in the upper earnings limit to £575 a week. I also welcome the zero rating of earnings between £64 and £87 a week, which means that many low-paid, part-time workers will receive benefits without having to make contributions for them. It is a positive step that maternity allowance is being extended to women workers earning £30 a week or more. On tax, I welcome the new 10p starting rate. No one who is working and bringing up a family will pay tax until he or she earns at least £235 a week. It is also right that higher earners will not gain from the children's tax credit, and that the maximum benefit of that new tax credit will go to those on low and middle incomes—an extra £8 a week for those groups.

Redistribution is only one method of trying to deliver fairness. Another route to fairness is better public services. The Budget makes a commitment to investing £1 billion more in information technology, in improved accident and emergency facilities in our hospitals and, crucially, in measures that will sustain community safety. It is also important to improve employment prospects. That is a focus of the Budget, which strengthens the new deal for under-25s and introduces employment credits for unemployed workers over 50. There is the minimum income guarantee for pensioners, the guarantee of £200 a week take-home pay for workers with families, and a guarantee of £170 for older workers as they move off benefit and into work.

Fairness requires not that everyone be treated the same, but that everyone is included in the equation. As *The Economist* pointed out this weekend:

"Fairness is a Brown phrase which Conservative Chancellors did not much use."

Curiously, *The Economist* also accused the Chancellor of being

"obsessed with getting people off welfare and into work."

I say three cheers for the Chancellor's obsession. Probably the most moving letter that I have received since my election to the House was from the father of a 21-year-old woman who had never had a job and lacked confidence in her own abilities. She went on new deal and is now working in a nursery. She is fulfilling her potential and contributing to society. She wanted to do both, and that is now possible through the new deal.

One of the Government's finest achievements so far is the way they have halved long-term and youth unemployment. This Budget takes us much further not only through the measures that I have mentioned, but through encouragement to small business, which will create many new jobs. The extension of benefits to lone parents for their first two weeks of employment after coming off benefit is crucial. The Budget fits neatly with many of the other initiatives that the Government are pursuing, particularly the single work-focused gateway, which reconnects to the workplace the one in five families with no one in work.

The Budget raises two long-term issues that I must mention in passing: national insurance and means-testing. The Chancellor moved in the Budget closely to align national insurance contributions and income tax. The hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) described some of those changes as complex, but I believe that they introduce greater fairness and transparency. It is right to smooth out the system in that way, but it is also right to keep the national insurance and income tax systems separate. That is necessary, first, for practical reasons—for example, most pensioners receive national insurance benefits but do not make national insurance contributions—and secondly, because keeping them separate reinforces the important connection between work, contribution, entitlement and benefit. That is especially important when we are trying to overcome barriers to work and tackle the issue of mass unemployment.

We must face the fact that we need to modernise the national insurance system. The Beveridge principle of flat-rate benefits for flat-rate contributions no longer works. Income differentials have widened and many more people in society are relatively better off. While it is important to keep the two systems apart, it is right that more progressive payments should be made.

As to means-testing, I am amazed at the bare-faced cheek of Opposition spokespeople. The previous Government introduced changes that, over 18 years, led to an increase of 5.5 million in the number of people on means-tested benefits. Some 2.3 million children were dependent on income support—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman's time has expired.

8.33 pm

Mr. Peter Brooke (Cities of London and Westminster): I declare two interests: the first that I am the father of a son who is a self-employed letter cutter and stone carver; and, secondly, that I am of pensionable age. I sympathise with the hon. Member for Wythenshawe and Sale, East (Mr. Goggins) about the hour at which we both find ourselves speaking. I made my maiden speech on this day of the Budget debate in March 1977, and I think speaking at this hour in this debate—just before the winding-up speeches—is worse than making my maiden speech.

On that occasion, I was speaking about the Budget introduced by the noble Lord Healey. I do not have a single drop of Scottish blood, which distances me somewhat from the present Chancellor, but the one eighth of my blood that is English is Yorkshire blood. I therefore say with some pride that one could always rely on the noble Lord Healey to give one bad news straight and not allow one to find it out in the watches of the night, the Red Book or in the Budget tables.

There has been some remark about the Budget—perhaps derived from the phenomenon that I have just mentioned—that it does not smell as sweet today as when the Chancellor sat down last Tuesday. The late Iain Macleod's law about Budgets—those that are well received on Budget day are less kindly regarded in the autumn—is true in this case, although the process has clearly speeded up.

In his speech in the Budget debate last week, the hon. Member for Halton (Mr. Twigg) said that it was "an excellent performance". The hon. Member for Northampton, North (Ms Keeble) called the Budget a "resounding success". The hon. Member for Lincoln (Gillian Merron) quoted the judgment in the headline "Flash Gordon", and the hon. Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Thomas) said that it was "another excellent Budget". "An outstanding Budget" was the verdict of the hon. Member for Watford (Ms Ward). The hon. Member for Croydon, Central (Mr. Davies) began:

"What a great Budget! . . . a fantastic media reception".—[*Official Report*, Wednesday 10 March 1999; Vol. 327, c. 450.]

The hon. Member for Sittingbourne and Sheppey (Mr. Wyatt) began by saying:

"I should like to say how brilliant the Budget is".—[*Official Report*, 11 March 1999; Vol. 327, c. 591.]

This week's letter column in *The Times* is led by a letter by the director general of the Freight Transport Association, signed also by the CBI, the Federation of Small Businesses, the United Road Transport Union, the British Chambers of Commerce, the National Farmers Union and the Road Haulage Association Ltd., all commenting pithily on the major disadvantages that the Budget confers on their industry. As I spent last Thursday's debate in the Standing Committee considering the Greater London Authority Bill being told by Ministers how well the new Government understand business, I shall re-read *Hansard* with the letter from the Road Haulage Association by my side.

All that said, it would be churlish not to remark on those aspects of the Budget where the Chancellor is maintaining Conservative policies. Given his reluctance to come clean and be upfront about his bad news, it should not surprise us that he makes no reference to the golden legacy that we bequeathed him which even commentators with no partiality towards our party acknowledge is the bedrock of his success. Not for him the fate of some of his Labour predecessors, to whom the hon. Member for Wirral, West (Mr. Hesford) referred, who came into office under economic conditions similar to those that, when I was working in New York, caused *The Wall Street Journal* to remark on its front page:

"The economic recession has become so severe that the mafia have had to lay off two judges in New Jersey."

Before any Labour Members intervene with their selective crib sheet, I repeat last week's observation by my hon. Friend the Member for Chichester (Mr. Tyrie) that

"Britain is the only major country to have reduced the overall burden of debt as a proportion of gross domestic production in the period from 1979 to 1997."—[*Official Report*, 11 March 1999; Vol. 327, c. 589.]

I served as a junior Treasury Minister under my noble Friend Lord Lawson of Blaby for almost four years, during which time part of the national debt was repaid by the then Government for the first time since 1968. However, an essential difference between those years and these is that my noble Friend, year after year, simplified and made clearer the tax arrangements of this land, whereas, in the three Budgets since 1997, the present Chancellor has complicated them and made them more opaque.

Throughout my four years with my noble Friend, I also served on the Budget Council of the European Union. It may be that it is euro enthusiasm that has contaminated the Treasury under the present Administration. The EU budget consisted of small programme after small programme in penny packet after penny packet. That made negotiation between the Council of Ministers and the Parliament a nightmare, because the house of cards constructed in Strasbourg was so delicate a piece of fiscal architecture that one could not withdraw a single card without bringing the whole structure slithering down on the table. As a process, it shared another characteristic with the Government's conduct of public expenditure, in that no one ever went back rigorously to test whether the programme had delivered the goods that were claimed for it.

The process was also distorted by being spread over several years. The manner in which the Government chronologically set out their expenditure and taxes may be a political paradigm, but it is a three-dimensional mathematical monkey puzzler. That may have more to do with getting a Government elected than with good government itself. Those who went on to the Terrace at lunchtime today to visit the science, engineering and technology reception will have noticed a billboard entitled "Predictions of Pressure Fluctuations over Stealth Aircraft". Had one amended "aircraft" to read "taxes", the title would still have been meaningful.

Nine months ago, we had a long, late-night debate on heritage issues in the Report stage of the Finance Bill, and the present Paymaster General made soothing noises, saying that we were wrong in predicting a flood of art treasures coming on the market because of the Bill's measures on inheritance-protected objets. It is bad luck for the Government that today should see the threatened flood returning to the pages of *The Times* at precisely the moment the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport has, in his own words, raided the lottery, thus robbing the heritage lottery fund of the capacity to keep those treasures in the country.

I want, before closing, to draw attention to one serious omission from the Budget—the issue of small and medium-sized companies not being able to get access to equity capital in the markets. The FTSE 100 is spectacularly well funded. I recall a figure of £57 billion going from the markets to our largest companies. It is now commonplace that, in about 37 of the 40 years up to the early 1990s, the small companies sector outperformed the

[Mr. Peter Brooke]

FTSE 100 share market or its equivalent, but, in nine of the past 11 years, that sector has under-performed it. However, in five of the past six years, the earnings of small companies have grown more rapidly than those of larger companies. Nor has the market under-performance come about as a result of the FTSE 100 growing more rapidly than small companies. Between 1984 and 1998, turnover of all companies in the FTSE 100 share index showed little growth in real terms. An article in the *Financial Times* a few months ago put the small company sector at its lowest relative market rating since the early 1960s.

The Bank of England, which led such valuable work on improving the financing of small companies since the last recession, is seized of the problem and its consequences and implications, but the reason for mentioning it in this debate is that attention will have to be given to capital gains tax, let alone bed and breakfasting, if we are to find a solution to the problem that I am describing. We have to find ways of increasing liquidity for small companies.

The Government should not regard my words as being a Trojan horse. In 1997, capital gains tax in the Republic of Ireland stood at 40 per cent., with tax proceeds of £131 million. In 1998, capital gains tax in the Republic was halved to 20 per cent. and proceeds jumped to £193 million, an increase of 47 per cent.

I am not surprised that the Chancellor has been able to find producer groups to applaud his penny-packet programmes. His colleague the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport had no difficulty in finding similar producer groups to applaud his raid on the lottery. I have long treasured C. S. Lewis's aphorism that, if one hears of someone going around doing good to others, one can always tell the others by their hunted look. One can always rely on producer groups not to look a gift horse in the mouth. However, that does not mean that it will be a good use of taxpayers' money or, indeed, of our money.

I began with 1977, and I reached my noble Friend Lord Lawson in the middle of my speech. In 1977, business men were taking decisions in response to the tax system. In 1987, they were taking decisions because they were the right decisions to take, in their own interests as seen by them. It is sad that, since 1997, we have been going back to tax-driven decisions—alas, the man in Whitehall never knows best.

8.42 pm

Mr. Gerald Bermingham (St. Helens, South): As someone said a moment ago, it is difficult to find something to say after all these days of debate and after having read carefully in *Hansard* what has been said, so I decided to be honest and say how I look at the Budget.

I get married and the married couple's tax allowance is removed; I buy a house and MIRAS is taken away, so I began to feel very pessimistic. But I read on, and I began to see that there was in the Budget the seedcorn of development and growth. To a constituency like mine, development and growth is the elixir of life, but we have had so little of it.

St. Helens has been a deprived area for the 16 years that I have represented it, and certainly for many years before that. We lost the glass industry, the mining industry, a large part of our chemical industry and the pharmaceutical industries. What did we have in return? Between 1983 and 1987, we got very little of anything. We were always, as it were, outside the pale. Since 1997, we have slowly begun to grow again. Slowly, we are beginning to get the development that we need, but does the Budget hurt or help? The answer is that it helps.

The Chancellor decided not to pursue the policy with regard to aggregate tax. We are grateful for that, because it would of course have hurt the glass industry. I know that there will have to be further discussions, and I understand the environmental argument on the one hand and the needs of the glass industry and other industries on the other. It is a fine balance, because what to one person can appear to be a great advance can cause pain and trouble to another.

I hope that the Government will look again at the issue of diesel fuel costs and the duty levies on lorries. I have in my constituency one of the biggest haulage companies in England—Suttons—and were it to send even half its lorries abroad, the effect on St. Helens would be disastrous. I say that quite openly. There is always a natural balance between the interests of both sides.

I can understand the need to restrict motorists and to push people to use public transport. I fully endorse that, and of course we want to encourage the haulage industry to move freight by rail rather than road. However, the minute we do that, there is a backlash in the other direction. There must be a middle way. I hope that when the Finance Bill goes through Committee, such matters will be considered.

I also noticed in the Budget the provisions for pensioners. When I was in St. Helens over the weekend, such matters were brought back to me time and again. For once a Government seemed to understand the needs of the elderly. The £20 increase in winter fuel payment to £100 may not seem much to many of us, but to the old it means an awful lot. The increase in the pension itself and the new tax arrangements may mean little in financial terms, but to the people concerned, they mean an awful lot. If the Government are pleasing an awful lot of people, they are getting something right.

One aspect of the Budget has caused me concern, because I think that we must drive harder and deeper at it. I declare an interest as a practising lawyer. There has been much talk in the House about the smuggling of tobacco. It has been estimated that the trade is worth about £1 billion. Whoever produced that estimate did not know Monday from Friday, because the figures are much, much higher. I know that from my personal knowledge of what is going on.

I know of the vast volume that is being smuggled through. I know that 70 per cent. of all the rolled tobacco in the south-east, the midlands and the north is smuggled. It comes in costing virtually nothing, it is sold at virtually nothing, and honest traders buying legitimately are losing their livelihoods.

There are several ways in which we can tackle that problem. I suggested to the Home Secretary some months ago that we should start bilateral conversations with the Belgians about the matter. Where is the tobacco bought? It is bought in Antwerp, Bruges and so on. There are warehouses—I have seen them—where the lorries drive in, load up with rolled tobacco, drive out and drive back to the UK. There are bus-loads of people and car-loads of

five or six people going across on "day trips" to get that tobacco. They are flooding through Dover, hour after hour.

The trade is so profitable that, it is said, even the drug dealers of old find it a much more convenient way to make their crooked money. The profits from importing tobacco are greater, the risks are lower and the penalties are far smaller.

How can the smuggling be conquered? All we have to do is to say to the Belgian authorities, "Come on, we are both in the European Common Market. This is wrecking our home trade. There is a way to solve it. If we find that a warehouse"—there are seven in Antwerp, which I can name—"is involved in the smuggling of tobacco, the warehouse owners will be deemed to be part of a conspiracy to defeat the United Kingdom importation rules under section 170 of the Customs and Excise Management Act 1979."

We must get the Belgians' co-operation. They should agree that we can extradite the warehouse owners to stand trial in the United Kingdom. The Belgians will not let that happen. I know from professional experience of case after case in which we know the source of supply, but there is nothing that we can do to stop it because we do not have the co-operation of the Belgian authorities.

The latest scam is the export of cigarettes to Benidorm and one or two other places. They go out entirely legitimately and come back totally illegitimately. Our major cigarette companies say that there is nothing to worry about—they are just exporting to Benidorm. It is surprising how many packets come back to the UK. Why do we not simply insist that any packet of cigarettes exported from the UK has stamped on it in thick red, black or green—the colour matters not—"Made in the UK"? If such packets come back, they will stand out like beacons on the shelves of superstores and everywhere else that they are sold.

In practical ways like that, we can begin to cut the illegal trade. Similarly, bottles of alcohol should be stamped. There have been cases where the villains, if I may use that word, bought their own distillery, so that they could have their own whisky bottled, exported and brought back. That product is on the supermarket shelves of southern England. When the problem is as bad as that, how much is the Treasury losing?

We need practical measures, such as an agreement with the Belgians, and we need more Customs officers. When people drive through Dover, who is there to check for drugs, fags or booze? I do not blame the Government for that. I remember speaking in the House many years ago when I criticised the removal of the cutter barges and the reduction in the number of Customs officers, yet here we are 10 years later paying the price in billions of pounds. What could we do with those billions if we had them?

It is a good Budget. Two little matters tweaked me, but I realise what the Government are doing for pensioners. I am getting near to pension age, so I shall no doubt go off into the sunset with a wonderful pension for my retirement. That will not be for a while yet, so before I go perhaps I can impress on Treasury Ministers that positive action is needed to stop the smuggling. That would pour billions into the Government's coffers, and then perhaps the hospitals and schools in St. Helens would get more money, over and above what we have generously been given, and perhaps we could have some industrial grants to get factories into the constituency and thus reduce the problem of long-term unemployment among the over-50s.

It is not a bad Budget. I give it nine out of 10. I cannot think of anything the Government could have done better.

8.51 pm

Mr. David Ruffley (Bury St. Edmunds): Among the many deficiencies in the Budget is the absence of a clear statement of gratitude from the Chancellor to my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke) for his brilliant stewardship of the British economy in the previous Parliament. My right hon. and learned Friend bequeathed a legacy of falling borrowing, historically low inflation, low interest rates and record exports.

In the past three Budgets, the Chancellor has done his best to squander that legacy. The principal means by which he has done that has been to load tax on to taxpayers and business. Statistics produced by the House of Commons Library—rather than anyone else—clearly show that during this Parliament £40 billion extra tax has been loaded on to the British economy.

That fact is underscored in table B9 in the Red Book, which clearly shows that the tax burden has been rising. In 1996-97, the last year of the Conservative Government, the share of gross domestic product accounted for by net tax and social security contributions was 35.4 per cent. That figure was given in a written answer provided by the Chief Secretary two weeks ago. In the first year of this Parliament, 1997-98, the relevant figure is 36.6 per cent. In the last year of this Parliament, 2001-02, the figure will be 37 per cent. That is proof positive that the tax burden is rising under this Government. Conservative Members would like to hear the Chief Secretary apologise for denying that the tax burden is rising under the Government in the lifetime of this Parliament over the five financial years to which I have referred.

The Budget was received with a certain amount of euphoria, but since last Wednesday there has been a cascade of critical commentary to the effect that the Budget was produced with smoke and mirrors; that it gave with one hand and took with another; that it was a pick-pocketing Budget; and that it was not all that it seemed. But Ministers on the Treasury Front Bench are still as smug and self-satisfied as they were on Tuesday. They remind me of a bunch of arrogant confidence tricksters who think that the punters are so stupid that they will not realise that they have been taken for a ride. The punters to whom I refer are the people of middle Britain. When they look at the abolition of the married couple's allowance, they understand not only that will it be abolished in April 2000, with an alleged replacement coming in one full year after, but that a recognition of marriage has been abolished from the tax system. They also understand that there are anomalies in the new system. The children's tax credit—some £400 per annum—will be available, for example, to a two-earner couple on £32,000 a year, which is just under the top-rate threshold. But a single-earner couple on more than £38,500 a year will not get that, or any compensation, in lieu of the abolition of MCA. That is a ridiculous anomaly, but the people of middle Britain are spotting it.

Those people also understand that the pensioners who were told that they would keep their MCA will not keep it. If an individual is unlucky enough to turn 65 after

[Mr. David Ruffley]

April 2000 and does not have any dependent children in the household, he will receive no credit and no compensation for married couple's allowance being abolished.

Furthermore, middle Britain understands full well that national insurance contributions, the direct tax that that represents, will be increased for them; the increase in the upper earnings limit to £575 a week represents nearly an 18 per cent. increase in direct tax. In addition, self-employed individuals, some typically on £20,000 per annum, will pay around £110 a year more in NICs as a result of the Budget.

As a result of the abolition of MIRAS, the mortgage payments of middle Britain will go up. It is no use Ministers talking about the fall in interest rates. We all know that interest rates went up in the first 18 months that the Government were in power as a direct result of the botched transfer of control of monetary policy to the Bank of England, leaving interest rates higher than they need have been.

Business has borne the brunt of the £40 billion tax increase. We know that businesses are important. As John Kay and Mervyn King have described in their classic text "The British Tax System", there is no such thing as a tax on firms. The incidence of tax is always on individuals in the end.

The president of the Confederation of British Industry said the day before the Budget that some £20 billion had been loaded on to industry. Of course, since then, more taxes have been loaded on to it, the energy tax and the diesel tax being the two biggest hits on manufacturing industry in particular.

Small businesses in my constituency derive no benefit from the Budget. They wanted a cut in business rates. A correspondent from Stowmarket, a small market town in my constituency, said, "What we want is a cut in the business rate burden. Without that, the future of village shops and small businesses is in grave danger," but there is nothing in the Budget to help hard-pressed village shops.

Those shops also face higher delivery costs as a result of the fuel duty increase. The corner shop tax is looming as a result of the future levy to help to set up the Food Standards Agency.

The Government need a better understanding of rural areas. There has been a savage and brutal increase in the cost of motoring for rural dwellers. Labour has given us the £3 gallon of petrol. That burden falls disproportionately on rural areas such as the one in Suffolk that I represent.

In the face of higher fuel duties, the prospects for rural areas are not good. The people of middle England, who reside in shire counties, will not be able to afford a Mondeo upgrade. They will be scratching around to see whether they can buy a second-hand Sierra, given the burden that the Government have put on them in the Budget.

I draw attention to the hubris of the Budget. It is strong on hype and spin, but it will do nothing for wealth creation, although it tinkers around with redistribution. It will do nothing to increase the long-term growth potential of the United Kingdom's economy. The fanciful forecasts for GDP growth are overblown; everyone knows that. The independent survey forecast predicts that this year the economy will grow by 0.6 per cent., rather than the 1 to 1.5 per cent. predicted by the Red Book. The Treasury forecast of growth of between 2.25 and 2.75 per cent. next year is contradicted by a 1.8 per cent. forecast by the independent surveys.

This Budget will do little for middle Britain in terms of families, enterprise and work. It is a Budget for hubris—a Budget that courts nemesis at the hands of middle Britain. Middle Britain will be disaffected and disillusioned, which is why the Budget deserves to be opposed and fought in the Lobby tonight.

9.1 pm

Mr. David Rendel (Newbury): I want to speak mainly about pensioners, but first I shall make some general points.

Along with many of my hon. Friends, I find it depressing that the Government have finally decided to make wealth creation a more important objective than wealth redistribution. We believe that this Government were elected by the people of Britain to produce a fairer society, and to return justice and opportunity to all our people; we are sorry that they seem to have rejected that aim.

The Budget illustrates what has been happening. It is a Budget for tax cuts, while it should have been a Budget for investment in public services and to support the weakest and most vulnerable of our fellow citizens. I have lost track of how often I have heard the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Social Security rail against the social security system. They are, of course, right to blame the system for trapping people in poverty—that is what it does—but they are wrong to blame it for failing to alleviate poverty. Indeed, sometimes it seems that only our social security system stands between the poorest members of society and real penury—homelessness and starvation.

The Prime Minister can repeat the mantra "work for those who can, security for those who cannot" as often as he likes, but the real need is to create full-time jobs that pay a living wage. After all, the one thing for which the Department of Social Security cannot be blamed is unemployment. Part of the solution to the problem of poverty and inequality in Britain must lie in our economy. Welfare reform will come to very little if there is no work for people to do: we cannot tell them to go back to work, when no jobs are available.

In this Budget, there is, at last, something for pensioners, and we welcome that; but, although an increase in the winter fuel payment for all pensioner households may look good on the surface, there are various problems. Using the money to add £2 a week to the weekly state pension payment would have saved nearly £14 million in advertising and administration costs. As it is, the huge cost of organising an audit every year to establish which households are pensioner households is a terrible waste of money—money that could have been given directly to the pensioners involved.

The winter fuel payments are intended to help vulnerable elderly people to stay warm and therefore healthy, but a much more effective way of dealing with that aspect of fuel poverty would have been spending the

money on insulation and energy-efficient housing. The problem of fuel poverty involves much more than simple economics.

This is not a good way of targeting money at the poorest pensioners. Better-off pensioner households—some of whom, last year, gave their winter fuel payments to charity because they were so well off—will receive an extra £80 or £90, compared with just £50 for pensioner households on income support. The Secretary of State's claim that he was increasing fivefold the amount that pensioners were receiving may apply to the better-off, but it does not apply to the poorest, who should have been targeted.

The winter fuel payment increase is administratively expensive. It fails to target fuel poverty and the poorest pensioners properly. Although Liberal Democrat Members welcome more being spent on pensioners, we wish that the Government could have spent it more sensibly and effectively.

From April 2000, the minimum income guarantee—the Government's other great claim to be doing more for pensioners—will be linked to earnings, rather than prices. Although the measure is very welcome, it comes with a sting in its tail, just as the minimum income guarantee does. The widening of the gap between the basic state pension and the higher income support levels inherent in the income guarantee will bring ever more people on to means-tested benefits.

The Government know, from their own research, how the more elderly people in our society are often embarrassed by the idea of applying for income support. That is why the minimum income guarantee is a shameful deceit. It is not an increase in the basic state pension, but it is guaranteed that many of the poorest pensioners will never get extra. Earlier in the debate, when I made that point to the Secretary of State for Social Security, he could not deny it.

Currently, 700,000 pensioners are not claiming the benefits to which they are entitled. Some of them do not do so because they are too proud to claim what they think is state charity, and others do not because they find the forms simply too complex to fill in.

Moreover, 600,000 pensioners are disqualified from the minimum income guarantee because they have too much in savings. They are the ones who were brought up to think that it was a good thing to save money for their old age and for a rainy day, or to put aside a bit to pass on to their descendants. Now, they are penalised for doing just that. The Government really have to get their act together on that issue—to save or not to save. People are asking that question, but the Government have given them no answer.

Mr. Tony McNulty (Harrow, East): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Rendel: No. I should continue if I am to leave time for other hon. Members to speak.

I hope that, in replying to the debate, the Chief Secretary to the Treasury will deal with the anomaly of pensioners who rely on income from savings—some of whom will find themselves in the bizarre tax situation of being within the 10p rate for income tax, but still paying 20p tax on each pound of income from savings. It is a bizarre situation to be in, and I hope that the Minister will tell us what the Government will do about it.

I noticed that the Chancellor, in his speech, mentioned a chaotic, even counter-productive system of child support. Had I not been paying full attention, I might have thought that he was attacking the Child Support Agency once again, and that he was going to tell us that he would not continue with the pale imitation of the CSA with which the Government are trying to replace it. He was really, of course, talking about supporting families with children.

Extra money for families is always welcome, and Liberal Democrat Members strongly support such provision. However, as with winter fuel payments, there are problems with how that support is distributed. As a tax credit, it will go to the household's main earner, who is usually the man. However, it is vital that funds for the care of children should go to the person with the primary care responsibility, who is usually the woman.

The Government have fallen into the trap of directing those funds—like money from the working families tax credit—from the purse to the wallet. We all know that there is usually precious little hope of getting money back intact from the wallet to the purse. Although the Secretary of State for Social Security said earlier today that choice in the matter would be given to each family, we know that the only families in which there is real choice are those who do not need the choice, as the earner is prepared to give the money to the other partner regardless. The families in which there is no choice are those who really need choice, as the father is not prepared to give the money to the mother.

Therefore, as with pensioners' money, the measure adds a level of administrative complexity without helping the weakest in our society. It seems to be an attempt to tax the Government's support for the children of higher-rate taxpayers while pretending that that is not happening.

To sum up the Budget, we welcome the new money that the Chancellor has offered to pensioners and children, but what a pity it is that it is going mainly not to the very poorest, but to those just above that level. Perhaps the Government feel that the poorest and most vulnerable are likely either to vote Labour anyway or not to bother to vote. That fits with their benefit cuts for widows, the sick and the disabled. The most vulnerable no longer seem to be cared for by the Government. We are proud to care for those people and target our policies at them. That is why we support a policy of £3 extra for the over-75s and £5 extra for the over-80s. We believe that the Government should support that policy. I very much hope that the Minister will accept the policy tonight.

9.10 pm

Mr. Lindsay Hoyle (Chorley): I find it very strange that the hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel) thinks that it will be an administrative nightmare to pay pensioners £100 per household. If we can distinguish between £50 and £20 per household for pensioners, why will it be more difficult for all households to receive £100? I am mystified by his argument.

I welcome most of the Budget. It would be naive and wrong for anyone to say that they loved every part of it. There will always be some aspects that we like and questions about other aspects that we do not like, but we have to consider the Budget in its entirety. It is a quality Budget which has been welcomed throughout the country.

Education is important to all. Each school will benefit from £2,000 for new books. I do not remember much of that during the 18 years of the previous Government.

[Mr. Lindsay Hoyle]

They were quiet on education. There is a lot of noise from the Conservatives now that they are in opposition, but they were not very positive towards education and schools when they were in government.

We are all concerned about pensioners, but, during the 18 years of the previous Government, pensioners were not top of the list. In fairness to the new Government, they have realised that pensioners count and are an important part of our society—a part that cannot be left and neglected as it has been. I am pleased to tell the pensioners of Chorley that the Government are listening and delivering and will continue to look after them. I have had very positive feedback from the pensioners of Chorley and a good response is coming through the mailbag.

The Conservatives are always saying that they were the party to cut taxation and that they are the party of businesses. It has been up to this Government to ensure a cut in tax and continued support for small business—not just talking about it, but delivering on election promises. That is why I am proud to be a Labour Member of Parliament. I am proud to be able to tell my constituents what the Government are doing for them and what the previous Government did not do for them.

My constituency has low unemployment. That will continue, thanks to my right hon. Friend the Chancellor, who will ensure that companies will benefit. The good-quality companies and the small and medium-sized enterprises to which this country will look for the future are being supported by positive actions. It is all well and good for the Conservatives to say what they would do, but, when they had 18 years to deliver, they failed. They must be embarrassed. Is their leader not now saying that they should stand up and say what was wrong and how they let the people down? After 18 years, he has realised that they failed. The leader of the Conservatives is now admitting that they were wrong. Yet, now that they are in opposition, they think that they are right. I do not understand their hypocrisy. That is a strange way to work.

The Chancellor has given to the good people of Chorley, ensuring that companies such as Scottish and Newcastle in my constituency will benefit, because there will be no further taxation on beer this year. That is good news not just for the employees of Scottish and Newcastle, but for all the public houses in Chorley and all the jobs related to the brewing industry. Those jobs will be secured, and that is a bonus. Before the Budget, Conservative Members were on the radio saying that my right hon. Friend would hit beer and whisky, and that those employed in the drinks industry would be affected. That did not happen, and I am pleased about that. Those jobs are now more secure than they have ever been.

I hope that my right hon. Friend takes on board the problem of drink smuggling, which is beginning to hit all parts of the country. We need to take further action because of the loss of duty and the knock-on effect on jobs. People are using artics to smuggle—we are not talking about people with loading up their cars—and criminals are flooding the country from Scotland to Cornwall. Nowhere is free from the effects of smuggling.

We have heard about tobacco smuggling, which is also affecting jobs—and tobacco will continue to be smuggled. My right hon. Friend must try to stop smuggling, as it is crucial that we do not lose good jobs. My right hon. Friend has supported the brewing industry, and we must protect jobs in it.

If there was a downside to the Budget—it was hard to find one—it was in the provisions affecting the haulage industry. The industry is suffering, and is on the back foot. I will be writing to my right hon. Friend the Chancellor to address the plight of the haulage companies in my constituency, and to ask him to see what support we can give. Many jobs could be at risk.

The concern is not just about companies from France or Germany, but about companies from the former eastern bloc, which will be sending poorer-quality trucks into the UK and undercutting haulage companies here. That is why I ask for a special case to be made for the industry, and I know that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor will look at that.

Accelerated fuel duty was introduced by the Conservatives, but we did not hear a whisper from them at that time—then, they had no worries about the haulage industry at all. In fact, the industry was attacked year on year. I am pleased to say that this was a good Budget.

The Minister of State, Department of Trade and Industry, my right hon. Friend the Member for Makerfield (Mr. McCartney), came to Chorley on Friday to open phase 2 of the Chorley business and technical centre, which is 50 per cent. full already. That proves the success of the Government, and their commitment to those companies. We are ensuring not only that each day new companies start, but that they are flourishing and expanding in Chorley. That is why phase 2 is so important. It was a pleasure to see my right hon. Friend opening the new centre.

Following the Budget, we will see the development of a brown-field site that will be second to none in this country—an area of 800 acres that will benefit from the Chancellor's proposals to ensure that new businesses come in and deliver jobs for central Lancashire. This is a strategic site—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. We cannot have so many conversations in the Chamber. The hon. Gentleman is addressing the House.

Mr. Hoyle: Obviously, Conservative Members do not want to listen to the truth, but that is not a worry.

I was talking about new jobs for Chorley and a new commitment to Chorley, and the use of a brown-field site—not a green-field site—as a flagship for the north-west. We believe that the site will generate 15,000 jobs in the next five years—jobs lost at Royal Ordnance as a result of the previous Government's lack of commitment to defence.

Throughout the 1980s and into the 1990s, we suffered from the lack of commitment to and investment in British jobs in defence. Jobs went down the pan, but the Conservatives do not care to remember that they were in government at that time. They failed the people of Chorley, of Lancashire and of the United Kingdom. Their shame and embarrassment prevent them from congratulating my right hon. Friend the Chancellor on a good Budget and thanking him for what he has done for all our constituencies. They are not man enough to accept the truth. They throw away their cheap remarks and ensure that the only voice that is heard is noise without constructive comment. I welcome the Budget.

9.20 pm

Mr. Francis Maude (Horsham): For the avoidance of doubt, and for the benefit of Labour Members who take an excessive interest in such matters, I declare the modest interests disclosed in the register, in case anyone thinks that they are relevant.

We have just heard a tirade from the hon. Member for Chorley (Mr. Hoyle) about listening to the truth. That is a plea of which we want to take notice, because we have not heard much in the way of truth in the presentation of the Budget. It is probably the most dishonest Budget in living memory.

The only thing that mattered to the Chancellor last Tuesday was the next day's headlines. He claimed that it was a Budget for families while abolishing the last recognition of marriage in the tax system, and then had the insolence to claim that the married couple's allowance is not a recognition of marriage. He claimed that it was a Budget for enterprise, while increasing tax on business by £3.2 billion. He claimed that it was a Budget for tax cuts, when taxes go on rising by stealth.

The Chancellor even spent taxpayers' money writing a propaganda leaflet that was meant to explain the Budget to ordinary people but failed even to mention that the 20p tax rate had been scrapped and MIRAS abolished. The only surprise is that only 50,000 of the leaflets had to be pulped. That gives a whole new dimension to the phrase "pulp fiction".

The Chancellor is guilty of Budget mis-selling and the Budget did nothing to reverse Labour's huge tax increases. Labour's lies on tax will catch up with them. Those people who drive, save, are married, have mortgages, are self-employed, have company cars, want to buy a house or smoke will all lose. People from all walks of life will lose from the Budget and will soon feel betrayed by a Government who claim that taxes are going down when they know that they are going up and who deliberately say that families are paying less tax when they know that they are paying more. A week on and, sure enough, the Budget is coming apart at the seams.

Let us look at what the experts are saying. The Automobile Association says that the Chancellor's tax plans are based on

"spurious arguments that do not stand up to scrutiny."

The Freight Transport Association described the Budget as "crass" and "crazy". The Federation of Small Businesses said that it

"completely missed the target where the majority of small firms were concerned."

Anatole Kaletsky—not a supporter of the Conservative party, and frequently a supporter of the Government—said in *The Times*:

"The feverish expectations created by the headlines are going to be disappointed once people open their pay slips and penetrate the veils of deception so skilfully flourished by Mr. Brown. And when people discover that they have been deceived they are apt to get angry."

Graham Searjeant in the same newspaper said:

"The fatal flaw in Mr. Brown is behind the cloying parade of virtue, he is just another clever confidence trickster . . . the last Budget of the millennium was made by the last great conman of the millennium."

The British Chambers of Commerce warned of a

"£20 bn penalty from the 'smoke and mirrors' Chancellor".

The BBC's economics correspondent said:

"this much is clear. Labour has increased taxes and are continuing to raise them. It's in black and white in the . . . Treasury Budget documents".

It was not in the Chancellor's speech. *The Economist*'s description of the Chancellor's addiction to meddling with, and complicating, the tax system was

"Bubble, bubble, toil and muddle".

That point was made very well by my right hon. Friend the Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack). The article continued:

"The biggest losers under Mr Brown have been businesses and pension funds".

Even the *New Statesman*, the Government's house journal, said that, under this Government, there is

"no taxation without stealth . . . Behind the glittering presentation he gave us an almost neutral Budget".

Of course, taken with the past two Budgets, that means that taxes are going up.

The first piece of dishonesty was that the Chancellor concealed the massive increase in the overall level of tax under Labour. The Prime Minister does not want us to remember it now, but, before the election, he promised the country that he had

"no plans to increase tax at all".

What did he mean by that? What did the Chancellor take him to mean by that? Labour's first two Budgets increased taxes by more than £40 billion over the course of this Parliament. It is now clear that, behind the gimmicks and headlines, the Budget did nothing to reverse those big tax increases.

We commissioned the Library to calculate how much higher taxes will be over the course of this Parliament. The answer is £40.7 billion. *[Interruption.]* That seems to be a surprise to Labour Members. It is not surprising that they did not know that, because the Chancellor said nothing about it. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I cannot have any shouting in the Chamber. I am looking at Mr. McNulty. You have to be quiet, Mr. McNulty. I do not want to hear you.

Mr. Maude: Taxes were up by nearly £6 billion in the first year of the Government and by nearly £8 billion in the second year. They will be up by £7.1 billion this coming year, by £10.5 billion in 2000–01, and by £9.3 billion in the year after that. The Government are giving a little with one hand while they take back much more with the other. Every tax reduction announced by the Chancellor with such a fanfare was cancelled out by a stealth tax increase hidden away in the fine print.

Taxes will be £7.1 billion higher next year as a direct result of Labour, but the Government will not admit it. The Prime Minister was asked a simple question by my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition on Wednesday, the day after the Budget. He asked:

"what is the total tax increase for the coming year"?

I am not surprised that the Chancellor casts his eyes up to heaven, because he knows that the Prime Minister got it wrong and misled the House. The Prime Minister should come back to the House and put the record straight.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I cannot allow the right hon. Gentleman to say that any hon. Member misled the House. Perhaps he will reconsider that.

Mr. Maude: I am sure that, if the Prime Minister has inadvertently misled the House, he would want to come

[Mr. Maude]

back and set the record straight. I am not aware of any attempt by the Prime Minister to make a personal statement and set the record straight, as the ministerial code of guidance requires. He is responsible for that code. Where is he? Why has he not come back to the House to set the record straight? We all know that what he said was incorrect. If it was inadvertently incorrect, let him come back and put us straight.

The answer to the question asked by my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition—easily arrived at—was £7.1 billion. The Prime Minister responded:

"There is a net tax cut of £4.5 billion."—[*Official Report*, 10 March 1999; Vol. 327, c. 358.]

That is utter rubbish. It is so far out of line with the truth that it makes one wonder whether the Prime Minister actually understands the figures at all.

Mr. Derek Twigg (Halton): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Maude: No. I have little time. I cut my time to allow the hon. Member for Chorley to speak, and that was a mistake.

Anatole Kaletsky in *The Times* wrote of the Prime Minister's answer:

"this was simply false. As shown unambiguously in the Government's own Budget statement, taxes have risen in each of the past two years and will rise even more in the next financial year".

It is not only true that taxes are going up under Labour. The Budget also failed to come clean on the fact that many more people will pay income tax in the coming financial year as a direct result of measures taken by the Government.

The gain that people make from the introduction of the 10p rate is partially clawed back by the scrapping of the 20p rate. Why did the Chancellor not mention the scrapping of that rate? Overall, the changes mean that most people will gain only £60 a year from that move, a small gain that will be completely swamped by the loss of mortgage interest tax relief and the married couple's allowance, both of which will be abolished next year.

We must not let the Government make their feeble claim that the child tax credit will replace married couple's allowance. There is a year's gap between the two. What kind of replacement is it when there a year's gap between abolition of one thing and the introduction of another? What a con.

Yvette Cooper (Pontefract and Castleford): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Maude: No, I am not going to give way.

What comfort is there for people approaching retirement? They are being told that, for the crime of being born after 1935, there will be no married couples allowance for them, and nothing to replace it, even if they still support children. They can forget it.

Yvette Cooper: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way on that point?

Mr. Maude: No.

That is not the complete story. Not only will people pay more income tax and other tax under Labour, but many people on low incomes will also pay a higher marginal rate of income tax. We asked the Secretary of State for Social Security how he squares the commitment not to raise income tax rates at all with the fact that the marginal rate of income tax has been increased for a large number of people. That increase is in clear contravention of Labour's direct pledge. Many people who previously paid a marginal rate of 20 per cent. will now have to pay income tax at a marginal rate of 23 per cent.

What price the posters everywhere that said that income tax rates would not be increased at all? Under the new system, people will start to pay income tax when their earnings reach nearly £6,000. Under the old system, that would not have happened until their earnings reached £8,600. For people between those income levels, there are higher marginal income tax rates under Labour. There was nothing about that in the promises before the general election, and no mention of it in the Chancellor's Budget statement. It is a disgrace.

Higher marginal rates of tax are bad because they reduce incentives. People are less likely to work for a pay increase if they know that a greater proportion of every extra pound they earn will be taken in tax. The increased rate is a complete betrayal of the Prime Minister's clear promise before the election that he would not increase income tax rates. About 4.3 million people have been let down by Labour's breach of that election promise.

Income tax is not the only one going up. National insurance is going up for many people. One might be forgiven for missing that fact, because it was not in the Chancellor's statement last Tuesday. We welcome the reforms that abolish the 2 per cent. entry fee, and we welcome the alignment of the national insurance contributions threshold with the income tax threshold. However, as ever, what Labour has given with one hand, it is taking back with the other.

In a move that merited just eight words in the Chancellor's speech, the Budget increased the upper earnings limit for employees' NICs to £575 a week. That amounts to a huge stealth tax increase on middle Britain. The net effect of the Government's changes to national insurance will be that many middle-income workers will be worse off because the gains that they make from threshold alignment and the abolition of the entry fee will be more than offset by the increase in the upper earnings limit.

Yvette Cooper: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Maude: No, I am not going to give way.

When all Labour's reforms to employee NICs have been implemented—

Mrs. Anne Campbell (Cambridge): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Maude: Labour Members ought to listen. I am talking about precisely the sort of people whom the Prime Minister was at such pains to claim he was going to protect.

When all Labour's reforms to employee NICs have been implemented, anyone who earns more than £27,000 a year will be worse off. Those people are by no means

rich and there are plenty of them—another 4 million, on top of the 4.3 million who were let down by Labour's previous pledge on income taxes—

Mrs. Campbell: On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Is this not supposed to be a debate and should not the right hon. Member for Horsham (Mr. Maude) give way when hon. Members seek to intervene?

Madam Speaker: It is up to the hon. Member who has the Floor to determine whether to give way. I understood the right hon. Gentleman to have indicated that he would not do so. Is that correct?

Mr. Maude: Yes.

Madam Speaker: In that case, hon. Members should not persist.

Mr. Maude: Although it was a great mistake, I have already cut my speech short to accommodate the hon. Member for Chorley, who wasted the time of the House.

Business taxes are up too. The Chancellor and his right hon. Friends like to pose as the friends of business. Last Tuesday, the right hon. Gentleman told the House that he was announcing tax cuts for business—that is not how they look now. The Budget will increase tax on business by £3.2 billion in the next three years—we did not hear too much about that—on top of the £5 billion a year in extra taxes imposed in the Government's first two Budgets.

Those are not my figures but those of the British Chambers of Commerce. It took a few days for them to see through the vacuous gloss of the Chancellor's speech, but, by last Thursday, they were denouncing the right hon. Gentleman as a "smoke and mirrors Chancellor", who has increased tax on business, while pretending to cut it. The chambers of commerce calculate that

"Business will be a grand total of £6 billion worse off each year for the next three years than they were before the last election".

The Budget offered some small tax breaks for investment, but those reductions are hugely outweighed by the increased cost of doing business under Labour: stealth taxes, regulation and red tape. It is no wonder that the Federation of Small Businesses has denounced the changes, stating:

"the real entrepreneurs and risk takers—the sole traders—will miss out on the corporation tax changes, but will be hit by increases to national insurance contributions".

On top of that, we must consider the effect of the swingeing 11 per cent. increase in diesel tax. No one heard the Chancellor announce that increase, which is hitting hauliers throughout the country and leading to a flood of people saying that they will leave. The words, "11 per cent." did not pass his lips, but that is what the price of diesel is going up by and that is why jobs will go. Even some of the right hon. Gentleman's hon. Friends are now pointing out the damage that is being done to serious British businesses. Business is being driven offshore by a Chancellor who does not care.

Perhaps the most discreditable part of the Government's policy has been their record on savings. Given the attack on pension funds and on dividend tax credits for the poorest pensioners and the abolition of tax-exempt special savings accounts and personal equity plans—to be replaced by measures introduced by the former Paymaster General as his swan song—it is not surprising that the savings ratio has plummeted by nearly a third.

The Budget has made things worse. By committing himself to increasing the minimum income for pensioners in line with earnings, the Chancellor will increase dependency and discourage savings. People who save hard throughout their lives in an effort to remain independent of the state might as well not have bothered. It is not surprising that the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) has borne that out and that the response of the savings industry to the Budget has also been scathing.

What did the Budget say about the economy? We have the first official confirmation that manufacturing will be in recession next year. The Treasury now expects a fall in manufacturing output. If the Government had listened to what they were being told earlier and stopped heaping on the damage, the higher taxes and the extra regulation, that recession might have been avoided, but it is too late now, as the Treasury has finally admitted. That means thousands more lost jobs. We read today that job prospects are at their bleakest for a long time.

The Chancellor's forecasts for growth are wildly unrealistic—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. This House must come to order. It is far too noisy.

Mr. Maude: This is a Budget that is shot through with dishonesty from beginning to end. This is not spinning; this is deception. Taxes are rising in plain breach of the Prime Minister's solemn pledge. This is a bad and a dishonest Budget. I urge the House to reject it.

9.40 pm

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Alan Milburn): I have rarely seen a senior politician in a debate as important as this refuse to give way to hon. Members on both sides of the House. It makes me wonder what the shadow Chancellor has to hide.

We have had an important debate over the past few days. Last Tuesday, the Chancellor delivered a Budget that will deliver an enterprise economy and a fair society. The one sustains the other. We cannot have a successful economy without a fair society in which the talents of all our people are deployed to the full.

Mr. Ian Bruce (South Dorset): I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman. Can he solve a problem and admit to everyone that the Budget has brought in £7.1 billion in extra taxes? At least we would have some honesty from him.

Mr. Milburn: Perhaps the shadow Chancellor was right not to give way. As usual, the hon. Gentleman is wrong. The Budget cuts taxes by £4 billion.

Mr. Ruffley: I am most grateful to the Chief Secretary. Can he explain why table B9 of the Red Book clearly demonstrates that the tax burden will be higher in the last year of this Parliament than in the first year?

Mr. Milburn: The tax burden will fall next year and will continue to be broadly flat over the remainder of this Parliament. More important, it is lower than the Tories had planned for if they had been in government.

[Mr. Milburn]

Our approach to tax is symbolised by the two new low starting rates of taxes introduced in this Budget. There is a new 10p starting rate of corporation tax to help companies create the wealth to sustain the investment to create the jobs that a fair society needs. There is also a new 10p rate of income tax to help people move from welfare to work, to harness their potential to stimulate the productive economy that our country demands.

These are Budget measures to create wealth and opportunity, as my hon. Friends the Members for St. Helens, South (Mr. Bermingham) and for Stafford (Mr. Kidney) rightly pointed out. The point was also made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Sheldon), who welcomed the Budget. He said that it was the first in 30 years, most of them under the Conservatives, that he could wholeheartedly welcome. I am grateful to him for his support. He is in good company, because the Budget has been warmly welcomed by pro-business organisations and anti-poverty groups alike.

I have a word of advice for the Leader of the Opposition and the shadow Chancellor. If they are serious about the Budget, they should practise what they preach and go out and listen to the people of Britain. They should listen to the British Retail Consortium, which said that the Budget would

"give a tremendous boost to small retailers."

They should listen to the Institute of Directors, which welcomed the reductions in company taxes, and to the Child Poverty Action Group, which welcomed the measures to tackle child poverty. It was even welcomed by the chairman of Asda himself, a well known and respected member of the Conservative party and of this House. He would be a fitting person to sit round the kitchen table that the Leader of the Opposition is so concerned about.

Wearing not his politician's hat but his business man's hat on Budget day, what did the hon. Member for Tunbridge Wells (Mr. Norman) have to say?

"We'd welcome the help for small businesses. I think that's good. We'd welcome the reduction in corporation tax and lower corporation tax for smaller businesses. That's good. As I said, we welcome, particularly in Asda . . . we're very keen on employee share ownership. I think everyone in the country is dead keen on it, and that's good."

"Overall," he concluded,

"not a bad business budget".

Mr. Bercow: I am most grateful to the Chief Secretary for giving way on that point. In light of the remarks that he has just quoted, how does he explain the fact that, in a 70-minute Budget speech, a 10-minute statement on enterprise and competition and a 36-minute speech in Wednesday's debate on the Budget, neither the Chancellor nor the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry said anything about the need to reverse the burden of slothful regulation on the industry and commerce of this country? Might it be that they want to impose regulation on the productive businesses of this country?

Mr. Milburn: I say to the hon. Gentleman in all candour that if he had been listening on Budget day, as I am sure he was, he would have heard my right hon. Friend the Chancellor announce cuts in taxes on small companies.

This Budget is the product of this Government's sound and prudent economic management—a point that was reinforced only a week ago by the IMF. When we entered office, we inherited a national debt that had doubled, inflation was back in the system and the public finances were spiralling out of control. While the Conservative party is only now owning up to its mistakes, we have been busy putting them right: inflation is under control, unemployment is down and employment up, long-term interest rates are at their lowest for many years and mortgages are cheaper than they have been for thirty years.

The Budget continues to lock in the stability that we are creating by keeping the public finances under control, while at the same time giving a £6 billion boost to the economy at just the right time in the economic cycle. The platform of stability that we are creating allows us to tackle the fundamental problem facing our country—how to raise our productivity performance. Therefore, in the Budget we introduced major reforms for a new, knowledge-based enterprise economy open to all.

There is to be a new research and development tax credit for firms with the brightest ideas and the best potential. There are to be new allowances for smaller businesses to help to bridge the investment gap between Britain and our competitors—just as the right hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Brooke) called for in his useful contribution. There are to be new rewards for the best entrepreneurs and new incentives for the best inventors. Finally, as my hon. Friend the Member for Chorley (Mr. Hoyle) emphasised, there are to be new company tax cuts that will help two in three of all firms that pay corporation tax. The right hon. Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack) said that that measure would help only companies making profits of up to £10,000 a year, but he was wrong; it will help two in three of all companies paying corporation tax—those earning up to £50,000 a year in profits.

Mr. Jack: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Milburn: This Government have already created the lowest company taxes of any major country in Europe. When, on Tuesday, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor said that we are now to give small British firms the lowest starting rate of company tax of any major industrialised country in the world, I swear I could almost hear the blood draining from the faces of the Conservatives, especially the Leader of the Opposition. The new 10p corporation tax will leave more money in the hands of those who are best placed to create wealth and jobs.

Mr. Jack: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Milburn: Because of our prudent approach, there will be more money for our essential public services. Next month, an extra—

Mr. Bercow: On a point of order, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: I suspect that I have heard it before, but go ahead.

Mr. Bercow: May I ask for your guidance, Madam Speaker? Is it not a matter of the grossest discourtesy for

the Chief Secretary—*[Interruption.]* If the right hon. Gentleman will hear the point, he might be able to offer an intelligible answer. Is it not the grossest discourtesy for the Chief Secretary directly to refer to a right hon. Member, but to fail to take his intervention in response?

Madam Speaker: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the response I made a moment ago. He was here, so he knows what I am talking about.

Mr. Milburn: Thank you, Madam Speaker. There will be more money than ever before for our public services, but for some, more is never enough. As the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) confirmed, the Liberals will vote against the 22p rate of income tax, because the record £19 billion that we are putting into schools in a month's time is inadequate—this from the party that promised only £2 billion more for education: £4.5 billion less than we will spend each year.

The more Labour delivers, the more the Liberals demand. They have proved once again that they have an insatiable appetite for spending other people's money. If they had their way, the Liberals and the nationalists alike would land the average family with higher tax bills. This Budget cuts taxes for low and middle-income families.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: Will the Chief Secretary confirm that the increase in current spending on health and education across the Parliament will be half the rate it was under the Conservative Government? Is that true or false? If it is true, how does the Chief Secretary think he will solve the problems of health and education?

Mr. Milburn: I know that the hon. Gentleman has a reputation for torturing the statistics until they confess, but this is a record investment in our health and education services. There will be £40,000 million more for our hospitals and schools—more than the Liberals promised the British people at the last general election.

This Budget cuts taxes for low and middle-income families, but it does even more than that. The independent Institute for Fiscal Studies says that people in every decile group—from top to bottom—will gain. The average household will be £380 a year better off, and the tax burden on the average family will fall to below 20 per cent. for the first time in more than 20 years.

This is not just a tax-cutting Budget, but a tax-reforming Budget too. These are tax cuts for a purpose: to reward work, enterprise and families. For years, successive Governments have taken too much tax from those who work hard but are by no means wealthy. Middle-income families who are self-reliant have been penalised for being so. The working poor, who have faced marginal tax rates of up to 100 per cent., have been penalised for moving off benefit. Families, who have seen their tax burden rising for three decades, have been penalised for having children.

This Budget begins to put things right: it will lift people up, not tie them down. It does so, first, by making sure that work pays.

Sir Peter Tapsell (Louth and Horncastle) *rose—*

Mr. Milburn: I have already given way.

Madam Speaker: Order. Is the Chief Secretary giving way?

Mr. Milburn: No, Madam Speaker. I have given way four times, which is 400 per cent. more than the shadow Chancellor managed.

This Budget makes sure that work pays. The new 10p starting rate will halve the tax bills of 2 million people. Our reforms to national insurance will lift almost 1 million people out of paying any contributions at all. Our pensions tax guarantee will help take 200,000 pensioners out of the tax bracket altogether. Our extension of the new deal to the over-50s will give a new lease on life and hope to thousands who had been written off. From April next year, every basic-rate and top-rate taxpayer will benefit from our 1p reduction in income tax.

Secondly, the Budget will provide most help to those who need it most when they need it most: families who are bringing up children. The new children's tax credit will put more than £400 into the pay packets of families with children. On top of that, there will be record increases in child benefit for all families.

So, as Opposition Members enter a new era of what can best be described as "confessional Conservatism", let me remind them about the extent of their past mistakes. In case they have forgotten, the Conservatives are the party that froze child benefit; we are the party that increases it. The Conservatives were wrong to put value-added tax on fuel and they were wrong when they tried to double it. It is right that we have cut VAT on gas and electricity and it is equally right that we will now help pensioners to cut their winter heating bills too.

This Budget delivers on our manifesto commitments. We said that we would cut VAT on fuel, and we have. We said that we would introduce a 10p starting rate of income tax, and we have. We said that we would give more help for pensioners, and we have. We said that we would make work pay, and we have. We said that we would give more support for families, and we have. By the end of this Parliament, the amount given to every child will have doubled from £11 to £23 and the extra help for pensioners will have increased dramatically. All that is opposed by the Conservative party.

When the Tories criticise the Budget, they do so not because of what we have done but because of what they did. We have kept our tax promises, but they broke theirs. They said in 1979 that they had no plans to increase VAT, but within a year they had doubled it. The Prime Minister said in 1992 that the Tories had no plans to extend VAT, but within a year they had put VAT on people's heating bills. Now they say that they want to put their past mistakes behind them, but by opposing the Budget, they are making new mistakes for the future that would cost the British people dear.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Order. The Chief Secretary has indicated that he is not giving way.

Mr. Milburn: I shall gladly give way once more.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Shall I select who it should be?

Mr. Paul Keetch (Hereford): I am grateful to the Chief Secretary for giving way. I apologise for missing the first two minutes of his speech, but I did hear him say that he was supporting a Budget for small business and shareholders. What is his message to the British cider industry? The only duty increase is on cider, which will affect jobs in Herefordshire, Worcestershire, Gloucestershire and Somerset. Is he not merely following the Tories' misguided policy? Should he not be supporting a truly English drink?

Mr. Milburn: Well, Madam Speaker, the hon. Gentleman was fastest on the draw. The cider industry, like all the industries that will benefit from our cuts in corporation tax, stands to benefit this evening.

The Tories and Liberal Democrats are making mistakes not only for the past but for the future because the mistakes that they will make by opposing the Budget tonight would cost the British people dear. Their actions would cost the British people the new 10p starting rate of tax, which is the lowest in 35 years. They would cost them the new 20p rate of income tax, which is the lowest in 70 years. They would cost them the extra help for families, children and pensioners. They would cost them the extra cash for schools, hospitals, rural transport and the fight against crime.

Already isolated in Europe and determined to be further isolated in Britain, the Tories will tonight set their face against a Budget that is good for our country and good for the people. This Budget debate has staked out the new dividing lines in British politics: the Tories consigned ever more to the margins; the Liberals and the nationalists exposed as the parties of tax and spend; and new Labour confirmed as the party of fairness and enterprise. The Government are delivering on our promises, step by step, building a stronger economy and a fairer society and offering a better deal for all Britain's people.

Madam Speaker: I shall now put the Question on the Amendment of the Law motion.

Sir Peter Tapsell *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Order. There is one minute to go. I call Sir Peter Tapsell.

Sir Peter Tapsell: It is 9.59 pm, so I am entitled to ask a question.

Madam Speaker: I am calling the hon. Gentleman.

Sir Peter Tapsell: Will the Chief Secretary say whether it is true that the three Budgets of the Labour Government have increased the overall tax take by £40 billion?

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That it is expedient to amend the law with respect to the National Debt and the public revenue and to make further provision in connection with finance; but this Resolution does not extend to the making of any amendment with respect to value added tax so as to provide—

(a) for zero-rating or exempting a supply, acquisition or importation;

(b) for refunding an amount of tax;

(c) for varying any rate at which that tax is at any time chargeable; or

(d) for any relief, other than a relief which—

(i) so far as it is applicable to goods, applies to goods of every description, and

(ii) so far as it is applicable to services, applies to services of every description.

MADAM SPEAKER *then, pursuant to Standing Order No. 51(3) (Ways and Means Motions), put forthwith the Questions necessary to dispose of the further motions.*

2. SPARKLING CIDER (RATE OF DUTY)

Motion made, and Question put,

That—

(1) In section 62(1A)(a) of the Alcoholic Liquor Duties Act 1979, for "£45.05" there shall be substituted "£161.20".

(2) This Resolution shall have effect as from 6 o'clock in the evening of 9th March 1999.

And it is hereby declared that it is expedient in the public interest that this Resolution should have statutory effect under the provisions of the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act 1968.

The House divided: Ayes 331, Noes 195.

Division No. 96] **[10.1 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Stuart *(Middlesbrough)*
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blair, Rt Hon Tony
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Boateng, Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Rt Hon Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Butler, Mrs Christine
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Canavan, Dennis
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John

Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Darvill, Keith
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, John
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Home Robertson, John
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Ms Jenny *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kelly, Ms Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kingham, Ms Tess
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Laxton, Bob
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Linton, Martin
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Lock, David
Love, Andrew
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McDonagh, Siobhain
Macdonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Mrs Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall–Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'ld Heeley)*
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morgan, Rhodri *(Cardiff W)*
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Eddie
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Mrs Diana
Osborne, Ms Sandra
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Rt Hon Ms Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Radice, Giles
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Rt Hon Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Robertson, Rt Hon George *(Hamilton S)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Salter, Martin
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shipley, Ms Debra
Short, Rt Hon Clare
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Stott, Roger
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Straw, Rt Hon Jack
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Temple–Morris, Peter
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Vaz, Keith
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wise, Audrey
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. David Jamieson and Mr. David Hanson.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Norman
Ballard, Jackie
Beggs, Roy
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Body, Sir Richard
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Brake, Tom
Brand, Dr Peter
Breed, Colin
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burns, Simon
Burstow, Paul
Butterfill, John
Cable, Dr Vincent
Campbell, Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chidgey, David
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Kensington)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rayleigh)*
Clifton–Brown, Geoffrey
Cormack, Sir Patrick

Cotter, Brian
Cunningham, Ms Roseanna *(Perth)*
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Day, Stephen
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Evans, Nigel
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Fearn, Ronnie
Forsythe, Clifford
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fox, Dr Liam
Fraser, Christopher
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gibb, Nick
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Sir Alastair
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorrie, Donald
Gray, James
Green, Damian
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Harris, Dr Evan
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson Smith, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross Skye)*
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Archy
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
Maclennan, Rt Hon Robert
McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Major, Rt Hon John
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Moore, Michael
Morgan, Alasdair *(Galloway)*
Moss, Malcolm
Nicholls, Patrick
Oaten, Mark
Öpik, Lembit
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Prior, David
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Ross, William *(E Lond'y)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Faversham)*
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
St Aubyn, Nick
Salmond, Alex
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Swinney, John
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, Rt Hon John D *(Strangford)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Tyler, Paul
Tyrie, Andrew
Wallace, James
Walter, Robert
Wardle, Charles
Waterson, Nigel
Webb, Steve
Wells, Bowen
Welsh, Andrew
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wigley, Rt Hon Dafydd
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Willis, Phil
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Woodward, Shaun
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Tim Collins and
Mr. James Cran.

Question accordingly agreed to.

3. HYDROCARBON OIL DUTIES (RATES AND REBATES)

Motion made, and Question put,

That—

(1) In section 6(1A) of the Hydrocarbon Oil Duties Act 1979—

(a) in paragraph (a), for "£0.4926" there shall be substituted "£0.5288";

(b) in paragraph (b), for "£0.4299" there shall be substituted "£0.4721"; and

(c) in paragraph (c), for "£0.4499" there shall be substituted "£0.5021".

(2) In section 8(3) of that Act, for "£0.2113" there shall be substituted "£0.1500".

(3) In section 11(1) of that Act—

(a) in paragraph (a), for "£0.0218" there shall be substituted "£0.0265"; and

(b) in each of paragraphs (b) and (ba), for "£0.0282" there shall be substituted "£0.0303".

(4) In section 13A(1A) of that Act—

(a) in paragraph (a), for "£0.0050" there shall be substituted "£0.0055"; and

(b) in paragraph (b), for "£0.0527" there shall be substituted "£0.0567".

(5) In section 14(1) of that Act, for "£0.0218" there shall be substituted "£0.0265".

(6) This Resolution shall have effect as from 6 o'clock in the evening of 9th March 1999.

And it is hereby declared that it is expedient in the public interest that this Resolution should have statutory effect under the provisions of the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act 1968.

The House divided: Ayes 329, Noes 196.

Division No. 97] **[10.14 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Stuart *(Middlesbrough)*
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blair, Rt Hon Tony
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Boateng, Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Rt Hon Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Butler, Mrs Christine
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Chisholm, Malcolm

Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Darvill, Keith
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, John
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Home Robertson, John
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Ms Jenny *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kelly, Ms Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kingham, Ms Tess
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Laxton, Bob
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Linton, Martin
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Lock, David
Love, Andrew
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McDonagh, Siobhain
Macdonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Mrs Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall–Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'ld Heeley)*
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morgan, Rhodri *(Cardiff W)*
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Eddie
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Mrs Diana
Osborne, Ms Sandra
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Rt Hon Ms Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Radice, Giles
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Rt Hon Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Robertson, Rt Hon George *(Hamilton S)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Salter, Martin
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shipley, Ms Debra
Short, Rt Hon Clare
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Stott, Roger
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Straw, Rt Hon Jack
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Temple–Morris, Peter
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Vaz, Keith
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wise, Audrey
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. David Hanson and
Mr. David Jamieson.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Ballard, Jackie
Beggs, Roy
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Body, Sir Richard

Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Brake, Tom
Brand, Dr Peter
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burns, Simon
Burstow, Paul
Butterfill, John
Cable, Dr Vincent
Campbell, Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chidgey, David
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Kensington)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rayleigh)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Cran, James
Cunningham, Ms Roseanna *(Perth)*
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Evans, Nigel
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Fearn, Ronnie
Forsythe, Clifford
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam
Fraser, Christopher
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gibb, Nick
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Sir Alastair
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorrie, Donald
Gray, James
Green, Damian
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Harris, Dr Evan
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson Smith, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross Skye)*
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Archy
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
Maclennan, Rt Hon Robert
McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Major, Rt Hon John
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Moore, Michael
Morgan, Alasdair *(Galloway)*
Moss, Malcolm
Nicholls, Patrick
Oaten, Mark
Öpik, Lembit
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Prior, David
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Ross, William *(E Lond'y)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Faversham)*
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
St Aubyn, Nick
Salmond, Alex
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Swinney, John
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, Rt Hon John D *(Strangford)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Tyler, Paul
Tyrie, Andrew
Wallace, James
Walter, Robert
Wardle, Charles
Waterson, Nigel
Webb, Steve
Wells, Bowen
Welsh, Andrew
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wigley, Rt Hon Dafydd
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Willis, Phil
Wiltshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Woodward, Shaun
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Tim Collins and
Mr. Stephen Day.

Question accordingly agreed to.

4. Hydrocarbon oil duties (drawback)

Resolved,

That provision may be made about the drawback of excise duty on hydrocarbon oil.

5. Tobacco products duty (rates)

Motion made, and Question put,

That—

(1) For the Table of rates of duty in Schedule 1 to the Tobacco Products Duty Act 1979 there shall be substituted—

TABLE

1. Cigarettes	An amount equal to 22 per cent. of the retail price plus £82.59 per thousand cigarettes.
2. Cigars	£122.06 per kilogram.
3. Hand-rolling tobacco	£87.74 per kilogram.
4. Other smoking tobacco and chewing tobacco	£53.66 per kilogram.

(2) This Resolution shall have effect as from 6 o'clock in the evening of 9th March 1999.

And it is hereby declared that it is expedient in the public interest that this Resolution should have statutory effect under the provisions of the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act 1968.

The House divided: Ayes 380, Noes 143.

Division No. 98] **[10.28 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Baker, Norman
Ballard, Jackie
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Stuart *(Middlesbrough)*
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Boateng, Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brake, Tom

Brand, Dr Peter
Breed, Colin
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Rt Hon Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burstow, Paul
Butler, Mrs Christine
Cable, Dr Vincent
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Canavan, Dennis
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cotter, Brian
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Ms Roseanna *(Perth)*
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, John
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fearn, Ronnie
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gorrie, Donald
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Harris, Dr Evan
Harvey, Nick
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Home Robertson, John
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Ilsley, Eric
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Ms Jenny *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Keetch, Paul
Kelly, Ms Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross Skye)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kingham, Ms Tess
Kirkwood, Archy
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Laxton, Bob
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Linton, Martin
Livingstone, Ken
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Lock, David
Love, Andrew
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McDonagh, Siobhain
Macdonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Mrs Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
Maclennan, Rt Hon Robert
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'ld Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moore, Michael
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Alasdair *(Galloway)*
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morgan, Rhodri *(Cardiff W)*
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Eddie
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Öpik, Lembit
Organ, Mrs Diana
Osborne, Ms Sandra
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Rt Hon Ms Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Radice, Giles
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Rt Hon Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, Rt Hon George *(Hamilton S)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Salmond, Alex
Salter, Martin
Sanders, Adrian
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shipley, Ms Debra
Short, Rt Hon Clare
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul

Stoate, Dr Howard
Stott, Roger
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Straw, Rt Hon Jack
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Swinney, John
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Wallace, James
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
Webb, Steve
Welsh, Andrew
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Rt Hon Dafydd
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Willis, Phil
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wise, Audrey
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. David Hanson and
Mr. David Jamieson.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Beggs, Roy
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Body, Sir Richard
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Butterfill, John
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Kensington)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rayleigh)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cran, James
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Evans, Nigel
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Forsythe, Clifford
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam
Fraser, Christopher
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Sir Alastair
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gray, James
Green, Damian
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson Smith, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Major, Rt Hon John
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Moss, Malcolm
Nicholls, Patrick
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Prior, David
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Ross, William *(E Londy)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Faversham)*
St Aubyn, Nick
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, Rt Hon John D *(Strangford)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Tyrie, Andrew
Walter, Robert
Wardle, Charles
Waterson, Nigel
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Woodward, Shaun
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Tim Collins and
Mr. Stephen Day.

Question accordingly agreed to.

6. POOL BETTING DUTY (RATE)

Resolved,

That—

(1) In section 7(1) of the Betting and Gaming Duties Act 1981, for "26.50 per cent." there shall be substituted "17.50 per cent."

(2) This Resolution has effect in relation to bets the stake money on which is paid on or after 28th March 1999.

And it is hereby declared that it is expedient in the public interest that this Resolution should have statutory effect under the provisions of the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act 1968.

7. VEHICLE EXCISE DUTY (INCREASE IN GENERAL RATE)

Resolved,

That—

(1) In sub-paragraph (2) of paragraph 1 of Schedule 1 to the Vehicle Excise and Registration Act 1994, for "£150" there shall be substituted "£155".

(2) This Resolution has effect in relation to licences issued after 9th March 1999.

And it is hereby declared that it is expedient in the public interest that this Resolution should have statutory effect under the provisions of the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act 1968.

8. VEHICLE EXCISE DUTY (SPLITTING OF GENERAL RATE)

Resolved,

That—

(1) In sub-paragraph (2) of paragraph 1 of Schedule 1 to the Vehicle Excise and Registration Act 1994, for the word "The" at the beginning there shall be substituted "Except in the case of a vehicle having an engine with a cylinder capacity not exceeding 1,100 cubic centimetres, the".

(2) After that sub-paragraph there shall be inserted the following sub-paragraph—

"(2A) In the case of a vehicle having an engine with a cylinder capacity not exceeding 1,100 cubic centimetres, the general rate is £100."

(3) In sections 13(3)(b), 35A(5)(b) and 36(3)(b) of that Act, and in section 13(4)(b) of that Act as substituted under paragraph 8 of Schedule 4 to that Act, for the words "paragraph 1 of Schedule 1", in each place where they occur, there shall be substituted "paragraph 1(2) of Schedule 1".

(4) This Resolution has effect in relation to any licence taken out for a period beginning on or after 1st June 1999.

And it is hereby declared that it is expedient in the public interest that this Resolution should have statutory effect under the provisions of the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act 1968.

9. VEHICLE EXCISE DUTY (RATES FOR GOODS VEHICLES ETC.)

Resolved,

That Schedule 1 to the Vehicle Excise and Registration Act 1994 be amended as follows—

(1) In sub-paragraph (2A)(b) of paragraph 6, for "£4,670" there shall be substituted "£4,170".

(2) In sub-paragraph (3) of that paragraph, for "38,000 kilograms" there shall be substituted "41,000 kilograms".

(3) For the Table in paragraph 9(1) there shall be substituted—

Revenue weight of vehicle		Rate		
(1) Exceeding	(2) Not exceeding	(3) Two axle vehicle	(4) Three axle vehicle	(5) Four or more axle vehicle
kgs	kgs	£	£	£
3,500	7,500	160	160	160
7,500	12,000	300	300	300
12,000	13,000	470	490	350
13,000	14,000	650	490	350
14,000	15,000	840	490	350
15,000	17,000	1,320	490	350
17,000	19,000	1,600	850	350
19,000	21,000	1,600	1,020	350
21,000	23,000	1,600	1,470	510
23,000	25,000	1,600	2,320	830
25,000	27,000	1,600	2,340	1,470
27,000	29,000	1,600	2,340	2,320
29,000	31,000	1,600	2,340	3,360
31,000	44,000	1,600	2,340	4,400

(4) In paragraph 9A(3), for "£4,670" there shall be substituted "£4,170".

(5) For the Table in paragraph 9B there shall be substituted—

Revenue weight of vehicle		Rate		
(1) Exceeding	(2) Not exceeding	(3) Two axle vehicle	(4) Three axle vehicle	(5) Four or more axle vehicle
kgs	kgs	£	£	£
3,500	7,500	155	155	155
7,500	12,000	155	155	155
12,000	13,000	155	155	155
13,000	14,000	155	155	155
14,000	15,000	155	155	155
15,000	17,000	320	155	155
17,000	19,000	600	155	155
19,000	21,000	600	155	155
21,000	23,000	600	470	155
23,000	25,000	600	1,230	155
25,000	27,000	600	1,340	470
27,000	29,000	600	1,340	1,320
29,000	31,000	600	1,340	2,360
31,000	44,000	600	1,340	3,400

(6) For the Table in paragraph 11(1) there shall be substituted—

Revenue weight of tractive unit		Rate for tractive unit with two axles			Rate for tractive unit with three or more axles		
(1) Exceeding	(2) Not exceeding	(3) Any number of semi-trailer axles	(4) 2 or more semi-trailer axles	(5) 3 or more semi-trailer axles	(6) Any number of semi-trailer axles	(7) 2 or more semi-trailer axles	(8) 3 or more semi-trailer axles
kgs	kgs	£	£	£	£	£	£
3,500	7,500	160	160	160	160	160	160
7,500	12,000	300	300	300	300	300	300
12,000	16,000	460	460	460	460	460	460
16,000	20,000	520	460	460	460	460	460
20,000	23,000	810	460	460	460	460	460
23,000	26,000	1,190	590	460	590	460	460
26,000	28,000	1,190	1,130	460	1,130	460	460
28,000	31,000	1,740	1,740	1,090	1,740	560	460
31,000	33,000	2,530	2,530	1,740	2,530	1,000	460
33,000	34,000	5,170	5,170	1,740	2,530	1,470	570
34,000	35,000	5,170	5,170	2,840	2,530	2,100	860
35,000	36,000	6,750	6,750	2,840	2,530	2,100	860
36,000	38,000	9,250	9,250	3,210	2,820	2,820	1,280
38,000	41,000	9,250	9,250	5,750	4,250	4,250	2,500
41,000	44,000	9,250	9,250	5,750	7,250	7,250	1,280

(7) In paragraph 11A(3), for "£4,670" there shall be substituted "£4,170".

(8) For the Table in paragraph 11B there shall be substituted—

Revenue weight of tractive unit		Rate for tractive unit with two axles			Rate for tractive unit with three or more axles		
(1) Exceeding	(2) Not exceeding	(3) Any number of semi-trailer axles	(4) 2 or more semi-trailer axles	(5) 3 or more semi-trailer axles	(6) Any number of semi-trailer axles	(7) 2 or more semi-trailer axles	(8) 3 or more semi-trailer axles
kgs	kgs	£	£	£	£	£	£
3,500	7,500	155	155	155	155	155	155
7,500	12,000	155	155	155	155	155	155
12,000	16,000	155	155	155	155	155	155
16,000	20,000	155	155	155	155	155	155
20,000	23,000	155	155	155	155	155	155
23,000	26,000	190	155	155	155	155	155
26,000	28,000	190	155	155	155	155	155
28,000	31,000	740	740	155	740	155	155
31,000	33,000	1,530	1,530	740	1,530	155	155
33,000	34,000	4,170	4,170	740	1,530	470	155
34,000	35,000	4,170	4,170	1,840	1,530	1,100	155
35,000	36,000	5,750	5,750	1,840	1,530	1,100	155
36,000	38,000	8,250	8,250	2,210	1,820	1,820	280
38,000	41,000	8,250	8,250	4,750	3,250	3,250	1,500
41,000	44,000	8,250	8,250	4,750	6,250	6,250	280

(9) Subject to the following paragraphs of this Resolution, the preceding paragraphs apply in relation to licences taken out after 9th March 1999.

(10) Paragraph (11) below applies where—

(a) a pre-commencement licence was taken out for a goods vehicle at a rate applicable to a vehicle with a revenue weight falling within a specified range of weights; and

(b) the revenue weight of the vehicle at any time on or after 17th April 1999 (though still within the specified range of weights mentioned in paragraph (a) above) is one which, for the purposes of taking out a licence for that vehicle after 9th March 1999, would fall in a range of weights attracting a rate of duty higher than that attracted by the vehicle's licensed weight.

(11) For the purposes of section 15 of the Vehicle Excise and Registration Act 1994 any use of the vehicle on a public road at a time on or after 17th April 1999 when its revenue weight falls within paragraph (10)(b) above shall be treated as a use of the vehicle so as to subject it to a rate of duty higher than that at which the pre-commencement licence was taken out.

(12) Paragraph (13) below applies where—

(a) a pre-commencement licence was taken out for a goods vehicle at a rate applicable to a vehicle with a revenue weight falling within a specified range of weights;

(b) the revenue weight of the vehicle is increased at a time after 9th March 1999; and

(c) the revenue weight of the vehicle immediately after the increase (though still within the specified range of weights mentioned in paragraph (a) above) is one which, for the purposes of taking out a licence for that vehicle after 9th March 1999, would fall in a range of weights attracting a rate of duty higher than that attracted by the vehicle's licensed weight.

(13) For the purposes of section 15 of the Vehicle Excise and Registration Act 1994 any use of the vehicle on a public road after the increase in its revenue weight shall be treated (if it would not otherwise be so treated by virtue of paragraph (11) above) as a use of the vehicle so as to subject it to a rate of duty higher than that at which the pre-commencement licence was taken out.

(14) In this Resolution—

"licensed weight", in relation to a vehicle, means the revenue weight of the vehicle at the time when the

pre-commencement licence for that vehicle was taken out; and

"pre-commencement licence" means a licence taken out on or before 9th March 1999 and in force after that date.

And it is hereby declared that it is expedient in the public interest that this Resolution should have statutory effect under the provisions of the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act 1968.

10. Drawback of excise duty on goods shipped as stores etc.

Resolved,

That provision may be made about the drawback of excise duty on goods shipped as stores or warehoused in an excise warehouse for use as stores.

11. Value added tax (gold)

Resolved,

That provision may be made about value added tax in respect of supplies or importations which relate to gold.

12. Value added tax (bad debt relief: assignment)

Resolved,

That—

(1) In section 36 of the Value Added Tax Act 1994, for subsection (3) there shall be substituted—

"(3) In subsection (2) above 'the outstanding amount' means—

(a) if at the time of the claim no part of the consideration written off in the claimant's accounts as a bad debt has been received, an amount equal to the amount of the consideration so written off;

(b) if at that time any part of the consideration so written off has been received, an amount by which that part is exceeded by the amount of the consideration written off;

and in this subsection 'received' means received either by the claimant or, except in such circumstances as may be prescribed, by a person to whom has been assigned a right to receive the whole or any part of the consideration written off."

(2) Until such day as the Commissioners may specify in regulations made under section 36 of that Act, Part XIX of the Value Added Tax Regulations 1995, except regulation 171, shall be read as if a reference to a payment being received by the claimant were a reference to a payment being received either by the claimant or by a person to whom a right to receive it has been assigned.

(3) This Resolution has effect for the purposes of the making of any refund or repayment after 9th March 1999, but does not have effect in relation to anything received on or before that day.

And it is hereby declared that it is expedient in the public interest that this Resolution should have statutory effect under the provisions of the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act 1968.

13. Value added tax (bad debt relief: regulations)

Resolved,

That provision may be made amending section 36(5) of the Value Added Tax Act 1994.

14. Value added tax (groups of companies)

Resolved,

That provision may be made about groups of companies in relation to value added tax.

15. Value added tax (repayment supplement)

Resolved,

That—

(1) Section 79 of the Value Added Tax Act 1994 shall be amended as follows.

(2) In subsection (2)(b), for the words "the period of 30 days beginning on the date of the receipt by the Commissioners of that return or claim" there shall be substituted "the relevant period".

(3) After subsection (2) there shall be inserted—

"(2A) The relevant period in relation to a return or claim is the period of 30 days beginning with the later of—

(a) the day after the last day of the prescribed accounting period to which the return or claim relates, and

(b) the date of the receipt by the Commissioners of the return or claim."

(4) In subsections (3) and (7), for "subsection (2)(b)" there shall be substituted "subsection (2A)"; and regulations under subsection (3) shall be construed accordingly.

(5) This Resolution has effect in relation to returns and claims received by the Commissioners on or after 9th March 1999.

And it is hereby declared that it is expedient in the public interest that this Resolution should have statutory effect under the provisions of the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act 1968.

16. Value added tax (meaning of "business")

Resolved,

That provision may be made for the repeal of section 94(3) of the Value Added Tax Act 1994.

17. Income tax (starting rate)

Motion made, and Question put,

That—

(1) The following shall be substituted for section 1(2)(aa) of the Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1988—

"(aa) in respect of so much of an individual's total income as does not exceed £1,500, at such rate as Parliament may determine to be the starting rate for that year;".

(2) The following shall be substituted for section 1(2A) of that Act—

"(2A) The amount up to which an individual's income is by virtue of subsection (2) above chargeable for any year at the starting rate shall be known as the starting rate limit."

(3) In section 1(3) of that Act, for "lower rate" there shall be substituted "starting rate".

(4) Section 1(4) of that Act, so far as it relates to section 1(2)(aa), shall not apply for the year 1999-00.

(5) In section 1(6A) of that Act, for "lower rate" there shall be substituted "starting rate".

(6) The following shall be inserted before section 1A(2) of that Act—

"(1B) In relation to any year of assessment for which income tax is charged the lower rate is 20 per cent. or such other rate as Parliament may determine."

(7) The following shall be inserted after section 1A(6) of that Act—

"(6A) Where income tax at the basic rate has been borne on income chargeable at the lower rate any necessary repayment of tax shall be made on the making of a claim."

(8) In sections 547(5)(c) and 550(3) of that Act, for "lower rate" there shall be substituted "starting rate".

(9) In sections 549(2), 699(2) and 819(2) of that Act, for "at the lower rate by virtue of section 1(2)(aa)" there shall be substituted "at the starting rate".

(10) In section 832(1) of that Act—

(a) the following shall be substituted for the definition of "lower rate"—

"'lower rate', in relation to the charging of income tax for any year of assessment, means the rate of income tax specified in or determined in pursuance of section 1A(1B);", and

(b) the following shall be inserted after the definition of "Schedule A business"—

"'starting rate', in relation to the charging of income tax for any year of assessment, means the rate of income tax determined in pursuance of section 1(2)(aa), and any reference to the starting rate limit shall be construed in accordance with section 1(2A);".

(11) In section 7(6) of the Taxes Management Act 1970, for "or the lower rate" there shall be substituted ", the lower rate or the starting rate".

(12) In section 91(3)(c) of that Act, for "or the lower rate" there shall be substituted ", the lower rate or the starting rate".

(13) The preceding paragraphs apply for the year 1999-00 and subsequent years of assessment.

(14) Nothing in this Resolution shall require any change to be made in the amounts deductible or repayable under section 203 of the Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1988 before 18th May 1999.

And it is hereby declared that it is expedient in the public interest that this Resolution should have statutory effect under the provisions of the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act 1968.

The House divided: Ayes 334, Noes 40.

Division No. 99] **[10.43 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Stuart *(Middlesbrough)*
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Best, Harold
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Boateng, Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Rt Hon Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Butler, Mrs Christine
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Canavan, Dennis
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Ms Roseanna *(Perth)*
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Darvill, Keith
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, John
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Home Robertson, John
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Ms Jenny *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kelly, Ms Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kingham, Ms Tess
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Laxton, Bob
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Linton, Martin
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Lock, David
Love, Andrew
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McDonagh, Siobhain
Macdonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Mrs Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'ld Heeley)*
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Alasdair *(Galloway)*
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morgan, Rhodri *(Cardiff W)*
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George

Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Eddie
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Mrs Diana
Osborne, Ms Sandra
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Rt Hon Ms Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Radice, Giles
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Rt Hon Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Robertson, Rt Hon George *(Hamilton S)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Salmond, Alex
Salter, Martin
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shipley, Ms Debra
Short, Rt Hon Clare
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Straw, Rt Hon Jack
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Swinney, John
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Vaz, Keith
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
Welsh, Andrew
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Rt Hon Dafydd
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wise, Audrey
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Mike Hall and
Mr. Clive Betts.

NOES

Allan, Richard
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Baker, Norman
Ballard, Jackie
Brake, Tom
Brand, Dr Peter
Breed, Colin
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burstow, Paul
Cable, Dr Vincent
Campbell, Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Chidgey, David
Cotter, Brian
Fearn, Ronnie
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gorrie, Donald
Harris, Dr Evan
Harvey, Nick
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross Skye)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Livsey, Richard
Maclennan, Rt Hon Robert
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Moore, Michael
Oaten, Mark
Öpik, Lembit
Rendel, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Tyler, Paul
Wallace, James
Webb, Steve
Willis, Phil

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Edward Davey and
Mr. Adrian Sanders.

Question accordingly agreed to.

18. INCOME TAX (CHARGE AND RATES FOR 1999–00)

Resolved,

That—

(1) Income tax shall be charged for the year 1999–00, and for that year—

(a) the starting rate shall be 10 per cent.;

(b) the basic rate shall be 23 per cent.; and

(c) the higher rate shall be 40 per cent.

(2) Nothing in this Resolution shall require any change to be made in the amounts deductible or repayable under section 203 of the Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1988 before 18th May 1999.

And it is hereby declared that it is expedient in the public interest that this Resolution should have statutory effect under the provisions of the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act 1968.

19. INCOME TAX (PERSONAL ALLOWANCES FOR THOSE AGED 65 OR MORE)

Resolved,

That—

(1) For the year 1999–00 the amounts specified in subsections (2) and (3) of section 257 of the Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1988 shall be taken to be £5,720 and £5,980, respectively.

(2) Accordingly, section 257C(1) of that Act, so far as it relates to the amounts so specified, shall not apply for the year 1999–00.

(3) Nothing in paragraph (1) of this Resolution above shall require any change to be made in the amounts deductible or repayable under section 203 of that Act before 18th May 1999.

And it is hereby declared that it is expedient in the public interest that this Resolution should have statutory effect under the provisions of the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act 1968.

20. INCOME TAX (OPERATIVE DATE OF INDEXATION FOR PAYE)

Resolved,

That—

(1) In section 1 of the Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1988, after subsection (4) there shall be inserted—

"(5A) Subsection (4) above shall not require any change to be made in the amounts deductible or repayable under section 203 during the period beginning with 6th April and ending with 17th May in the year of assessment."

(2) In section 257C of that Act, after subsection (1) there shall be inserted—

"(2A) Subsection (1) above shall not require any change to be made in the amounts deductible or repayable under section 203 during the period beginning with 6th April and ending with 17th May in the year of assessment."

And it is hereby declared that it is expedient in the public interest that this Resolution should have statutory effect under the provisions of the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act 1968.

21. RATES OF CAPITAL GAINS TAX

Resolved,

That provision may be made about the rates of capital gains tax.

22. CORPORATION TAX (CHARGE AND RATE FOR FINANCIAL YEAR 2000)

Resolved,

That, for the financial year 2000, corporation tax shall be charged at the rate of 30 per cent.

23. RELIEF FOR INTEREST PAYMENTS (LIMIT FOR 1999–00)

Resolved,

That, for the year 1999–00, the qualifying maximum defined in section 367(5) of the Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1988 shall be £30,000.

And it is hereby declared that it is expedient in the public interest that this Resolution should have statutory effect under the provisions of the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act 1968.

24. INTEREST ON LOANS FOR LIFE ANNUITIES (WITHDRAWAL OF RELIEF)

Motion made, and Question put,

That—

(1) In section 365 of the Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1988, in subsection (1), before paragraph (a) there shall be inserted the following paragraph—

"(aa) that the loan was made before 9th March 1999;".

(2) After subsection (1) of that section there shall be inserted the following subsection—

"(1AA) Where—

(a) a loan made on or after 9th March 1999 was made in pursuance of an offer made by the lender before that date; and

(b) the offer was either in writing or evidenced by a note or memorandum made by the lender before that date,

the loan shall be deemed for the purposes of subsection (1)(aa) above to have been made before that date."

(3) The preceding paragraphs have effect for the year 1998–99 and subsequent years of assessment.

And it is hereby declared that it is expedient in the public interest that this Resolution should have statutory effect under the provisions of the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act 1968.

The House divided: Ayes 324, Noes 191.

Division No. 100] **[10.56 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Stuart *(Middlesbrough)*
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Best, Harold
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Rt Hon Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Butler, Mrs Christine
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Canavan, Dennis
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Darvill, Keith
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, John
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Home Robertson, John
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Alan *(Newport E)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Ms Jenny *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kelly, Ms Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kingham, Ms Tess
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Laxton, Bob
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Linton, Martin
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Lock, David
Love, Andrew
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McDonagh, Siobhain
Macdonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Mrs Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mahon, Mrs Alice

Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall–Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'ld Heeley)*
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morgan, Rhodri *(Cardiff W)*
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Eddie
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Mrs Diana
Osborne, Ms Sandra
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Rt Hon Ms Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Radice, Giles
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Rt Hon Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Robertson, Rt Hon George *(Hamilton S)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Salter, Martin
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shipley, Ms Debra
Short, Rt Hon Clare
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Stott, Roger
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Straw, Rt Hon Jack
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Temple–Morris, Peter
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Vaz, Keith
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wise, Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Mike Hall and
Mr. Clive Betts.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Norman
Ballard, Jackie
Beggs, Roy
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Body, Sir Richard
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Brake, Tom
Brand, Dr Peter
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burns, Simon
Burstow, Paul
Butterfill, John
Cable, Dr Vincent
Campbell, Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chidgey, David
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Kensington)*
Clifton–Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Cran, James
Cunningham, Ms Roseanna *(Perth)*
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Day, Stephen
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Evans, Nigel
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Fearn, Ronnie
Forsythe, Clifford
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam
Fraser, Christopher
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gibb, Nick
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Sir Alastair
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorrie, Donald
Gray, James
Green, Damian
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Harris, Dr Evan
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Heathcoat–Amory, Rt Hon David
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson Smith, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross Skye)*
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Archy
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
Maclennan, Rt Hon Robert
McLoughlin, Patrick
Major, Rt Hon John
Maples, John
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Moore, Michael
Morgan, Alasdair *(Galloway)*
Moss, Malcolm
Nicholls, Patrick
Oaten, Mark
Öpik, Lembit
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Prior, David
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Ross, William *(E Lond'y)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Faversham)*
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
St Aubyn, Nick
Salmond, Alex
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Swinney, John
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, Rt Hon John D *(Strangford)*

Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Tyler, Paul
Tyrie, Andrew
Wallace, James
Wardle, Charles
Waterson, Nigel
Webb, Steve
Wells, Bowen
Welsh, Andrew
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wigley, Rt Hon Dafydd
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Willis, Phil
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Woodward, Shaun
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mrs. Eleanor Laing and
Sir David Madel.

Question accordingly agreed to.

25. CARS AVAILABLE FOR PRIVATE USE

Motion made, and Question put,

That—

(1) Schedule 6 to the Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1988 shall be amended as follows.

(2) In paragraph 2(1)—

(a) for "in the year concerned" substitute "in a year", and

(b) for "the amount ascertained under paragraph 1 above, reduced by two thirds" substitute "15 per cent. of the price of the car as regards the year".

(3) In paragraph 2(2)—

(a) for "in the year concerned" substitute "in a year", and

(b) for "the amount ascertained under paragraph 1 above, reduced by one third" substitute "25 per cent. of the price of the car as regards the year".

(4) For paragraph 4(a) substitute—

"(a) paragraph 2(1) above shall have effect as if for '15 per cent.' there were substituted '25 per cent.'"

(5) In paragraph 5, for "one third" substitute "one quarter".

(6) The preceding paragraphs have effect for the year 1999-00 and subsequent years of assessment.

(7) This Resolution shall not require any change to be made in the amounts deductible or repayable under section 203 of the Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1988 before 18th May 1999.

And it is hereby declared that it is expedient in the public interest that this Resolution should have statutory effect under the provisions of the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act 1968.

The House divided: Ayes 372, Noes 137.

Division No. 101] **[11.8 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Baker, Norman
Ballard, Jackie
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Stuart *(Middlesbrough)*
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Best, Harold
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brake, Tom
Brand, Dr Peter
Breed, Colin
Brown, Rt Hon Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burstow, Paul
Butler, Mrs Christine
Cable, Dr Vincent
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Canavan, Dennis
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cotter, Brian
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Ms Roseanna *(Perth)*
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, John
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fearn, Ronnie
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gorrie, Donald
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Harris, Dr Evan
Harvey, Nick
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Home Robertson, John
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Alan *(Newport E)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Ms Jenny *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*

Keetch, Paul
Kelly, Ms Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross Skye)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kingham, Ms Tess
Kirkwood, Archy
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Laxton, Bob
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Linton, Martin
Livingstone, Ken
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Lock, David
Love, Andrew
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McDonagh, Siobhain
Macdonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Mrs Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
Maclennan, Rt Hon Robert
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall–Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'ld Heeley)*
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moore, Michael
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Alasdair *(Galloway)*
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morgan, Rhodri *(Cardiff W)*
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Eddie
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Öpik, Lembit
Organ, Mrs Diana
Osborne, Ms Sandra
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Rt Hon Ms Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Radice, Giles
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Rt Hon Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, Rt Hon George *(Hamilton S)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Salmond, Alex
Salter, Martin
Sanders, Adrian
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shipley, Ms Debra
Short, Rt Hon Clare
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Stott, Roger
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Straw, Rt Hon Jack
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Swinney, John
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Temple–Morris, Peter
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Wallace, James
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
Webb, Steve
Welsh, Andrew
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Rt Hon Dafydd
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Willis, Phil
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wise, Audrey
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Mike Hall and
Mr. Clive Betts.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Beggs, Roy
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Body, Sir Richard
Boswell, Tim
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Butterfill, John
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Kensington)*
Clifton–Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Day, Stephen
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Evans, Nigel
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Forsythe, Clifford
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam
Fraser, Christopher
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Sir Alastair
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gray, James
Green, Damian
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat–Amory, Rt Hon David
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Major, Rt Hon John
Maples, John
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Moss, Malcolm
Nicholls, Patrick
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Prior, David
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Ross, William *(E Lond'y)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Faversham)*
Ruffley, David
St Aubyn, Nick
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard

Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, Rt Hon John D *(Strangford)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Tyrie, Andrew
Wardle, Charles
Waterson, Nigel
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Woodward, Shaun
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mrs. Eleanor Laing and
Sir David Madel.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael J. Martin): I understand that it will be convenient for the House to take motions 26 to 42 together.

26. TAX TREATMENT OF REVERSE PREMIUMS ETC.

Resolved,

That provision may be made with respect to the tax treatment of payments or other benefits received in consideration of, or in connection with, a transaction being entered into under which the person receiving the payment or other benefit, or a person connected with that person, becomes entitled to an estate or interest in, or a right in or over, land.

27. VOCATIONAL TRAINING RELIEF

Resolved,

That—

(1) For subsection (2) of section 32 of the Finance Act 1991 there shall be substituted—

"(2) The individual shall be entitled to relief under this subsection in respect of the payment for the year of assessment in which it is made; but relief under this subsection shall be given only on a claim made for the purpose, except where subsections (3) to (5) below apply.

(2A) Where an individual is entitled to relief under subsection (2) above in respect of any payment made in a year of assessment, the amount of his liability for that year to income tax on his total income shall be the amount to which he would be liable apart from this section less whichever is the smaller of—

(a) the amount which is equal to such percentage of the amount of the payment as is the basic rate for the year; and

(b) the amount which reduces his liability to nil.

(2B) In determining for the purposes of subsection (2A) above the amount of income tax to which a person would be liable apart from this section, no account shall be taken of—

(a) any income tax reduction under Chapter I of Part VII of the Taxes Act 1988 or under section 347B of that Act;

(b) any income tax reduction under section 353(1A) of the Taxes Act 1988;

(c) any relief by way of a reduction of liability to tax which is given in accordance with any arrangements having effect by virtue of section 788 of the Taxes Act 1988 or by way of a credit under section 790(1) of that Act;

(d) any tax at the basic rate on so much of that person's income as is income the income tax on which he is entitled to charge against any other person or to deduct, retain or satisfy out of any payment."

(2) This Resolution has effect in relation to payments made on or after 6th April 1999.

(3) This Resolution shall not require any change to be made in the amounts deductible or repayable under section 203 of the Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1988 before 18th May 1999.

And it is hereby declared that it is expedient in the public interest that this Resolution should have statutory effect under the provisions of the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act 1968.

28. SETTLEMENTS

Resolved,

That provision may be made amending section 660B of the Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1988.

29. ENTERPRISE INVESTMENT SCHEME

Resolved,

That provision may be made amending Chapter III of Part VII of the Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1988 and Schedule 5B to the Taxation of Chargeable Gains Act 1992.

30. VENTURE CAPITAL TRUSTS

Resolved,

That provision may be made amending Schedule 15B to the Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1988.

31. COURT COMMON INVESTMENT FUNDS

Resolved,

That provision may be made for the purposes of income tax and corporation tax about common investment funds established under section 42 of the Administration of Justice Act 1982.

32. DISCOUNTED SECURITIES ETC.

Resolved,

That provision (including provision having retrospective effect) may be made—

(a) amending paragraph 3 of Schedule 13 to the Finance Act 1996, paragraphs 19 and 20 of Schedule 15 to that Act and sections 64 and 65 of the Finance Act 1993; and

(b) modifying section 116 of the Taxation of Chargeable Gains Act 1992.

33. CHARGEABLE GAINS (VALUE SHIFTING)

Resolved,

That provision may be made about value shifting in relation to the taxation of chargeable gains.

34. CHARGEABLE GAINS (CONCESSIONS THAT DEFER A CHARGE)

Resolved,

That provision may be made about cases where, after a relief in respect of a chargeable gain has been obtained in reliance on a concession, a charge to tax would arise if the concession were an enactment to the corresponding effect.

35. PENSION SHARING

Resolved,

That provision may be made, for purposes connected with the sharing of pensions between ex-spouses, with respect to pensions and annuities.

36. PURCHASED LIFE ANNUITIES

Resolved,

That section 657(2) of the Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1988 shall have effect, and shall be deemed always to have had

effect, with the substitution of the following paragraph for the "or" at the end of paragraph (d)—

"(da) to any annuity purchased under or for the purposes of a scheme approved by virtue of section 591 or in pursuance of any obligation imposed, or offer or invitation made, under or in connection with any such scheme;".

And it is hereby declared that it is expedient in the public interest that this Resolution should have statutory effect under the provisions of the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act 1968.

37. Extra-statutory arrangements for insurance groups

Resolved,

That provision may be made, in relation to accounting periods beginning on or after 1st January 1999, about disposals of assets the acquisition cost of which has been disregarded on a previous occasion under extra-statutory arrangements relating to groups of insurance companies.

38. Lloyd's

Resolved,

That provision may be made about rights under syndicates held by a member of Lloyd's under a members' agent pooling arrangement.

39. Advance pricing agreements

Resolved,

That provision may be made for the effect in any person's case of paragraphs 6 and 7 of Schedule 28AA to the Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1988 to be modified by an agreement to which he is not a party.

40. Controlled foreign companies

Resolved,

That provision may be made amending Part 1 of Schedule 25 to the Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1988.

41. Group relief (consequential provision)

Resolved,

That provision may be made with respect to the consequences of a reduction in the amount available for surrender by way of group relief.

42. Inheritance tax (gifts)

Resolved,

That provision may be made as to the circumstances in which gifts of land are gifts of property subject to a reservation for the purposes of inheritance tax.

43. Stamp duty (conveyances and transfers on sale)

Motion made, and Question put,

That the following provisions shall have effect for the period beginning with 16th March 1999 and ending 31 days after the earliest of the dates mentioned in section 50(2) of the Finance Act 1973—

(1) Section 55 of the Finance Act 1963 and section 4 of the Finance Act (Northern Ireland) 1963 shall each be amended in accordance with paragraphs (2) and (3) below.

(2) In subsection (1)(d), for "£2" there shall be substituted "£2.50p".

(3) In subsection (1)(e), for "£3" there shall be substituted "£3.50p".

(4) This Resolution applies to instruments executed on or after 16th March 1999, except where the instrument in question is executed in pursuance of a contract made on or before 9th March 1999.

And it is hereby declared that it is expedient in the public interest that this Resolution should have statutory effect under the provisions of section 50 of the Finance Act 1973.

The House divided: Ayes 365, Noes 137.

Division No. 102] **[11.20 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Baker, Norman
Ballard, Jackie
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Stuart *(Middlesbrough)*
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brake, Tom
Brand, Dr Peter
Breed, Colin
Brown, Rt Hon Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burstow, Paul
Butler, Mrs Christine
Campbell, Alán *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Canavan, Dennis
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cotter, Brian
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Ms Roseanna *(Perth)*
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, John
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fearn, Ronnie
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gorrie, Donald
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*

Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Harris, Dr Evan
Harvey, Nick
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Home Robertson, John
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Alan *(Newport E)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Ms Jenny *(Wolverhampton SW)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Keetch, Paul
Kelly, Ms Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross Skye)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kingham, Ms Tess
Kirkwood, Archy
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Laxton, Bob
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Linton, Martin
Livingstone, Ken
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Lock, David
Love, Andrew
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonnell, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Mrs Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
Maclennan, Rt Hon Robert
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall–Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'ld Heeley)*
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moore, Michael
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Alasdair *(Galloway)*
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morgan, Rhodri *(Cardiff W)*
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Eddie
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Öpik, Lembit
Organ, Mrs Diana
Osborne, Ms Sandra
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Rt Hon Ms Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Radice, Giles
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Rt Hon Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, Rt Hon George *(Hamilton S)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Salmond, Alex
Salter, Martin
Sanders, Adrian
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shipley, Ms Debra
Short, Rt Hon Clare
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Stott, Roger
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Straw, Rt Hon Jack
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Swinney, John
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Temple–Morris, Peter
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Wallace, James
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
Webb, Steve
Welsh, Andrew
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Rt Hon Dafydd
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Willis, Phil
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wise, Audrey
Woolas, Phil
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Kevin Hughes and
Mr. Keith Hill.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Beggs, Roy
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Body, Sir Richard
Boswell, Tim
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Butterfill, John
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Kensington)*
Clifton–Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cran, James
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Day, Stephen
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Evans, Nigel
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Forsythe, Clifford
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam
Fraser, Christopher
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Sir Alastair
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gray, James
Green, Damian
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat–Amory, Rt Hon David
Horam, John

Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Major, Rt Hon John
Maples, John
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Moss, Malcolm
Nicholls, Patrick
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Prior, David
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Ross, William *(E Lond'y)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Faversham)*
Ruffley, David
St Aubyn, Nick
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, Rt Hon John D *(Strangford)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Tyrie, Andrew
Wardle, Charles
Waterson, Nigel
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Woodward, Shaun
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mrs. Eleanor Laing and Sir David Madel.

Question accordingly agreed to.

44. Stamp duty and stamp duty reserve tax

Resolved,

That provision may be made in relation to stamp duty and stamp duty reserve tax.

45. Ring fence profits

Resolved,

That provision may be made about persons carrying on activities which fall within any of paragraphs (a) to (c) of subsection (1) of section 492 of the Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1988.

46. Petroleum revenue tax (allowable expenditure)

Resolved,

That provision may be made restricting the expenditure that is allowable for the purposes of petroleum revenue tax.

47. Petroleum revenue tax (assessments)

Resolved,

That provision may be made about the times when an assessment may be made to petroleum revenue tax.

48. Landfill tax

Motion made, and Question put,

That—

(1) In section 42 of the Finance Act 1996 (amount of landfill tax), in subsections (1)(a) and (2), for "£7", in each place where it occurs, there shall be substituted "£10".

(2) This Resolution has effect in relation to taxable disposals made, or treated as made, on or after 1st April 1999.

And it is hereby declared that it is expedient in the public interest that this Resolution should have statutory effect under the provisions of the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act 1968.

The House divided: Ayes 350, Noes 142.

Division No. 103] **[11.33 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Baker, Norman
Ballard, Jackie
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Stuart *(Middlesbrough)*
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brake, Tom
Brand, Dr Peter
Breed, Colin
Brown, Rt Hon Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burstow, Paul
Butler, Mrs Christine
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Canavan, Dennis
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cotter, Brian
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, John
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Fearn, Ronnie
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gorrie, Donald
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*

Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Harris, Dr Evan
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Home Robertson, John
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Alan *(Newport E)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Ms Jenny *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Keetch, Paul
Kelly, Ms Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross Skye)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kingham, Ms Tess
Kirkwood, Archy
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Laxton, Bob
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Linton, Martin
Livingstone, Ken
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Lock, David
Love, Andrew
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonnell, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Mrs Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
Maclennan, Rt Hon Robert
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall–Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Michie, Bill *(Sheffld Heeley)*
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moore, Michael
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morgan, Rhodri *(Cardiff W)*
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Eddie
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Öpik, Lembit
Organ, Mrs Diana
Osborne, Ms Sandra
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Rt Hon Ms Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Radice, Giles
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Rt Hon Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, Rt Hon George *(Hamilton S)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Sanders, Adrian
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shipley, Ms Debra
Short, Rt Hon Clare
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Stott, Roger
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Straw, Rt Hon Jack
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Temple–Morris, Peter
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Wallace, James
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
Webb, Steve
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Willis, Phil
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wise, Audrey
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Kevin Hughes and
Mr. Keith Hill.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Beggs, Roy
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Boswell, Tim
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Butterfill, John
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Kensington)*
Clifton–Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cran, James
Cunningham, Ms Roseanna *(Perth)*
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Day, Stephen
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Evans, Nigel
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Forsythe, Clifford
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam
Fraser, Christopher
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Sir Alastair
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gray, James
Green, Damian
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat–Amory, Rt Hon David
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui

Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Major, Rt Hon John
Maples, John
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Morgan, Alasdair *(Galloway)*
Moss, Malcolm
Nicholls, Patrick
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Prior, David
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Ross, William *(E Lond'y)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Faversham)*
Ruffley, David
St Aubyn, Nick
Salmond, Alex
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Swinney, John
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, Rt Hon John D *(Strangford)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Tyrie, Andrew
Wardle, Charles
Waterson, Nigel
Wells, Bowen
Welsh, Andrew
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Woodward, Shaun
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Sir David Madel and
Mrs. Caroline Spelman.

Question accordingly agreed to.

49. INSURANCE PREMIUM TAX (STANDARD RATE)

Motion made, and Question put,

That—

(1) In section 51(2)(b) of the Finance Act 1994, for "4 per cent." there shall be substituted "5 per cent."

(2) Paragraph (1) above has effect in relation to a premium which falls to be regarded for the purposes of Part III of the Finance Act 1994 as received under a taxable insurance contract by an insurer on or after 1st July 1999.

(3) Paragraph (1) above does not have effect in relation to a premium which—

(a) is in respect of a contract made before 1st July 1999, and

(b) falls to be regarded for the purposes of Part III of that Act as received under the contract by the insurer on a date before 1st January 2000, by virtue of regulations under section 68 of that Act.

(4) Paragraph (3) above does not apply in relation to a premium which—

(a) is an additional premium under a contract,

(b) falls to be regarded for the purposes of Part III of that Act as received under the contract by the insurer on or after 1st July 1999, by virtue of regulations under section 68 of that Act, and

(c) is in respect of a risk which was not covered by the contract before 1st July 1999.

(5) In the application of sections 67A to 67C of that Act in relation to the increase under paragraph (1) above and the exception under paragraph (3) above—

(a) the announcement for the purpose of sections 67A(1) and 67B(1) shall be taken to have been made on 9th March 1999,

(b) the date of the change is 1st July 1999, and

(c) the concessionary date is 1st January 2000.

And it is hereby declared that it is expedient in the public interest that this Resolution should have statutory effect under the provisions of the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act 1968.

The House divided: Ayes 350, Noes 140.

Division No. 104] **[11.44 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Baker, Norman
Ballard, Jackie
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Stuart *(Middlesbrough)*
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brake, Tom
Brand, Dr Peter
Breed, Colin
Brown, Rt Hon Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burstow, Paul
Butler, Mrs Christine
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Canavan, Dennis
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cotter, Brian
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, John
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Fearn, Ronnie
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Galloway, George
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godman, Dr Norman A

Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gorrie, Donald
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Harris, Dr Evan
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Home Robertson, John
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Alan *(Newport E)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Ms Jenny *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Keetch, Paul
Kelly, Ms Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross Skye)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kingham, Ms Tess
Kirkwood, Archy
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Laxton, Bob
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Linton, Martin
Livingstone, Ken
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Lock, David
Love, Andrew
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonnell, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Mrs Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
Maclennan, Rt Hon Robert
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall–Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'ld Heeley)*
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moore, Michael
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morgan, Rhodri *(Cardiff W)*
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Eddie
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Öpik, Lembit
Organ, Mrs Diana
Osborne, Ms Sandra
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Rt Hon Ms Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Radice, Giles
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Rt Hon Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, Rt Hon George *(Hamilton S)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Sanders, Adrian
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shipley, Ms Debra
Short, Rt Hon Clare
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Stott, Roger
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Straw, Rt Hon Jack
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Wallace, James
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
Webb, Steve
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Willis, Phil
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wise, Audrey
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Kevin Hughes and
Mr. Keith Hill.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Beggs, Roy
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Boswell, Tim
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Butterfill, John
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Kensington)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cran, James
Cunningham, Ms Roseanna *(Perth)*
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Day, Stephen
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Evans, Nigel
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam
Fraser, Christopher
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Sir Alastair
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gray, James
Green, Damian
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew

Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Maples, John
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Morgan, Alasdair *(Galloway)*
Moss, Malcolm
Nicholls, Patrick
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Prior, David
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Ross, William *(E Lond'y)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Faversham)*
Ruffley, David
St Aubyn, Nick
Salmond, Alex
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Soames, Nicholas
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Swinney, John
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, Rt Hon John D *(Strangford)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Tyrie, Andrew
Wardle, Charles
Waterson, Nigel
Wells, Bowen
Welsh, Andrew
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Woodward, Shaun
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Sir David Madel and
Mrs. Caroline Spelman.

Question accordingly agreed to.

50. RELIEF FROM TAX (INCIDENTAL AND CONSEQUENTIAL CHARGES)

Resolved,

That it is expedient to authorise any incidental or consequential charges to any duty or tax (including charges having retrospective effect) which may arise from provisions designed in general to afford relief from taxation.

PROCEDURE (VAT LIABILITIES OF GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENTS)

Resolved,

That, notwithstanding anything to the contrary in the practice of the House relating to the matters which may be included in Finance Bills, any Finance Bill of the present Session may contain provision (including provision having retrospective effect) for allowing deductions to be made in respect of value added tax liabilities before the receipts of a Government department are paid into the Consolidated Fund.

PROCEDURE (FUTURE TAXATION)

Resolved,

That, notwithstanding anything to the contrary in the practice of the House relating to the matters which may be included in Finance Bills, any Finance Bill of the present Session may contain the following provisions taking effect in a future year—

(a) provision about indexation of the limits for rates of income tax;

(b) provision for corporation tax to be charged for the financial year 2000;

(c) provision as to the rates at which corporation tax is charged;

(d) provision for the introduction of a tax credit in respect of children;

(e) provision about married couple's allowance;

(f) provision for and in connection with the abolition of widow's bereavement allowance and additional relief in respect of children;

(g) provision about maintenance payments and other annual payments;

(h) provision relating to income tax relief for interest payments;

(i) provision amending section 548 of the Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1988;

(j) provision abolishing vocational training relief under sections 32 and 33 of the Finance Act 1991;

(k) provision amending section 48(2)(a) of the Finance (No. 2) Act 1997.

FINANCE [*MONEY*]

Queen's recommendation having been signified—

Motion made, and Question put,

That, for the purposes of any Act of the present Session relating to finance, it is expedient to authorise—

(a) the payment out of money provided by Parliament of sums required by the Commissioners of Inland Revenue and the Commissioners of Customs and Excise in order to secure that, if the United Kingdom were to move to the third stage of economic and monetary union, they would be able to exercise their functions relating to taxes and duties (including agricultural levies of the European Community);

(b) any increase attributable to any provision of that Act relating to the Debt Management Account in the sums payable out of or into the National Loans Fund or the Consolidated Fund; and

(c) any payments out of or into that Account.

The House divided: Ayes 351, Noes 132.

Division No. 105] **[11.56 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Baker, Norman
Ballard, Jackie
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Stuart *(Middlesbrough)*
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brake, Tom
Brand, Dr Peter
Breed, Colin
Brown, Rt Hon Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Buck, Ms Karen

Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burstow, Paul
Butler, Mrs Christine
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Canavan, Dennis
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cotter, Brian
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Ms Roseanna *(Perth)*
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, John
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fearn, Ronnie
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Galloway, George
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gorrie, Donald
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Harris, Dr Evan
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Home Robertson, John
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Alan *(Newport E)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Ms Jenny *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Keetch, Paul
Kelly, Ms Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross Skye)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kingham, Ms Tess
Kirkwood, Archy
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Laxton, Bob
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Linton, Martin
Livingstone, Ken
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Lock, David
Love, Andrew
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonnell, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Mrs Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
Maclennan, Rt Hon Robert
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'ld Heeley)*
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moore, Michael
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Alasdair *(Galloway)*
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morgan, Rhodri *(Cardiff W)*
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Eddie
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Öpik, Lembit
Organ, Mrs Diana
Osborne, Ms Sandra
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Rt Hon Ms Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Radice, Giles
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Reid, Rt Hon Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, Rt Hon George *(Hamilton S)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sanders, Adrian
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shipley, Ms Debra
Short, Rt Hon Clare
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Stott, Roger
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Swinney, John
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Wallace, James
Walley, Ms Joan
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David

Webb, Steve
Welsh, Andrew
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Willis, Phil
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wise, Audrey
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Jane Kennedy and
Mr. Robert Ainsworth.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Beggs, Roy
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Boswell, Tim
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Butterfill, John
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Kensington)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cran, James
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Day, Stephen
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Evans, Nigel
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam
Fraser, Christopher
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Sir Alastair
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gray, James
Green, Damian
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maples, John
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Moss, Malcolm
Nicholls, Patrick
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Prior, David
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Ross, William *(E Lond'y)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Faversham)*
Ruffley, David
St Aubyn, Nick
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Soames, Nicholas
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, Rt Hon John D *(Strangford)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Tyrie, Andrew
Wardle, Charles
Waterson, Nigel
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Woodward, Shaun
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mrs. Caroline Spelman and
Mr. Tim Collins.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in upon the foregoing resolutions: And that the Chairman of Ways and Means, Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. Secretary Prescott, Mr. Secretary Straw, Mr. Secretary Blunkett, Mr. Secretary Dobson, Mr. Secretary Darling, Mr. Secretary Byers, Mr. Alan Milburn, Dawn Primarolo, Mrs. Barbara Roche and Ms Patricia Hewitt do prepare and bring it in.

Finance Bill

Mrs. Barbara Roche accordingly presented a Bill to grant certain duties, to alter other duties, and to amend the law relating to the National Debt and the Public Revenue, and to make further provision in connection with Finance: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time this day, and to be printed [Bill 62].

Chess

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Kevin Hughes.]*

12.8 am

Dr. Evan Harris (Oxford, West and Abingdon): I am pleased to raise in this Adjournment debate the important issue of the future funding and support for chess in the United Kingdom. I am delighted to welcome the Minister for Sport to the debate. He was recently "outed" in a national newspaper as an intellectual, when he declared his support for chess in *The Independent*'s question and answer section. Those of us who follow such issues recognise that the Minister has long been a supporter and true friend of chess in this country. It is with such sporting challenges in mind that I challenge him tonight—if only it were over a game of chess—to agree with me on the future funding and support for chess in the United Kingdom.

The campaign for Government support for chess has been a long one. I am especially pleased to see the hon. Member for Staffordshire, Moorlands (Charlotte Atkins) in her place. She has been a strong advocate for chess in the House and she tabled early-day motion 1609 in the previous Session, which deserves to be read into the record. It states:

"That this House recognises that chess is a sport at which the United Kingdom really excels; notes that the United Kingdom is the second strongest chess nation in the world after Russia and currently European champions, and that there is a possibility of a British world champion with both Michael Adams and Nigel Short amongst the top dozen players in the world; notes it is played by four million people in this country with no cultural or physical boundaries, being played by children and adults of all ages; further notes that the Government spends £49,000 compared to Greece which spends £337,000 per year; further notes that the World Chess Federation is the second largest sporting association in the world, second only to FIFA, with the vast majority of countries recognising chess as a sport; notes also the extensive and numerous academic research that has shown the high educational and social impact of chess when available at school; further notes that chess teaches children co-ordination, concentration, social and interactive skills, to plan ahead, and most importantly to take responsibility for their decisions; notes the Marguiles Report conducted in the United States of America which showed improved learning in children who were taught chess compared with those who were not; and that in consequence numerous states have put chess on the curriculum; further notes the Minister of Sport's previous statements about his support for the game of chess; and calls upon the Minister to encourage the Sports Council to recognise chess."

Our debate is about the inadequacy of current funding and the failure of chess to be able to access alternative sources of funding, such as the Foundation for Sport and the Arts and the national lottery sports funds. That is due to the collective decision of the UK Sports Councils not to recognise chess as a sport and, therefore, as a suitable recipient of funds.

Other sources of funds that might be available—such as the lottery's new opportunities fund for schools—are, by their nature, limited, given all the other bids for that funding. The situation is bad for chess as a sport, bad for chess players, bad for children's education and bad for this country's reputation.

My earliest memory of chess—as perhaps is the Minister's—is of the dramatic 1972 world championship when Boris Spassky failed to defend his title against the extrovert, maverick American genius Bobby Fischer. I remember that British chess grew in the ensuing years following the publicity around that event. Schools chess grew in particular, and the UK began to have its own grandmasters and international masters—Tony Miles, Raymond Keene, Michael Stean, William Hartston and John Nunn, who were followed in due course by Nigel Short, Julian Hodgson, David Norwood—against whom I used to play as a school player—Michael Adams and Malcolm Pein from Liverpool, where I grew up.

Since then, we have consistently been, for around a decade, one of the top two or three countries in the chess world. That has happened in spite of the facilities for chess, not because of them. I certainly enjoy playing chess, as many people do. I enjoyed it for the pure fun of taking part. Actually, if I am honest, I enjoyed winning and hated losing—perhaps that is why I am Liberal Democrat.

I was lucky. My state school had a teacher—Ken Champion—who was interested and who gave up enormous amounts of his time to drive minibuses around the north-west so that we could play other schools. I feel that chess developed my intellect. It certainly developed my team work and my ability to plan. Chess also imbued one with a sense of responsibility that came from being part of a team. I was lucky enough to be spotted by a well-known chess club—Atticus—which was well known both in the region and nationally. I had the good fortune to play for that club for many years, although in only the third or fourth team.

I once played against a formidable woman opponent from Formby chess club, and she later became the hon. Member for Liverpool, Garston (Maria Eagle), although it may have been the Under-Secretary of State for Social Security, the hon. Member for Wallasey (Angela Eagle)—then, more than now, it was difficult to tell them apart. I was fortunate to scrape a draw.

In 1997-98, Government funding was £49,000—a direct grant from the Department for Culture, Media and Sport to the British Chess Federation. Because of the pressures of public expenditure, there was a real terms cut in 1998-99 as the amount stayed at £49,000. For next year, there will be a further real terms cut as the increase has been only 2 per cent., welcome though that is.

Spending by the BCF from those limited funds will be £14,000 or thereabouts in schools, which puts the federation in a difficult position. As better players emerge, they need funding to go to international tournaments abroad, which squeezes the funds available from the grant for schools. Although, the BCF works hard to develop coaching and training opportunities for young people and to promote links between schools and chess clubs, it is difficult to see how it can be done on such a small budget.

Mr. Phil Willis (Harrogate and Knaresborough): The news that the entire European Commission has resigned broke a few minutes ago. Does my hon. Friend feel that that will affect the future of chess in Europe?

Dr. Harris: Obviously, my hon. Friend will be pleased to have got that on the record. I will mention comparisons with Europe later. In many ways the Europeans are ahead of us in this matter, although perhaps not on the issue that he mentioned.

British chess has had to rely on getting by with other funds. Obviously, British chess—in particular schools chess—is grateful to sponsors who had supported a

recreation and, I believe, a sport that does not get the television exposure that it deserves. In that context Saitek, which has recently funded junior chess, will be joining many hon. Members in the House at an event in the next few days to publicise the superb quality of schools chess and should be thanked for its support. There has been an explosion in chess in schools, but that is not due to, but despite, the lack of investment. Educationally, chess is recognised to be very good. Indeed, it used to be looked after by the Department for Education and Employment.

The hon. Member for Moorlands obtained a written answer recently from the Minister for School Standards in which she said that the Government very much welcome the opportunities which many schools provide for their pupils to take part in such activities. With reference to chess she said that it was open to schools to offer such activities as extra-curricular options, which the Government see as an important part of a broad and balanced education. However, as budgets are squeezed and as pressure on teacher's time increases, it is hard to see how that sort of activity can prosper.

Women's and girls' chess is strong in this country. Recently, I was pleased to meet the world under-18 champion, Ruth Sheldon, at a tournament in Oxford. She will shortly become my constituent when she comes to Oxford university, which I am afraid to say was soundly beaten by another university in the recent Varsity match.

Charlotte Atkins (Staffordshire, Moorlands): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the organisation of women's chess is in an appalling state? The achievements of the 11-year-old Jessie Gilbert, the youngest women's amateur world chess champion and Ruth Sheldon, the world junior under-18 female champion, are even more spectacular given the limited organisation of women's chess. Obviously, we have tremendous talent, but we do not have the organisation to allow those people to realise their full potential.

Dr. Harris: I agree. I am pleased that in Oxford we have our own chess prodigies in the Hunt siblings, Adam and Harriet, who have been British champions at various ages.

Indeed, the Minister is aware of the problem of women's access to sport and recreational activity. Following the debate on sport for all in July 1997, which he will remember, he wrote to the hon. Member for Garston to point out that he wanted women to be actively involved in all sports and he said that the national lottery sports fund was an important mechanism to level the playing field and to develop women's sport—in particular, sports that had been male dominated. For that reason, as with all other sports, it is important that chess can access the funds that have been made available by the lottery.

As the Minister knows, lottery funding is not available because the English Sports Council does not consider chess to be a sport. He has said that schools may be able to access the new opportunities fund for after-school activities. I would be interested to know whether he has any data on whether schools have been successful in getting such funding for chess because of all the other pressures from schools on the fund and the need to have good facilities for after-school clubs.

There is a feeling that the sports establishment does not want chess to compete for scarce public funds, or that there is a philistine prejudice against the so-called "nerds" and "anoraks" who are deemed to play chess. I stand before the House as proof that it is not only nerds and anoraks who play; my hon. Friends are all nodding in agreement.

The Minister has often identified the problem. I hope that he will develop it in his answer to the debate. The UK Sports Councils are public bodies set up by royal charter. As such, they enjoy a certain independence from the Government. They have developed a system of recognition to decide which activities and organisations should be eligible for support to ensure that public funds are distributed as efficiently and effectively as possible, as they see it. In several letters, he has pointed out to hon. Members that they deem that suitability for recognition includes requirements for physical skills and effort. Elsewhere he has talked of physical skills, effort and challenge. In other places, he has mentioned other words. I hope that the Minister agrees that in many ways, chess is a challenge, and a physical and mental effort. It certainly qualifies as a sport by almost every definition.

The Minister knows that other European countries are increasingly recognising chess as a sport. Austria, Finland, Germany, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal and Spain all recognise it as a sport. In many cases, chess is part of the national Olympic body. Soon, it may be that the International Olympic Committee will recognise it as a sport while the English Sports Councils do not. I know that he supports the case, so I do not believe that the sports councils can hold out much longer in their old-fashioned view that chess, a sport in which we excel, should not be considered a sport.

Given that I hope that the Minister will agree that there is a cogent case for recognising chess as a sport to enable it to access the lottery funds that it desperately needs for development, for its support in schools and for the development of women's chess, the only barrier to getting such recognition may be legislative. If it is, I would be grateful if he could clarify that. This is a doing Government. If it is a question of Government action, I know that chess players will not have to wait long. In this campaign, I hope that we are truly in the end game and that he will deliver from the Dispatch Box tonight the check mate.

12.23 am

The Minister for Sport (Mr. Tony Banks): I congratulate the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris) on securing this debate, but he chose a wretchedly inconvenient evening. For me, it completes a day between the Scylla of dodgy boxing results and the Charybdis of chess recognition. I have total sympathy with his case, and that of my hon. Friend the Member for Staffordshire, Moorlands (Charlotte Atkins).

Chess is a sport in which there are no barriers of physical ability or between the sexes. Both counts commend it to me. I have received many representations from hon. Members, to some of which the hon. Gentleman referred. I have publicly expressed my support for chess to be recognised as a sport, and I gladly reaffirm that. The question of what is or is not a support is vexed. It is not a matter of semantics, but a crucial decision. Once recognition is given, sports can receive funding from the Sports Councils and the lottery and certain tax advantages, especially in respect of VAT. Regrettably, as he noted, recognition is not in the gift of the Government.

[Mr. Tony Banks]

Personally, I think it should be, because I am very much a hands-on Minister, but responsibility for deciding what is or is not a sport currently resides with the Sports Councils.

We have 112 recognised sports in this country, but the Sports Councils use a definition of what constitutes a sport, the system for which is based on several principles that broadly relate to physical skill, physical effort, accessibility, rules, organisation and so on. My officials have discussed the difficulties that arise in connection with activities such as chess, but predominant among the criteria against which the councils assess suitability for recognition remain requirements for physical skill and physical effort.

I believe that the definition used is too restrictive. It appears to be rooted in a belief that mental activity does not require physical effort. That is an old-fashioned notion, based on the caricature that I experienced when I was a kid at school, that the bright ones read books and the thickos play sport. I read the article by Jon Speelman in *The Independent* today, in which he describes Nigel Short losing a stone in weight during a week-and-a-half match. It is clear that top chess players, if they want to excel at technical level, need to be physically fit to do that; the two cannot be divided.

The main barrier in terms of definition appears to be the Physical Training and Recreation Act 1937. The legal advice received by my Department concludes that chess does not fall within the meaning of the words "physical training and recreation" in section 3(1) of that Act. My Department has invested nearly £150,000 over the past three years to help the British Chess Federation to promote the development of chess, and we recently committed a further £50,000 per annum over the next three years. My Department makes over that money to the BCF under the annual Appropriation Acts because of the restrictions imposed by the 1937 Act.

It cannot be sensible in 1999 to have the issue of recognition tied to a definition struck in 1937. The world of sport and our attitudes toward sport have changed dramatically during the intervening 62 years. As if the 1937 Act were not enough of a problem, there is worse to come: chess does not fall within the meaning of the word "sport" in the context of the Sports Councils' current royal charters; and it appears unlikely that chess would be regarded as a sport under the National Lottery etc. Act 1993.

Let me set out the problems facing us. First, to gain recognition for chess, we would need primary legislation to change the 1937 Act; secondly, we would need to amend the royal charters, which would need to promulgated by the Sports Councils themselves; and, thirdly, we would probably need primary legislation to amend the National Lottery etc. Act 1993. Think about that. Who was it who said that the job of the Minister for Sport was all about free tickets and lager? However, do not despair—I have a cunning plan, which I shall announce in due course.

When I answered readers' questions in *The Independent* recently, I said, inter alia, that I wanted recognition for chess because we are very good at it. As the hon. Gentleman said—and this was in the early-day motion tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Moorlands—we are the second nation in the world after Russia in terms of chess success. In this country, 4 million people play chess, and in England alone 50,000 children in some 3,000 clubs play it. As my hon. Friend said, we have some spectacular young chess players; she mentioned 11-year-old Jessie Gilbert from Croydon, who became the youngest winner of an adult world title by winning the women's gold medal at the world amateur chess championships in January. We are extremely proud of what Jessie Gilbert has achieved for chess and for this country.

We could go on to talk about the great double triumph in Croatia, where the England men's team became European champions ahead of the Russians, and the England women's team took the bronze medal. We are talking about a big sporting success story in a country that wants sporting success, enjoys that success and at times feels deprived of it. That makes our failure to grant recognition all the more absurd. Yet, while we have imprisoned ourselves in our own legislation, other countries have forged ahead: 98 nations worldwide recognise chess as a sport; and 37 European countries do so, of which eight are partner members of the European Union.

As I said, recognition is not an academic issue: it would bring tangible benefits for the development of chess. Therefore, I can inform the House that the Secretary of State has proposed to broaden the scope of the 1937 Act to enable chess and other mind games to be funded by the UK Sports Council. We will do that as part of the new cultural framework Bill for which we are seeking legislative time. Once that is achieved, the Sports Council, in turn, will need to promulgate the appropriate amendments to its royal charters, which I feel certain it will want to do following our amendments to the 1937 Act. That would secure the recognition of chess.

However, we would still be left with the problem of the 1993 lottery Act. It would require primary legislation to amend if chess is to receive funding through the lottery sports fund—unless we can find a way around it. At the moment, all I can say is that I must consider the matter carefully and consult on it. As I understand it, if we can reach an agreed definition of sport, we will not need to change the 1993 Act via primary legislation.

Dr. Harris: May I take this opportunity to welcome the Minister's words warmly, which will be well received by many chess players in the country at large? I am also grateful to the Minister for explaining the problems that we face. I hope that I am not pushing the boat out too far by also putting in a plug for bridge, to which many of the arguments also apply. I hope that the proposed legislation will cover bridge as well.

Mr. Banks: The hon. Gentleman could seek to secure another Adjournment debate on the subject of bridge—perhaps at a more convenient time of day. The fact is that the amendment to the 1937 Act would include mind games.

We must arrive at a definition of sport that is agreeable and acceptable, and, with good will, we will achieve it. It is currently a nonsense situation and, quite frankly, I do not like presiding over nonsense situations. I intend to consult on the matter to see whether we can achieve an agreed definition of sport. If we can, we might not have

to jump the third hurdle that I described: amending the 1993 lottery Act. The hon. Gentleman mentioned the new opportunities fund. It is not just a matter for schools: the British Chess Federation is eligible to apply for lottery funding to promote chess in after-school clubs using the new opportunities fund. I hope that it will do so.

I congratulate the hon. Gentleman and other right hon. and hon. Members—particularly my good friend the hon. Member for Moorlands—who have campaigned assiduously for chess to be recognised as a sport. I think we will see the end of this match and that, with good will on all sides, we can achieve the objectives that we have set ourselves. I hope that, with tonight's Adjournment debate, we have started the process that will bring this country into line with so many other European Union nations and countries around the world that recognise the superb game of chess as a real sport.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-seven minutes to One o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 16 March 1999

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

The Secretary of State was asked—

Spain

1. **Mr. Edward Garnier** (Harborough): If he will make a statement on the United Kingdom's relations with Spain. [74907]

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Robin Cook): Relations with Spain are generally strong and reflect the improvement in relations under this Government with all our European partners. In April, we will hold the first ever UK-Spanish summit, which demonstrates our more constructive working relationship on a range of European and security issues.

Our major point of difference remains Gibraltar. I saw the Spanish Foreign Minister again at the weekend, when I made it clear that it is in Spain's as well as Britain's interests that we achieve a return to normality on the Gibraltar border. I have also made it clear that we will never enter into arrangements that would change the sovereignty over Gibraltar against the freely and democratically expressed wishes of its people. That principle remains as valid today as when it was first expressed by a previous Labour Government.

Mr. Garnier: Was not the first part of the right hon. Gentleman's answer somewhat complacent? Is he not aware that, in a television interview 10 days ago, the Spanish Foreign Minister suggested that the British Government were tolerating, and indeed conniving at, the planning in Gibraltar of assassinations? Will he please call in the Spanish ambassador to draw to his attention the true facts; and will he perhaps pull his socks up over the whole issue?

Mr. Cook: Although the Foreign Minister has made some allegations of wrongdoing in Gibraltar, he has not as yet raised the prospect of assassination. The main issues that have been drawn to our attention concern money laundering and smuggling. On both those questions, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and I have given the same clear message to the Spanish Prime Minister and Foreign Minister: either they should not make such allegations or, if they have evidence of wrongdoing in Gibraltar, we would want to co-operate on the matter through our law enforcement agencies, as we certainly have no interest in tolerating any breach of the law. It is of course more difficult to achieve that co-operation as long as Madrid refuses to recognise the Gibraltar law enforcement agencies.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): I welcome the general thrust of the Foreign Secretary's answer. Has he taken any steps in Europe, in addition to his negotiations with the Spanish Foreign Minister, to safeguard the rights and liberties of the people of Gibraltar as European and British citizens?

Mr. Cook: Absolutely. It is our clear position that it is for the people of Gibraltar themselves to decide how long and whether they want to remain British citizens. As long as they do—it is what the overwhelming majority want—we will defend that right, and their full rights under European as well as their own Gibraltar law. They need have no doubt that we are resolutely with them in defending their right to decide their own future.

Mr. Michael Howard (Folkestone and Hythe): Will the Foreign Secretary comment on Spain's reaction to the Home Secretary's declared intention of applying to sign up to certain aspects of the Schengen agreement? Does not that reaction reinforce the damage that was done when he and the Prime Minister were caught napping in the closing stages of the Amsterdam summit and allowed Spain to secure a veto on any such application? Will he assure the House that the Government's application to sign up to Schengen will include Gibraltar, and that they will not make any concessions on Gibraltar in order to overcome Spain's veto?

Mr. Cook: There is no intention of making any concessions on Gibraltar, in relation either to this issue or to any other. The right hon. and learned Gentleman is factually wrong: neither Spain nor any other country has a veto on whether we join the new arrangements being made under Schengen. There is the need for unanimity on the existing arrangements, but we secured a protocol requiring the other members to use their best endeavours for Britain to join. France, Germany and other countries have already welcomed the statement of my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary, and we are confident that they will use those best endeavours.

Mr. Howard: Is not the Foreign Secretary aware that the protocol has no binding legal effect?

Mr. Cook: What I am well aware of is that we have clear support in Europe for joining, and that our joining will be welcome. If Spain is concerned about law enforcement in Gibraltar, it is in its own interests that Britain and Gibraltar should play a full part.

Iraq

2. **Mr. David Winnick** (Walsall, North): If he will make a statement on the situation in Iraq. [74908]

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Derek Fatchett): In late January, the United Nations Security Council established three panels to deal

with disarmament and humanitarian issues, and Kuwaiti detainees and property. It is anticipated that they will report by mid-April. Meanwhile, we continue to patrol the no-fly zone. All responses by United Kingdom aircraft in the no-fly zones are proportionate and in self-defence.

Mr. Winnick: While recognising the need to defend the no-fly zones, which were indeed approved by virtually the whole House after the Gulf war, will my right hon. Friend accept that it is very important that there should be a precise limit on the bombing that is taking place? Is it not important to recognise that a bloodthirsty and murderous regime such as Saddam Hussein's will not be brought down by bombing? We have to accept that as a fact.

Mr. Fatchett: My hon. Friend is right to point out that the no-fly zones were humanitarian measures, introduced in 1991 and 1992, which had the support of the whole House, and they have performed an important humanitarian task. My hon. Friend is also right to say that the action we are taking under the rules of engagement on the no-fly zones is proportionate and will continue to be so. There is no suggestion that we will further change the rules on the no-fly zones.

Mr. Menzies Campbell (North-East Fife): In considering the nature of military operations over the north and south of Iraq, is it not right to recognise a distinction between a defensive response and what is taking place now—the systematic destruction of Iraq's air defence system? Does the Minister understand the unease at an apparent change of policy towards Iraq, openly acknowledged in the United States of America, which is to disable, debilitate and destroy Saddam? That is a policy for which there is no authority in the relevant United Nations Security Council resolutions or in international law. Does he also understand that the unease is compounded by the fact that neither the change of policy to which the United Kingdom is subscribing nor the strategy that underpins it has ever been debated by the House of Commons?

Mr. Fatchett: The right hon. and learned Gentleman will recall that in 1993, 1996 and 1997, Saddam Hussein violated the no-fly zones. On each of those occasions, we reacted in the same proportionate manner in which we are reacting on this occasion. The right hon. and learned Gentleman will also know that there have been more than 100 incursions by Iraqi aircraft and other military equipment into the no-fly zones. We have responded in the same way as before, and there has been no shift in policy.

There is no vacuum, as the right hon. and learned Gentleman suggested there was in his article in *The Independent* this morning: we are continuing to carry out the humanitarian objectives of the no-fly zones. I remind the right hon. and learned Gentleman that he agreed to the no-fly zones in the first place, and that if we were to disengage from those zones, substantial damage would be inflicted on the Kurds and the people in the south of Iraq.

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield): Is the Minister aware that what is being done has no United Nations authority and no authority from the House of Commons, and that it amounts, in the case of the civilians who are being killed, to what a Nobel peace prize winner has described as genocide? The Government have shown no readiness to allow the House to discuss the matter when it is clear that there is great anxiety across the Floor of the House about what is being done in our name and without our authority—that is, killing innocent civilians who have no capacity to get rid of Saddam Hussein, although all recognise the brutal nature of his regime.

Mr. Fatchett: There is legal support for the position taken by the United Kingdom. It flows from the United Nations Security Council resolutions and it is to support the humanitarian objectives. My right hon. Friend is right to say that the brutal nature of the regime in Baghdad is the backcloth against which we should ask and answer all these questions. He needs to remind himself, as do others, of what that regime has done to the people of Iraq over the past 20 years.

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Mid-Sussex): The right hon. Gentleman is being deliberately obtuse. No one here contradicts the absolute necessity for the policing of the no-fly zones, but the House is not happy about the practice—it continues at the moment—of allied aircraft attacking targets that are, to all intents and purposes, not hostile. Nobody disputes that if planes are locked on to, they should deal properly with targets; but just to take out targets on the ground is improper and outside the United Nations resolutions. It must stop, and Britain should not be a party to it.

Mr. Fatchett: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence made a statement recently to the House on those issues. He explained the Government's policy and the continuation of the enforcement of the no-fly zones. There has been no change in that policy and if there is a change, the House will be informed accordingly.

Debt Relief

3. **Mr. Huw Edwards** (Monmouth): What discussions he has had with Governments of the G8 about the relief of the debts of the world's most impoverished nations. [74909]

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Tony Lloyd): We used last year's G8 presidency to advance the heavily indebted poor countries initiative, agreeing at the Birmingham summit that all eligible countries should be in the debt relief process by 2000. We and our Government partners are preparing for further discussions at this year's Foreign Ministers and Heads of Government meetings.

On 3 March, my right hon. Friends the Chancellor and the Secretary of State for International Development announced a four-point plan to help debt relief and aid poverty reduction in the developing world. It includes a $50 billion debt reduction target for the poorest countries.

Mr. Edwards: I thank my hon. Friend on behalf of the Jubilee 2000 campaign in my constituency and I commend the Government for being one of the leading countries—if not the leading country—in the relief of debt. Does he agree with me and with the Bishop of

Monmouth, who recently said that if we are against slavery, we must be for the relief of the most unpayable debts of the world's most impoverished countries?

Mr. Lloyd: My hon. Friend rightly congratulates the Government on the steps that we have already taken. There is no doubt that all manner of ailments flow from poverty to beset the developing world, including conflicts, premature death and poor education and health. The role of the British Government in beginning to make the case for change has been important. The initiative announced by my right hon. Friends the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Secretary of State for International Development seeks to wipe out $50 billion of debt and to provide development assistance to the tune of $60 billion by the end of 2000. Those are significant steps. The Chancellor's announcement of millennium gift aid tax discretion is also important in ensuring that good will among the people of the United Kingdom can be translated into practical action to relieve poverty among the poorest people and countries.

India and Pakistan

4. **Mr. Mike Gapes** (Ilford, South): When he next plans to meet the leaders of India and Pakistan to discuss nuclear issues; and if he will make a statement. [74910]

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Derek Fatchett): My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary and I discussed non-proliferation and regional security issues with Brajesh Mishra, the principal secretary to the Indian Prime Minister and the National Security Adviser, and with Jaswant Singh, the Indian Foreign Minister, during their respective visits to the UK in January and February. I discussed nuclear issues with Foreign Minister Kanju during my visit to Pakistan in February.

Mr. Gapes: I am grateful for that reply. Does my right hon. Friend welcome recent indications of improved relations between India and Pakistan, particularly the cricket tour by a Pakistani team to India and the visit by the Indian Prime Minister to meet his counterpart in Pakistan? Is my right hon. Friend aware that the hundreds of thousands of people in the UK who have family connections with India and Pakistan look forward to nothing other than good and normal relations between those two important Commonwealth countries?

Mr. Fatchett: I very much agree that the recent talks between the two Prime Ministers in Lahore could herald a new start for relations between India and Pakistan. We wish both countries well. Confidence-building measures are an important first step towards tackling some difficult security and political issues. It is in all our interests, and particularly in the interests of economic and political development in south Asia, that the talks should continue and progress be made.

Sir Raymond Whitney (Wycombe): When the Foreign Secretary next meets the leaders of India and Pakistan, will he again raise with them the question of Kashmir? If so—

Madam Speaker: Order. Questions further down the Order Paper relate to Kashmir, but this question is on nuclear issues. If the hon. Gentleman wishes to ask a question about the nuclear issue, he may. We will wait until later for Kashmir.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold): Can the Minister confirm that recent discussions between the Indian and Pakistani Prime Ministers covered nuclear proliferation? Were any steps taken towards nuclear reduction by both sides? I visited both Pakistan and India Kashmir a while ago, and it seemed that if there could be progress on Kashmir, there would be scope for nuclear reduction. Has the Minister looked into that matter?

Madam Speaker: Order. We are on nuclear issues.

Mr. Fatchett: The hon. Gentleman was right, however, Madam Speaker, to say that there is a relationship between Kashmir and the nuclear issue. Kashmir comes up later, I know, and I—

Madam Speaker: Order. I am going to be firm. Back-Bench Members have tabled questions on Kashmir and it is totally unfair of other hon. Members to jump the gun. If the Minister is willing to answer only on nuclear issues, I will hear him. I will not hear him on the Kashmir situation.

Mr. Fatchett: Indeed, Madam Speaker. The nuclear issues were discussed at Lahore, and it is crucial for the region's security that India and Pakistan should sign up to the comprehensive test ban treaty and the range of other non-proliferation treaties. That would lessen the risks of instability in the region and of nuclear or conventional war on Kashmir or other issues. It is vital that we all engage in encouraging India and Pakistan to take such non-proliferation steps, and we shall do so.

Euro Zone

5. **Mr. Desmond Swayne** (New Forest, West): What assessment he has made of the impact on British foreign policy objectives of the United Kingdom remaining outside the euro zone. [74911]

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Robin Cook): Her Majesty's Government will decide on whether to recommend in a referendum that United Kingdom should join the euro if we believe that it would be to the economic benefit of the country on the basis of the tests set out by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor in October 1997.

The arrangements for developing the common foreign and security policy are exactly the same for the UK whether we are a member of the euro zone or not. We shall continue to work for common positions in foreign policy where possible, on the basis that we have a much better prospect of securing common objectives in the world if Europe speaks with one voice rather than fifteen voices.

Mr. Swayne: Does the right hon. Gentleman agree with Hans Eichel, the new German Finance Minister,

that any monetary union must be swiftly supplemented by full political union? Is that one of the right hon. Gentleman's foreign policy objectives?

Mr. Cook: We have made it perfectly plain that we very much agree with President Chirac—that what we seek is not a united states of Europe, but a united Europe of states; that remains the policy of this Government. However, we are quite clear that if we conclude that Britain is being economically damaged and undermined by being outside the euro, we cannot possibly pretend to defend and strengthen the independence or sovereignty of Britain by weakening our own economy.

Dr. Phyllis Starkey (Milton Keynes, South-West): May I welcome the way in which our Government and the French Government have been working together on Kosovo, west Africa and NATO enlargement? Is not that a positive way forward for Europe to co-operate, and does it not contrast starkly with the xenophobia we hear from Conservative Members?

Mr. Cook: I very much welcome my hon. Friend's comments. The meeting that took place in Africa last week between me and my French opposite number, and between all our ambassadors to Africa, was an historic first event in the history of Africa; we have never done that together. We have common objectives in Africa of securing stability and an end to conflict, relief of the debt burden, development and the spread of democracy. We have a much better chance of securing that if we work together co-operatively than if we compete against each other as rivals.

Mr. Michael Howard (Folkestone and Hythe): Perhaps I shall have better luck if I ask the Foreign Secretary whether he agrees with another statement of Germany's new Finance Minister, Hans Eichel, who said only a few weeks ago:

"Why does Europe need 15 foreign ministers when one is enough? Why do we still need purely national armies? One European army is enough."

Does the Foreign Secretary agree?

Mr. Cook: No, I do not agree with that, nor does any member of the Government. However, we are working for better security within Europe. That is why we have again tabled with France an initiative that would provide for better security decision making in Europe and clearer access to the assets that we have provided to NATO, so that Europe can better intervene in crises in its own continent. I point out to the right hon. and learned Gentleman that the current situation in the Balkans underlines the importance of taking forward that initiative.

Cyprus (EU Accession)

6. **Mr. Nigel Evans** (Ribble Valley): What discussions he has had concerning the accession of Cyprus to the EU. [74912]

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Ms Joyce Quin): My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary discussed Cyprus's EU accession with the Cypriot Foreign Minister when they met in November. He attended the EU Cyprus accession conference on 10 November, which took stock of the good progress made in negotiations so far. My right hon. Friend and I have regular discussions with colleagues from other EU member states on all aspects of the accession process, and there is also close and regular contact at official level.

Mr. Evans: Does the Minister agree that the complete shambles within the European Commission should not be allowed to stand in the way of EU expansion? Does she agree that the accession of Cyprus to the EU would benefit communities in both north and south Cyprus? Does she also agree that the fact that Cyprus has removed the new threat of placing S300s in Cyprus, although welcome, is not sufficient to enable progress toward a sustainable peace; and that we must look for new initiatives enabling both north and south to secure a sustainable future?

Ms Quin: I agree with the hon. Gentleman in respect of all three elements of his question. Whatever the state of affairs within the European Commission, we are keen that accession negotiations should not suffer; that is extremely important. The hon. Gentleman is also right to believe that both parts of the Cypriot community can benefit from accession to the EU, and I know that that view is shared by hon. Members on both sides of the House. However, he is also right to say that we must continually look for ways to take forward both the process of EU accession and the important process of seeking a settlement to the Cyprus problem. It is also right to say that we need to look continually for ways of taking the process forward, regarding both EU accession and seeking a settlement of the Cyprus problem.

Mr. Andrew Love (Edmonton): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on keeping the accession negotiations on track. Those negotiations have been bedevilled by the lack of progress in finding a resolution to the division of the island. What success has the special representative to Cyprus had in bringing the two communities together? Can my right hon. Friend give us some idea of what discussions have taken place with the United Nations or with others about restarting the talks between the two communities so that there may be a resolution to the problem of the island's division?

Ms Quin: The efforts of the special representative have been impressive and assiduous in seeking to make progress. However, greater political willingness must be shown—particularly in the north of Cyprus—regarding some of the bicommunal and bizonal activities that we believe are important in paving the way for the eventual reunification of the island. The efforts of that special representative are very important, but we must encourage all sides to participate actively in negotiations.

Mr. Ian Bruce (South Dorset): I am sure that the right hon. Lady will know that Turkey, with Greece and Britain, is a co-guarantor of Cyprus's becoming a single nation. What cards are the Government playing in telling Turkey that its accession to the European Union will always be blocked if it does not participate in a settlement of the Cyprus question? Can nothing be done to ensure that Turkey plays a constructive role in bringing together the two halves of Cyprus?

Ms Quin: As we know, Turkey has expressed an interest in attaining a closer relationship with the

European Union, and that must be viewed in the context of moving towards resolving the Cyprus issue. We have made it clear that Turkey does not have a veto on Cypriot accession to the European Union. However, we also believe that it is in the interests of both Cyprus and Turkey to be more positive in their approach to the European Union.

Export Promotion

7. **Mr. Michael J. Foster** (Worcester): If he will make a statement on his Department's future role in export promotion. [74913]

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Derek Fatchett): Following the Cabinet Secretary's review of export promotion, my right hon Friend the Foreign Secretary was delighted to announce on 12 March—also on behalf of the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry—the setting up of a new unified Foreign Office and DTI export promotion operation, British Trade International, under a single chief executive. I refer my hon Friend to that announcement.

Mr. Foster: I welcome the creation of British Trade International, which is a clear demonstration of the Government's commitment to business. What help will it provide to smaller manufacturing companies, such as Excel Automation in my constituency, which is seeking to expand its export market?

Mr. Fatchett: I appreciate my hon. Friend's comments about last week's announcement. One of the objectives of the new structure is to provide a unified system that will enable domestic companies to sell overseas. Assistance will be provided for United Kingdom companies, such as the one in Worcester mentioned by my hon. Friend, to export to any location around the world. We hope that that assistance will be much more efficient and targeted. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry has announced additional measures to help to promote small businesses and assist with their export activities.

Mr. James Gray (North Wiltshire): Perhaps further evidence of the Government's commitment to exports is the fact that weapons sales to Indonesia have doubled since Labour came to office. Is that what the Government describe as an "ethical foreign policy"?

Mr. Fatchett: I am delighted that the hon. Gentleman has asked that question because it gives me an opportunity to lay to rest some of the myths that are circulating about arms sales under this Government. An annual report will be published shortly that will set out all the details. However, I assure the hon. Gentleman that no Hawks, armoured cars, water cannon, flame throwers or other equipment of that sort have been licensed by the Government for sale to Indonesia.

I have absolute confidence that, when the hon. Gentleman reads the annual report, he will see that each licence granted conforms totally to the criteria that we established in July 1997. The Government have followed those criteria—unlike the previous Conservative Government, who were prepared to arm Iraq without even bothering to tell the House.

Ethical Foreign Policies

8. **Mr. Andrew Tyrie** (Chichester): What discussions he has had with his opposite numbers in the G7 about co-operation to develop ethical foreign policies. [74914]

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Tony Lloyd): We regularly discuss the promotion of human rights and democracy with our G8 partners. In London last May, G8 Foreign Ministers emphasised the universality of human rights and made a number of practical commitments to promote human rights world wide. The G8 also agreed action on development and debt relief, health, nuclear safety, terrorism, crime and the environment. We are continuing G8 discussions on those issues in the run-up to this year's summit in Cologne in June.

Mr. Tyrie: What work has the Minister done with fellow G8 members to advance the cause of human rights in China? Will the Government condemn the Chinese human rights record here today and at the meeting of the UN Commission on Human Rights in Geneva? Why has a leading human rights activist in China condemned the Government's ethical foreign policy as two-faced?

Mr. Lloyd: The hon. Gentleman will know that my right hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, Central (Mr. Fatchett) made a clear public statement condemning the Chinese for abuse of human rights. There is no doubt of the Government's stance. There is equally no doubt that we discuss China, particularly with our European Union colleagues. I shall attend the meeting of the UN Commission on Human Rights in Geneva in a few weeks, and there is no doubt that the role of China will figure in those deliberations.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Will the G8 re-examine the conditions on which money is lent for the construction of dams around the world—in particular, the money lent to Turkey and Syria for the construction of more and more dams that have reduced the Euphrates to a trickle? Winter snows and other adverse conditions mean that the Tigris is lower than ever it has been, with terrible consequences for an already desperate situation in Iraq.

Mr. Lloyd: The Government want to consider water systems more broadly, so my hon. Friend asks an important question which we shall certainly examine. I had perhaps over-anticipated my hon. Friend's question because I thought that he would ask about the Pergau dam scandal, in which the previous Government were prepared to prostitute this country's values in a dodgy deal.

Mr. Bowen Wells (Hertford and Stortford): Will the Minister of State and his G8 partners examine ethical foreign policy as regards the pursuit of peace in Sierra Leone? That state remains violent and conflict-riven, and our policy seems to be simply to support one aspect, one person and one president and not to encourage the pursuit of an ethical foreign policy to achieve peace in that country.

Mr. Lloyd: I am afraid that the hon. Gentleman is wrong. I remind him that President Kabbah is the democratically elected president of Sierra Leone. I am not sure whether the hon. Gentleman is suggesting that we should dismiss President Kabbah. If so, he is misguided. When my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary was in west Africa last week, he met President Kabbah, among others, and urged on him the need for a negotiated, inclusive settlement which will bring lasting peace to that country.

It is a matter of public record that while Britain has done more than any other country, apart from Nigeria, to try to resolve Sierra Leone's problems, we have actively been lobbying the rest of the world to make the same financial commitment as we have made. The £10 million that my right hon. Friend recently announced is already receiving backing in the international community. The House should welcome that.

Mr. Ernie Ross (Dundee, West): Will my hon. Friend confirm that this year's agenda recreates universality of human rights and underlines partnership between non-G8 countries? In that context, will he join me in congratulating the people of Qatar on their successful municipal elections, which were held on 8 March under universal suffrage for all Qataris over the age of 18? Women were encouraged and promoted as candidates, there was a free, fair press, and international observers from the middle east, Europe and America ensured free and fair elections.

Mr. Lloyd: My hon. Friend draws attention to a very important election for the House to examine. He could have gone on to say that women candidates took part freely in that election. The Qatar example is a significant and important signal to the rest of the world, especially the rest of the middle east. Given my hon. Friend's long and deep interest in the middle east and the respect with which he is held, not only in this House but throughout the region on these issues, that message will be particularly strong.

Dr. Jenny Tonge (Richmond Park): Does the Minister agree that the significant factor in the waging of civil wars all over the world is the ready supply of arms, which is often in contradiction to an ethical foreign policy? Do the Government intend to support the German Government at this week's Co-Arm talks in their attempts to curb the activities of arms brokers?

Mr. Lloyd: I agree with the hon. Lady that the ready supply of arms in different regions is a very important motor in the continuation of violent solutions to problems that, essentially, ought to be resolved by political means. This Government have certainly worked very hard in specific regions, and generally, to seek action to dry up supplies, especially of small arms which do so much damage. She will know that the results of consultation on the White Paper are being examined by the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry. We want to take forward discussion in Europe about how Europe can crack down on problems caused by European brokers in this very difficult, and sometimes very unpleasant, trade.

United Nations (Finances)

9. **Mr. Michael Jack** (Fylde): What is his current assessment of the financial health of the United Nations. [74915]

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Tony Lloyd): The United Nations remains in serious financial difficulties. At the end of 1998, it was owed more than $2 billion by member states. We urged all member states to pay their dues promptly, in full and without conditions. We continue to promote the European Union's proposals to put United Nations finances on a more secure and equitable long-term footing.

Mr. Jack: The Minister's answer shows the lamentable progress towards achieving the objectives of that European initiative. Is he aware of the 5th Committee, which is trying to secure a better financial base for the United Nations? Is he also aware that agenda item 115, which is being considered by the committee, is behind timetable? What action will he take to ensure that it gets back on timetable? Will he assure the House that, once completed, this matter will be discussed at the next General Assembly of the United Nations?

Mr. Lloyd: I am sorry that the right hon. Gentleman wants to try to turn this into an attack on the Government. In fact, this Government have done as much as any. Indeed, I credit previous Governments in such terms. We are a good payer; we pay on time. We set the rest of the world a good example. Britain is up to date with its payments. Some 136 countries owed money at the beginning of the year when time to pay expired. The matter will be raised at the General Assembly. Britain will continue in the European framework, the UN, and with respect to the 5th Committee, to ensure that the argument is taken forward. We remind all states of their obligations—especially the United States, which is the single biggest debtor—that they must resolve their internal political problems and pay the money owed.

Land Mines

10. **Mr. Nigel Griffiths** (Edinburgh, South): What progress he has made in discussions with his international counterparts to secure the elimination of land mine production. [74916]

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Tony Lloyd): We continue to press for as many countries as possible to join the 134 that have already signed up to the total ban on anti-personnel mines that is enshrined in the Ottawa convention, which entered into force on 1 March.

Mr. Griffiths: We welcome the leading role that the Government have played in ratifying the Ottawa convention. Will my hon. Friend do more to ensure that the mines are cleared when, every day, women, children and other civilians fall victim to those awful devices? Is he aware of the work being done by Professor Stephen Salter of Edinburgh university and others throughout Britain on innovative devices to clear the minefields?

Mr. Lloyd: My hon. Friend is right to say that the victims of these mines are not simply combatants in

conflict situations but often, long after conflict has finished, innocent people who had no role in that conflict—women, children and, indeed, men—who lose their lives or their capacity to look after themselves and their families. That is what led the Government to be so actively involved in the process that led to the Ottawa convention. That is what led Britain to be one of the first to get rid of its stock of anti-personnel and land mines. The Army had got rid of its stocks before the Ottawa convention came into force on 1 March this year—a significant achievement.

My hon. Friend is absolutely right, and Britain is doubling the amount of money that we shall make available for mine clearance in the year 2000, to about £10 million. That will have a significant impact, and we shall continue to lobby among friends and allies, and globally, that all countries should a play a part in de-mining.

Chile

11. **Mr. David Borrow** (South Ribble): If he will make a statement on recent discussions between his Department and the Government of Chile. [74917]

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Robin Cook): Since the arrest of Senator Pinochet, my hon. Friend the Minister of State and I have had a number of meetings with the Chilean Foreign Minister, Deputy Foreign Minister and ambassador.

Mr. Insulza, the Foreign Minister, and I have agreed that our common objective should be to preserve the sound and long-standing relations between our two countries. In all our discussions, I have made it clear that the extradition procedures are subject to legal process, and that it would be improper of us to interfere with it.

Mr. Borrow: Does my right hon. Friend agree that we should welcome the closer economic links that have been formed between Chile and the Falkland islands in recent years? Does he also welcome the visit by the Prince of Wales to the region? Will he join me in rejecting criticism, over the past few days, by elements in the right-wing press of the Prince of Wales and his comments in support of democracy?

Mr. Cook: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend. I find it extraordinary that the Prince of Wales should be subject to criticism for a message of reconciliation, in which he stood by the democracy of the people of the Falkland islands. I hope that everyone in Britain can at least welcome those remarks as strongly as did the Foreign Minister of Argentina.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): Is it not the case that if his Royal Highness Prince Charles had been able to go to his originally planned destination—Chile—and that if Lan Chile were to be able to continue direct flights from Punta Arenas to the Falkland islands, the situation in the southern cone would be a great deal better?

As the right hon. Gentleman and Her Majesty's Ministers are unable to go to Chile in person to find out the situation for themselves, could they not at least take the advice of someone who has been to Chile—His Holiness the Pope, who knows the region, but who has much greater wisdom and magnanimity than the right hon. Gentleman?

Mr. Cook: First, the visit to Argentina by the Prince of Wales had been planned since 1994 and is certainly the place that the Prince of Wales wished to go, and that was achieved. He also visited the Falkland islands, and it is to his credit that he wanted to include them on the tour. The letter from the Vatican has not been released by the Vatican, and it is not our custom to release letters pertaining to foreign relations. However, it did raise questions of compassion, and that will certainly feature in the course of our decision at the appropriate time. In the meantime, the Government stand firmly on the principle that any application of extradition should be settled by the courts, by due legal process. We have no intention of interfering in it, and I regret the fact that every month the hon. Gentleman asks us to interfere in it.

Mrs. Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham): When, against the background of the Pinochet affair, the Presidents of Chile and of Argentina signed a joint declaration last December—in which, for the first time officially, Chile recognised the Argentine claims on the Falkland islands—why did the Foreign Secretary fail to make an official representation to the Chilean Government? Has he been caught napping again? Does he not realise that robust and immediate responses are expected from his Department when British interests are at stake?

Mr. Cook: The hon. Lady is talking humbug. We have made perfectly plain to Chile, and to every other country that has taken that view, the basis of our robust position on the sovereignty of the Falkland islands, and the right of the Falkland islanders to self-determination. We have no anxiety about Chile and Argentina becoming friends, as we are friends of both, but we intend to insist on the right of the Falkland islands to decide their future.

EU Enlargement

12. **Mr. Gareth R. Thomas** (Harrow, West): What recent representations he has received about Agenda 2000 relating to enlargement; and if he will make a statement. [74918]

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Robin Cook): We continue to maintain regular contact on Agenda 2000 with a wide range of domestic interests. We are well aware of the great interest of the applicant countries in early progress.

At the informal meeting of the Foreign Ministers over the weekend, there was general agreement that we are on track for a resolution of Agenda 2000 at Berlin next week.

Although we would have liked further cuts in farm prices, we welcome the fact that we have now reached agreement on agricultural reform, which will cut the food bill of a household of four in Britain by £70 a year.

On structural funds, the current package is likely to produce an increase in Britain's percentage share from the structural funds.

We are on course for a deal on Agenda 2000 that will be a good bargain for Britain, and will provide a basis of sound reforms on which to take forward the enlargement of the European Union.

Mr. Thomas: Is my right hon. Friend aware that the countries that have applied to join the European Union are more than willing to sign up to the social chapter and the euro? Does not my right hon. Friend think that their attitude is in stark contrast to that of the Conservative party, whose attitude to European politics seems to be based partly on an obsessive hatred of all things to do with the European Union?

Mr. Cook: Any hon. Member who has visited central and eastern Europe and the applicant countries will be well aware of the immense enthusiasm in those countries—not just of their Governments, but of their people—for joining the democratic family of nations in the European Union. My hon. Friend is right—it is particularly perverse that at a time when the rest of Europe is queuing up to join the European Union, there are so many Opposition Members who want to get off the bus.

Mr. Michael Trend (Windsor): Four weeks ago, in the context of those talks, the Foreign Secretary gave the House an absolute assurance that the British rebate was non-negotiable. Good. Can he now give the House an absolute assurance that there will be no increase in Britain's contributions to the European Union, in either gross or net terms?

Mr. Cook: As the hon. Gentleman should be aware, because the question was answered by my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary, it is likely that the proposals for reform of agriculture will result in a net increase in contributions, because if we wish to achieve reform, farmers must be compensated. If the hon. Gentleman is suggesting otherwise, he is suggesting that the farmers who will suffer from the price cut should not receive compensation. However, the overall increase in Britain's contribution as taxpayers will be more than matched by what Britain will receive as consumers in reduced prices. That is a good bargain for the people of Britain.

EU Institutions

13. **Ms Rachel Squire** (Dunfermline, West): If he will make a statement on his plans for increasing the democratic accountability of EU institutions. [74919]

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Ms Joyce Quin): The Government have shown their commitment to improving the European Union's democratic accountability in a number of ways. We supported changes to the role of the European Parliament and to the role of national parliaments at Amsterdam. We have also introduced a number of improvements to our own scrutiny system.

During the British presidency, we made significant progress in improving access to information, including through more open debates in Council and better public access to documents. We continue to attach great importance to introducing more transparency to EU decision-making processes.

With regard to the European Commission, hon. Members will be aware that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister is to make a statement shortly.

Ms Squire: I must have been under a telepathic influence when I tabled the question two weeks ago for answer today, given the damning report that was published last night and the resignation of the EU Commissioners. Does my right hon. Friend agree that if ever the time was right for making EU institutions more democratic and accountable, it is now? In particular, does she agree that the reform of the management and accountability of the Commission should be accelerated, and that, in line with the Amsterdam treaty, the opening up of the decision-making process in the EU should be given greater priority, so that it is seen to be more responsible, accountable and relevant to the everyday lives of the people whom we represent?

Ms Quin: I agree with my hon. Friend and congratulate her on her perspicacity. We strongly believe that the events of yesterday and today represent a real opportunity to change the European Commission's management culture and to improve EU decision making across the board.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): How can democratic accountability in the EU possibly survive if certain leading German politicians have their way? Is the right hon. Lady aware that the German Chancellor has stated:

"National sovereignty will soon be a product of the imagination"?

Or that the German Foreign Minister has stated:

"My goal is to turn the EU into an entity under international law"?

Or even that the new German Finance Minister has stated:

"European unification is an absolute must . . . The euro is not European unification, but it is one important step towards this end."?

Does the right hon. Lady accept that, if the 20th century has taught us anything, it is the unwisdom of ignoring the pronouncements of German politicians by pretending that they do not mean what they say?

Ms Quin: Throughout the EU, there are many ideas on how to change EU institutions and bring them closer to the people whom we represent. During our presidency, we established an impressive programme of priorities to bring Europe closer to the citizens, and that is the agenda that we are pursuing, for which we have much support.

EU Enlargement

14. **Mr. Bill Rammell** (Harlow): If he will make a statement on the progress of enlargement of the European Union. [74920]

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Ms Joyce Quin): The successful enlargement of the European Union remains a key objective for the United Kingdom. The accession negotiations are on track. The priority for the candidates and the current member states is to concentrate on our mutual preparations for enlargement. It is still too early to predict when the first accessions might take place. However, once we have

agreed Agenda 2000, and the accession negotiations themselves are more advanced, we might be able to set ourselves a deadline for their conclusion.

Mr. Rammell: Given the progress that is being made on Agenda 2000 and on common agricultural policy reform, and given that some of the first-wave applicants have now joined NATO, will my right hon. Friend bear in mind that, in the history of the EU, setting a deadline has often led to decisions being made sooner than would otherwise have been the case? Is there not a case at the forthcoming European Council meetings for at least beginning to consider some of the deadlines and dates for membership for those countries?

Ms Quin: I agree that deadlines can act as a stimulus, but we must not set unrealistic deadlines which cannot be met. So far, the EU accession process has proceeded satisfactorily, and it has been good to see the way in which that process has stimulated beneficial change in some of the applicant countries.

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): Does the Minister share my concern that decisions may not now be reached on Agenda 2000 at the Council of Ministers next Wednesday and Thursday, and that because of the current turmoil in decision making, which is causing huge concern in applicant countries as well as existing EU countries, the extended market for which we all hope may well be delayed?

Ms Quin: I share the hon. Lady's concern. It is important to focus on the need to achieve agreement next week. Despite the situation in the EU Commission, the prime decisions to be taken next week will be for national Governments in the Council of Ministers. They know what the issues are and it is for them to ensure that we reach an agreement which will not only be good for the future of the existing EU member countries, but will facilitate the enlargement process, which has such overwhelming support in the House and which can create the large and successful market to which the hon. Lady referred.

Mr. Roger Casale (Wimbledon): As my right hon. Friend has said, one of the few matters that even the Conservative party can agree on in relation to Europe is the importance of keeping to a strict timetable for enlargement. That timetable must be respected by the applicant countries, but it is also important that it is respected by the European Union. Will she assure the House that Britain will continue to take a lead in pushing for enlargement as soon as the applicant countries are ready, and will not allow any slippage in that timetable as a result of stalling within the EU on the necessary reforms?

Ms Quin: I am certainly happy to give my hon. Friend that assurance. As he pointed out, the enlargement process has a great deal of support on both sides of the House. I believe that the Government's policies will promote a successful enlargement.

Tibet

16. **Mr. Norman Baker** (Lewes): If he will make a statement on the 40th anniversary of the uprising in Lhasa. [74922]

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Derek Fatchett): We remain very concerned about human rights in Tibet. We take every opportunity to raise our concerns with the Chinese authorities, both bilaterally and in conjunction with our EU partners. I will be raising the subject when I visit China in April.

Mr. Baker: Does the Minister recognise that, in recent months, the human rights abuses in Tibet have, if anything, worsened and that monks are being arrested simply for possessing a photograph of the Dalai Lama? I say to the Minister—without any intention of criticising him and his Government—that the policy of constructive engagement, which has been followed by this Government and by others in the west, seems, to me at least, not to be working. Will he review that policy and see what further pressure can be brought upon the Chinese authorities to loosen up in Tibet?

Mr. Fatchett: We have not softened our criticism of China's abuses of human rights, even though there has been dialogue with China on human rights issues. The two are not mutually exclusive. We will continue to press the human rights agenda with China, in relation to both Tibet and China more generally. I can give the hon. Gentleman an assurance that we will express our concern on those issues at every opportunity.

Mr. Lawrie Quinn (Scarborough and Whitby): Can my right hon. Friend outline to the House what assistance has been given to the Tibetan refugees in the north of India since the outrages in Lhasa 40 years ago?

Mr. Fatchett: These are issues that we keep an eye on and discuss with the Indian Government. It is obviously important on a humanitarian level that we do what we can to assist the refugees from Tibet who find themselves based in northern India.

Libya

18. **Sir Teddy Taylor** (Rochford and Southend, East): What progress has been made in normalising relations with Libya. [74924]

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Robin Cook): The first step in normalising relations with Libya must be for Libya to comply with its obligations in international law—primarily by handing over the two accused of the Lockerbie bombing. With our American and Dutch partners, we have gone to great lengths to arrange for a trial in a third country and also to convince the Libyan Government that it will be a fair trial. I am encouraged by recent statements by Colonel Gaddafi, in particular his recognition that no one can criticise the fairness of Scottish justice. Those statements leave Libya no reasonable grounds on which to refuse to surrender the two suspects.

Sir Teddy Taylor: Will the Foreign Secretary make it clear that sanctions will end, normal transport links will be restored and the Government will endeavour to restore good relations with Libya if the two suspects are handed over?

Mr. Cook: First, we have made it perfectly plain from the start of this exercise that sanctions will be suspended from the moment that the two suspects arrive in the Netherlands. There is also a commitment under the Security Council's resolutions that, within 90 days of that occasion, the Secretary-General will report on Libya's outstanding responsibilities, for instance on the question of compensation. If Libya fully complies in those 90 days, I have every confidence that we can then proceed from suspension to lifting of the sanctions.

On normalisation of transport and other links, the hon. Gentleman will be aware that we continue to have concerns over the murder of WPC Fletcher. However, I can assure the House that, if we resolve the issue of our right to try the two Lockerbie bombing suspects, in circumstances and under arrangements that Libya itself asked for, we will show good will and good faith in trying to arrange a resolution of the outstanding matters.

Select Committee Reports

20. **Mr. Dennis Canavan** (Falkirk, West): If he will make a statement about the information which he has received about Select Committee reports before their publication. [74927]

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Robin Cook): I have already provided such information in my statement to the House, and in written parliamentary answers. The special report on Sierra Leone by the Foreign Affairs Committee is now before the Committee on Standards and Privileges, which I shall provide with any further information that it requires.

Mr. Canavan: May we have an assurance that if there is any further attempt by a Select Committee member to hand over a draft report to the Secretary of State, the Secretary of State will hand that report back to the Chairman or Clerk of the appropriate Select Committee?

Mr. Cook: I can happily give my hon. Friend and the House an assurance that we will destroy any such report without taking further action.

European Commission

3.30 pm

The Prime Minister (Mr. Tony Blair): I should like to make a statement today on the report of the Committee of Independent Experts, and the resignation last night of Jacques Santer and his 19 colleagues in the European Commission.

The Committee of Independent Experts, set up last January on a motion from the Labour Group of the European Parliament to investigate allegations of fraud and mismanagement, reported yesterday. It is a damning report. It catalogues in key areas a culture of complacency and lack of accountability, and in some cases nepotism, that is unacceptable. The report could not be more clear-cut. It has revealed systemic failings in the Commission which have been tolerated for far too long.

It was absolutely right that the Commission resigned en masse. The President of the Commission should leave as soon as reasonably and practically possible, and a new President should take his place. The Commission should stay only in a caretaker role until a new Commission is appointed.

There is no criticism of the two British Commissioners. Indeed, they played a key role in bringing this issue to a head, and I believe that they should carry on.

Above all, the appointment of a new President and Commission should be the opportunity to push through root-and-branch reform of the Commission, its mandate and its method of operation. I will, of course, discuss these issues fully with Chancellor Schröder, the present European Union President, when I see him later today.

The new President of the Commission must be a political heavyweight, capable of providing the Commission with leadership and authority.

Jacques Santer is by no means solely responsible for this situation. Indeed, to be fair to him, he has instituted many changes of a worthwhile nature. Many of the issues revealed by the report predate his appointment. But I will be blunt: we cannot have the next President decided in the same way as the last, debating the narrow interests of one country or another. The top jobs, not just in the Commission, but throughout the European institutions, should go to the top people. Merit, and merit alone, should decide. We need the best person for the job of President, and we Heads of Government should make it clear that the Commission President operates under a mandate for reform and is a thorough-going reformer.

I would like Heads of Government, in the manner that we proposed last year at the conclusion of our presidency, to give the new Commission—with due involvement on the part of the European Parliament—a specific statement of what we believe the aims and mission of the new Commission should be: a new contract between the Commission and the Council. It should set a clear new course for a Europe of reform and change.

The changes suggested by the committee of inquiry yesterday are just the first step. In the short term, reform must include at least the following: a complete overhaul of the approval and auditing procedures for financial control; a new system for financial management and spending programmes; an entirely new procedure for the awarding of contracts for the provision of services with a new management system to oversee it; reworking of the whole disciplinary procedure so that staff in the Commission know exactly what is expected of them and what will happen if they fall short of those expectations; and a new system of accountability in the bureaucracy of the Commission so that each individual holding a position of responsibility is fully accountable for the budget and the measures that he or she manages.

In addition, we also need an entirely new framework for fighting fraud and financial irregularities. We have long been advocates of the appointment of an independent fraud investigation office which has full access to documents and officials, and the powers that it needs. That appointment should now be made.

The Committee of Independent Experts will report again soon with further recommendations on reform. We should implement them. In the longer term, we should put in place, as we argued at Amsterdam during our presidency and ever since, a new structure for the Commission, a better process of decision making, and a system of accountability that recognises the importance of connecting the people of Europe more closely to the decisions that affect them.

The inquiry's report has revealed a sad catalogue of negligence and mismanagement. There will, no doubt, be those who see this as just another chance to bash Europe. Intelligently seen, this is, in fact, an opportunity to make changes that many of us believe and have argued are long overdue. It is our responsibility now to use this crisis to ensure that the standards of management and public administration in the European institutions are as high as we expect them to be in national and regional governments in Europe. Let us seize that opportunity, therefore, and use it well.

Mr. William Hague (Richmond, Yorks): Yesterday's report from the inquiry on fraud could not have been more devastating. It refers to the European Commission having

"lost control of the administration."

It says that

"it is difficult to find anyone who has even the slightest sense of responsibility",

and that

"no supervision was exercised and a state within a state was allowed to develop."

It is welcome to hear the Prime Minister speak of root-and-branch reform—although we are learning, week by week, to judge him by his actions and not by his words—but does he accept that a more drastic overhaul of the Commission is now required than has ever before been envisaged; more important still, that the European Commission needs to do less rather than more; and that what it does it must do better?

Will the Prime Minister ensure that the national Governments now take an immediate grip of this situation, if necessary at an emergency summit within days, to restore public confidence in European institutions and to implement radical change? Will he consider adding to the list of proposals that he made a few moments ago: a binding code of conduct for the appointment of senior officials to prevent personal appointments by Commissioners and to stamp out nepotism in the Commission; an agreement that the European Parliament should be able to sack individual Commissioners who are guilty of misconduct; strengthened and publicly available

[Mr. William Hague]

declarations of financial interest by Commissioners and by their senior staff; and the immediate introduction of a systematic career management system for senior Commission staff, so that they rotate between responsibilities, as would be normal in any other Administration?

Does the Prime Minister agree that Jacques Santer should be relieved of all responsibilities with immediate effect, leave his office today and not return to it? While supporting the idea of those Commissioners not directly implicated by the report serving out their terms as an interim measure, can I specifically ask the Prime Minister to agree that there should be a total clear-out of the existing Commission and an entirely new set of Commissioners appointed?

Is there not an even bigger issue and more important challenge now, which is that it is time to change the whole culture that leads the European Commission and the European Union to try to do too much and to interfere too often? The report makes it clear that the attempts of the Commission to implement a humanitarian aid budget, a policy on tourism and a highly expensive programme of aid to the Mediterranean led to massive fraud and irregularities that the Commission were unable or unwilling to deal with. Is that not what comes of trying to do too much? Is not the wrong answer to recruit more staff and the right answer to reduce the Commission's range of activities?

This is surely the heart of the matter. Does the Prime Minister recognise that a strong case already exists, further strengthened by this report, for cutting back on what the Commission does and letting national Governments do it instead? Will he accept that there is now considerable evidence that, in almost every case, bilateral aid provides better value for money than EU aid programmes? Is there not a strong case for the EU not to have an aid programme, but for those resources to be spent instead by member states?

Would it not be better, instead of the Commission trying to run a fisheries policy for every country, for local or national fishing industries to have control over the stock of their fisheries, while recognising the traditional rights of other countries?

Should not the Commission be doing less in those and in other ways, so that it might deal more effectively with the real priorities of enlargement of the European Union and completion of the single market? Is it not time not only for a new contract, but a new direction?

Will the Prime Minister now come clean and give straight answers to some specific questions on events of the past few months? Will he confirm that, only yesterday, at the Economic and Finance Council, the Chancellor signed up to creation of a fraud investigation office that, far from being independent of the Commission, would come under the control of the Commission, in directorate F?

Will the Prime Minister confirm that yesterday—on the very day the report was produced—the Chancellor thought it right, at ECOFIN, to sign off the 1997 European Union accounts, whereas the European Parliament itself has refused to do so?

Will the Prime Minister now give the House an answer about what instructions and advice he gave to Pauline Green, the Labour leader of the Socialists in the European Parliament, before Labour Members of the European Parliament let the Commission off the hook two months ago, after the revelations?

Why was the leader of the Socialist group, Pauline Green, to be seen celebrating that event with Jacques Santer, with champagne, as recorded on German television, rather doing her job of holding the Commission to account?

When the Prime Minister talks about what he will do, will he undertake, this time, to deliver some action instead of some talk? His spokesman has said that the Commission is like Lambeth council in the '80s, and the analogy is not a bad one—fraud and mismanagement resulting from a group of politicians trying to do too much and interfere too much, while the Labour party lets them do it. Is it not time to ensure not only that they clean up their act, but that the Commission is doing less, and doing it better?

The Prime Minister: I should start by reminding the right hon. Gentleman who it was who appointed Mr. Santer. Which country, under which Government, blocked each one of the alternative 15 candidates, until only Mr. Santer was left? It was the Government under whom he was a Cabinet member. If he disputes that, I should read what the former Prime Minister said at the time. He said:

"What matters is how competently and efficiently the new President is going to run the Commission. I have worked with Jacques Santer for . . . a number of years. I know his virtues and his capacity to carry matters forward."

The current Conservative finance spokesman—the right hon. Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory)—when he was a Treasury Minister, said:

"We are happy with Mr. Santer and we wish him well. He shows every sign, based on his record, of running an efficient and effective Commission."

We have from the Conservative party itself this quote about Mr. Santer:

"He is the right man in the right place at the right time".

So let us have no more of trying to blame this Government for any shortcomings in the Commission. The Conservative party has something of a habit of managing to appoint compromise candidates who seem like a good idea at the time, but do not quite work out in the longer term.

As for the irregularities that the right hon. Gentleman says that the Labour Government have let happen, if he reads the report, he will see that the vast majority of irregularities happened before we were even elected—they happened when the Conservative party was in government. The fact is that the current proposals have been made precisely because a committee of inquiry was established under a motion tabled by the Labour group in the European Parliament.

The right hon. Gentleman made some other extraordinary comments. He was wrong, for example, in his comment on the Chancellor, who made it quite clear that there should be an independent fraud investigation office. Today, the right hon. Gentleman has also suggested a very big change of United Kingdom policy—that we should effectively change all the Commission's powers—and has said that he would withdraw entirely from the common fisheries policy. Is that current Conservative party policy? *[Interruption.]* Really—to withdraw from it altogether? Do Conservative Members

think that an attempt unilaterally to impose our policy would be of benefit to the United Kingdom, when it would all have to be negotiated with the very self-same European partners?

There is one question, and one question only: do we use this event as an excuse to indulge the anti-Europeanism of the current Conservative party, which wants to take us out of Europe entirely, or do we regard it as an opportunity to drive through a reform agenda, from a position of strength and influence, in Britain's and in Europe's interests? The worst thing that we could do, when we have the chance of reform, is to return to the disastrous days of Tory diplomacy.

Mr. Menzies Campbell (North-East Fife): Withdrawing from the common fisheries policy would be not only politically inept, but illegal under the treaties that we have signed. There is no denying the humiliation that the Commission has suffered over the past 24 hours or the significance of the victory achieved by the Parliament over fraud and mismanagement. Is it not clearly the case that relations between the Parliament and the Commission will never be quite the same again? Do not those events provide an opportunity for the reform of the European Union, the Commission and the Parliament, even to the extent of giving the Parliament the power to hold individual Commissioners to account, which the Labour Members of the European Parliament voted against earlier this year? Does the Prime Minister accept that we shall not achieve an open, accountable and transparent Europe merely by modifications or alterations, and that we need radical reform? Do we not need a set of clear political rules by which to manage the affairs of the European Union? Is not the case for a constitution for the European Union overwhelming?

The Prime Minister: It is important to get the reforms right. The reforms suggested by the Leader of the Opposition would be wholly detrimental to the interests of this country. We must be careful how we reform the European Commission and other European institutions. In the short term, measures connected with financial management and budgetary control are essential, and we can put them into effect quite quickly. We can also set up an independent fraud office almost immediately.

In the longer term, we must be careful about saying that the answer to everything is more power to the European Parliament. The right hon. and learned Gentleman suggested that, as did the Leader of the Opposition to an extent. One of the strongest connections that we can have is with the Council of Ministers, which represents the democratically elected Governments of the European Union. We need to get the longer-term reforms right and the shorter-term reforms in place. We can do that now.

I agree with the right hon. and learned Gentleman that we should use this situation as an opportunity for reform. We can do that. The initial indications from other countries in the European Union are that as a result of what has happened, the reformers are very much in the ascendant.

Mr. Bill Rammell (Harlow): Does my right hon. Friend agree that one of the biggest institutional blocks on reform is the fact that individual Commissioners cannot be disciplined and removed from office without the wholesale resignation of the Commission? Will he also ponder on the fact that we have a weak leader of the European Commission because he was foisted on us by the previous Conservative Government? They took their decision not in the national interest, but because of the divisions in the Conservative party at the time. Is it not also the case that when there was misconduct at the highest levels of Government under the previous Administration in this country, we used that not as an argument to remove and dismantle that Government, but to bring about fundamental and effective reform? That is what should happen with the Commission and the European Union.

The Prime Minister: It is important that the next President of the Commission is someone of strength and real authority in the European Union. It is also important to look carefully at the terms under which Commissioners and senior officials in the bureaucracy are appointed. Those changes can be taken forward with considerable backing from all countries of the European Union.

Mr. John Major (Huntingdon): Will the Prime Minister accept that, no doubt inadvertently, he misled the House on the subject of Mr. Santer's appointment? Mr. Santer was proposed by all the other members of the European Union before I accepted his appointment on behalf of this country.

On the substantive point of his statement, does the Prime Minister agree that the report throws up an institutional problem that has long existed in the European Union? The structure of the Union is such that the Commission, in theory, is accountable to the Council of Ministers. However, in practice, the irregularity with which the Council meets means that detailed supervision over many of the activities of the Commission is not undertaken properly, either by the Council of Ministers or, in any other sense, by the European Parliament.

Is not one of the most important reforms—it is many years overdue, I happily concede—clear-cut financial accountability by the Commission, ideally to the member states of the European Union or, if that is too cumbersome, to a body that itself reports directly to the member states for them to judge how effectively the accounts are being managed? The Prime Minister and his fellow Heads of Government have a tremendous opportunity, in light of the report, to effect such a reform. Simply replacing the existing Commissioners will not do. If he takes that opportunity for structural reform, he will deserve the support of both sides of the House.

The Prime Minister: I will deal with the second part of the right hon. Gentleman's question and leave aside what will have to be disagreement on the first part. The institutional problems to which he drew attention have been there a long time, and there is a lot of merit in what he says, in two senses. There is a problem with detailed supervision because the Council, necessarily, meets irregularly. Secondly, we need a better system of financial accountability—that was one of the things that I set out in my statement. That better system of financial accountability—in the longer term—may well require some fundamental change to the way in which the present system works. The point that the right hon. Gentleman made is well worth looking at.

Reading back on much of what the right hon. Gentleman said at previous European Councils, one sees that it is true that this has been an issue for a long time,

[The Prime Minister]

and it would be misleading—on this point, although I do not accept that charge on the first point—if I were to say that this argument was not mounted by the previous Conservative Government. However, the big difference now is that I believe that a consensus for reform is beginning to form right across the European Union for some of the things for which the right hon. Gentleman argued but, at the time, was unable to get through. We can build the alliance for that now, but we can do so only if we see this as an opportunity, and not as an excuse to indulge in the Europhobia that some Conservative Members—although not the right hon. Gentleman—want.

Mr. Clive Soley (Ealing, Acton and Shepherd's Bush): Is not what the right hon. Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major) said an example of the importance of this country having a positive approach to Europe? If we have a negative and divided approach, the problems of which we have been aware for some time will inevitably continue. We need a strong and independent check on fraud, and a body dealing with standards and privileges for Commissioners. Perhaps at this stage we ought to record our thanks to Pauline Green and Alan Donnelly for the lead that they have taken on this matter.

The Prime Minister: The committee of inquiry would not have been set up but for the motion, which came not merely from the Labour group, but from British Labour members of that group. Secondly, the committee of inquiry will make a further report shortly. We should implement that as well.

Mr. William Cash (Stone): The Prime Minister says that we must get the reforms right. Why can he not match the scale of this crisis with a statement dealing with the real problems facing this country? Is he prepared to go to the Berlin summit in a few days and make a proposal to the other Heads of Government to deal with the real questions, which relate to the loss of national democracy, accountability and the means of calling people to account? Is he prepared to table amendments at the intergovernmental conference that is due shortly to ensure that we get the balance right, and bring back to this House and to the other national Parliaments the democracy and accountability that the electors of Europe and this country truly deserve?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman will no doubt get a lot of support for that view from his own side. He believes that Britain should not be a member of the European Union at all. The idea that if I adopted his position on Europe I would go to Berlin with great influence is absurd: I would go there with no influence at all. If he had his way, I would not even be invited to Berlin and to the conference.

Mr. Cash: On a point of order, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: I can take points of order only at the end of statements, and I have three statements to deal with today.

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman caused quite enough difficulty for my predecessor without causing difficulty for me as well. We have a fundamental disagreement about how to get the best for Britain out of Europe. He would do it by effectively taking Britain out of Europe; I believe that we should stay in Europe, fight for our interests as other countries do, and build consensus and alliances for the changes that we want.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): My right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister will recollect that when he led the Labour delegation to Strasbourg, I was the Labour member on the Budget Committee and on the Budget Sub-Committee dealing with fraud. In the light of experience, especially of the Friuli earthquake compensation, does my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister accept that it is very difficult to get politicians to have anything to do with fraud investigations into their own country, not least if they are Italians? No Italian MEP would have anything to do with the Friuli investigation. Does he agree that if an investigation is to be effective, it will have to be on a European, rather than on a country-by-country basis, and that there will have to be a strong, independent investigative team?

The Prime Minister: I will not pray my hon. Friend's remarks in aid for my new strategy for the Italian alliance. My hon. Friend is right to say that there is a problem with countries investigating their own institutions to determine whether fraud has occurred, but that is surely precisely the reason why we need an independent investigative fraud office, which is what we proposed and what I now believe will be accepted.

Mr. David Davis (Haltemprice and Howden): In June and July last year, before the furore that led to yesterday's events, the Public Accounts Committee published a report criticising the fraud and waste in Europe. I called for an independent anti-fraud office, with teeth, to be set up. The Commission dismissed that as unnecessary. Does the Prime Minister accept that an anti-fraud office that will do the most to stop the rot at the centre of Europe will be on the Danish, Dutch and British model: independent in funding, appointment and activities, with absolute access to the information in all the institutions in Europe, and reporting back to European taxpayers through the Council of Ministers?

The Prime Minister: I do indeed believe that the body should be fully independent and allowed to carry out its functions in a way that establishes its own credibility, quite apart from anything else. That is the best thing for Europe. The standing of the European Commission has been damaged, quite rightly, and the best way for us to respond is to act now. The right hon. Gentleman is right to say that the Public Accounts Committee made that proposal before, but the difference is that this time—I found this in the discussions in Petersberg a few weeks ago and, before that, in Vienna—it will find an echo right across Europe.

Mr. Robert Sheldon (Ashton-under-Lyne): I support what the right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden (Mr. Davis), the current Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee, said. I want to refer to events as they unfolded late last night. Is not it clear that the responses of Jacques Santer and Mrs. Cresson were wholly inadequate? The report found fraud, nepotism and mismanagement, and the

minimum response from those singled out should be not only immediate resignation, but no possibility of reinstatement.

The Prime Minister: I agree that the response was wholly inadequate, which is why we have called for the measures that I outlined today.

Sir Brian Mawhinney (North-West Cambridgeshire): Did the Prime Minister hear Sir Leon Brittan this morning, saying, without making any excuse, that one of the problems that the Commission had was that national Governments asked it to take on more than it was equipped to handle? Does he accept that if, in his new contract, he were to take the opportunity for reform by circumscribing the activities of the Commission and the pressure put on it by national Governments to do more, not as a cover for disengagement but as a genuine reform, he would carry the support of all parties in the House?

The Prime Minister: It is worth considering how we describe the functions of the Commission, although I suspect that even those who are most insistent that we remove some of its activities would want, in other circumstances, to start adding responsibilities. It is necessary to look root and branch at the activities we want the Commission to undertake and how it undertakes them. I hope that we can have a sensible debate across the House, because that would be in the interests of this country.

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield): Is my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister aware that although the two British Commissioners were apparently cleared completely of any charge against them, they were collectively responsible for the work of the Commission? Will he take the opportunity to make one significant reform—which is entirely in his hands—and give the House of Commons the opportunity to vote for and appoint the British Commissioners in Brussels? I wrote to him on that point today and legislative provision for it is contained in the Crown Prerogatives (Parliamentary Control) Bill, which has support on both sides of the House and would be a significant way to spread power from the few—indeed from the individual—to the many of the House of Commons.

The Prime Minister: I am afraid that I cannot offer my right hon. Friend any solace on that last point. In respect of his first point, I have looked at the report carefully and neither of the two British Commissioners was personally criticised or involved in any shape or form in the specific cases that were examined. Therefore, it would be wrong if we were to single out our Commissioners for blame in those circumstances.

Mr. David Curry (Skipton and Ripon): Is it not curious that the one word that did not pass the Prime Minister's lips was Parliament? As a democratically elected leader, does he not believe that he should discuss with his fellow Heads of Government how the European Parliament and national Parliaments can co-operate rather than compete to represent the people's interests in Europe and achieve genuine accountability? The Prime Minister mentioned a new President. Is he suggesting bringing forward the appointment of the whole of the new Commission or merely appointing a temporary stop-gap between now and next January?

The Prime Minister: I have said that I believe that the President of the Commission should stand down as soon as possible and that we should put the new Commission in place as soon as possible. I am here, being accountable to Parliament through the statement I am giving, but when I described longer-term reform, I had in mind the clutch of issues that we raised in Cardiff during our presidency, which included the need for better co-ordination between the European Parliament and national Parliaments. Because Europe has those powers, the more scrutiny to which it is subjected and the better the debate between the European Parliament and the national Parliaments and Governments, the better it is for democracy. However, I would stress, as I said to the right hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell), that—I suppose probably all Prime Ministers say this—we must take account of the fact that the Council of Ministers is also a democratically accountable body, in the sense that each Prime Minister goes home and is accountable to his or her Parliament.

Mr. Denzil Davies (Llanelli): My right hon. Friend rightly called for a root-and-branch reform of the Commission. Which institution of the European Union has the power to carry out such reform? If proposals are made for such reform, will they require a treaty to ratify them?

The Prime Minister: That depends on the nature of the reforms proposed, but we already have in the Amsterdam treaty some issues that were left over for the purpose of sorting out enlargement including, for example, the structure of the new Commission. In any event, we will consider some of those issues very carefully over the coming months. We should bind into that an opportunity to analyse some of the fundamental reforms that we can make. My right hon. Friend asks about the correct institution, but the correct beginning of the process of reform is with the Council of Ministers.

Sir Teddy Taylor (Rochford and Southend, East): Does the Prime Minister agree that the basic problem is the fact that those 20 little emperors in Brussels have massive powers? They are not highly qualified, experienced civil servants, subject to disciplines and controls, but redundant politicians who are faced with daily temptations on the basis of the ever-increasing powers given to Brussels. While a minority take the view that Europe would be strengthened if the Commission were to close its doors tomorrow, does the Prime Minister agree that we could improve the administration of, and spending controls in, Europe if powers such as agricultural management and foreign aid were returned to member states?

The Prime Minister: I do not believe that it would be in our interests to renegotiate the entire terms of European Union membership or of the institutions of the EU. I must disagree with the hon. Gentleman, and our disagreement will simply remain. In respect of the hon. Gentleman's very

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harsh words about the Commissioners, I must say that I dug out an interesting statement that he made when Mr. Jacques Santer was appointed. The hon. Gentleman said:

"He is a quiet, decent, responsible person and we can congratulate John Major for accepting him."

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Is the Prime Minister aware that one reason why he has had to come here today to talk about the latest crisis in the common market is the contradiction in the common market? For as long as it is based on the idea that nation states must scratch one another's backs to get what they want—that is roughly how the common market operates—the net result will be a democratic deficit. If that democratic deficit resulted in a European Parliament that could properly scrutinise fraud and all the rest of it, we would have a united states of Europe. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister does not want that, and nor do I.

Crises will therefore continue to confront the Prime Minister and everyone else in the common market. We must understand that no matter how well meaning the proposals are, the common market will continue to have one nation state scratching another's back to get what it wants. That is the problem that the whole common market must face.

The Prime Minister: If we consider the balance of our interest in being in or out of the European Union, we can see that it is fundamentally in our interest to be in it. It is in our interest in terms of jobs, trade, industry and influence in the world. Scratching each other's backs is one way of describing what happens, but there is a mutual self-interest in being part of the European Union. Whatever changes and reforms we make in the EU, I believe that Britain is better in than out.

Mr. John D. Taylor (Strangford): I accept that Her Majesty's Government have a role in the appointment of the new President of the Commission and the nomination of two United Kingdom Commissioners. Have the Government any say, however, in the appointment of other Commissioners? In particular, have they any say in the reappointment of one retiring Commissioner who is the subject of a public inquiry into the disappearance of £50,000 in his own country?

Secondly, in so far as centre right politics in Europe is concerned, does the Prime Minister agree with new thinking in Europe that the Commission should be appointed by the European Parliament, not by national Governments?

The Prime Minister: If the right hon. Gentleman is saying that the European Commission should be appointed by the European Parliament, not national Governments, I do not agree. It is better that nation states appoint Commissioners.

In respect of the right hon. Gentleman's other point about the appointment of other Commissioners, of course we have a say. All Commission appointments are discussed at the Council of Ministers.

Mr. Austin Mitchell (Great Grimsby): May I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his proposals, which seem exactly the right way in which to deal with a long-running problem? Our own Select Committee on European Scrutiny said in January:

"This is the fourth successive year in which the Court has not been able to provide assurance about the legality and regularity of the accounts of the general budget."

There remains the problem of the existing Commission and its collective responsibility. Without wishing to bash Europe in any way—there is no need; Europe is self-bashing these days—may I suggest that we should follow the practice of a president of a company that has failed because of incompetence, nepotism, selfishness and lack of leadership among its board? The board should go, and we should call in the administrator.

The Prime Minister: The board has effectively gone and it is right that the President of the Commission takes responsibility. My hon. Friend mentions that the European Scrutiny Committee has raised the issue of dealing with the problems of fraud; it is fair to say that this country and the various Committees of this House have been raising that issue for many years. My point is that we now have an opportunity in Europe to push that reform with the agreement of other countries. I do not know how it will be seen by our national media, but it is interesting that the media of other European countries see the whole issue as giving a fair wind to those who want to reform the system, once and for all.

Sir Michael Spicer (West Worcestershire): If we are facing institutional corruption and fraud, to borrow Sir William Macpherson's phrase, what proposals does the Prime Minister have for institutional reform?

The Prime Minister: The proposals I made in the statement for changes in the whole system of financial accountability, disciplinary proceedings in respect of Commission staff and awarding of contracts are all institutional changes, as is the establishment of an independent fraud office. In the longer term, we should look at ways in which we can introduce a better system of accountability between member states and the European Union. Those are all changes that we can look at and do.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North–East Derbyshire): Surely it is not only a matter of appointing a stronger President who has even greater authority—I think my right hon. Friend spoke about greater authority being established—but a matter of having democratic arrangements in place, so that whoever is there is controlled by those provisions. Should we not move to a system whereby the bodies that make decisions are the Parliaments—the European Parliament and the Parliaments of the nation states?

The Prime Minister: There is a case for looking at how to strengthen the link between national Parliaments and the European institutions, and that is what we proposed at Cardiff during our presidency. When I talk about the new President of the Commission having strengthened authority, I mean that we should appoint someone who is clearly a political heavyweight and who can make the European Commission into the sort of body that Europe needs. However, I am also suggesting, as we proposed at Cardiff at the conclusion of our presidency,

that the Commission operate under a specific mandate and statement of aims and mission from the Council of Ministers. That is the right place to start.

Sir Edward Heath (Old Bexley and Sidcup): I agree with the Prime Minister's analysis of the situation and that his proposals are worth deep consideration. I would suggest only that when discussing those matters with the other countries, the right hon. Gentleman bear in mind the danger of being told that the British just want to run everything. That is a real danger, which he has encountered once before.

The good side of the situation is that, for the first time, the European Parliament has been prepared to act and to act decisively. Things will never be the same again, because, in future, the Parliament will always take an attitude and carry it through. That has to be taken into account. I suggest that that gives every one of us a powerful argument to use in the forthcoming European elections, which is to say to our own electorate that the time has now come when they should use their vote to get the representation in the European Parliament that we ought to have, rather than having the smallest of the lot.

The Prime Minister: I agree entirely that it is right that we try to get representation in the European Parliament that will stick up for Britain's interests in a sensible way. It is also true that we are not telling the rest of Europe that we in Britain know how to run everything and everyone has to take our instructions. However, with a Government who believe in a strong and influential position for Britain in Europe, we now have the chance to build the alliance necessary to get the right changes in Europe. I say with respect to my predecessor as Prime Minister that, at the beginning of his premiership and before his party put the manacles on him, he tried to achieve that and to construct a different set of relationships in Europe. It is possible for us to do that now, but we shall succeed only if we recognise and say, right up front, that Britain is a key partner in Europe. We shall play our role as a partner in Europe and, in doing that, fashion a Europe of which this country can be proud.

Ms Jenny Jones (Wolverhampton, South-West): Does my right hon. Friend agree that, if we are to achieve the long-awaited reforms on fighting fraud and bringing greater financial accountability to the Commission, the work of the Court of Auditors should be given due recognition and that organisation should be given greater power? The Court of Auditors has for some time been pointing out what is wrong with the Commission in that respect.

The Prime Minister: There is certainly a case for ensuring that the Court of Auditors has all the powers it needs. However, I believe that the existence of the independent fraud investigation office will make the critical difference. If people can see that allegations are investigated by an independent body, it will give the whole system greater credibility. When the issues were first raised in the European Parliament, the European Labour group was absolutely right to call for an inquiry first and to make the necessary changes on the basis of that inquiry. If we take this opportunity to put in place a wholly independent system, it will be far better and far more credible for the future.

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): Is the Prime Minister arguing for the immediate reappointment of the British Commissioners? If so, is that not rather odd because they must bear some of the collective responsibility for what has gone on and for the Commission's failure to act in spite of many warnings and reports? Would not the Prime Minister and his Government be better advised to stay their hand and consider carefully what is in the best interests of the Commission and of the European Union when appointing a new Commission, rather than joining other countries in rushing to reappoint discredited Commissioners?

The Prime Minister: It would be strange if Britain responded to this issue by sacking the two British Commissioners, who have been subject to no personal criticism or investigation regarding the original areas of complaint. It would be odd if we did not reappoint our Commissioners and other countries—whose Commissioners were also subject to no criticism—did the opposite. That would not be in this country's interests.

Mr. Rhodri Morgan (Cardiff, West): Although it is quite understandable that the previous Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major), should seek to play down his key role in appointing the President of the Commission—Jacques Santer has, from day one, suffered from delusions of adequacy—does the Prime Minister accept that it is important to remember the role that the whistleblower played in revealing the fraud that has taken place? Greater provision for freedom of information in the European Commission's work and in dealings between each member state and the Commission, and greater protection for whistleblowers in the EC, should be part of the reform package.

The Prime Minister: I support any moves that make the system more transparent because transparency will aid accountability.

Mr. Charles Wardle (Bexhill and Battle): In several of his replies, the Prime Minister has asserted that the two United Kingdom Commissioners are free from blame—indeed, they were not mentioned in the report. Will the Prime Minister place in the Library the memorandums that show when the two British Commissioners first flagged up the mess that was under their noses—if they ever did so—before the balloon went up?

The Prime Minister: As I said in my statement, the two British Commissioners played a crucial part in bringing the issue to a head and in insisting that action was taken. Despite Conservative Members' comments, it would be very odd if we ultimately alighted upon the two British Commissioners—who were not subject to any personal criticism at all—as the ones who should pay the price.

Mr. Richard Shepherd (Aldridge-Brownhills): The selection and appointment of Commissioners is clearly key to the reform of the institution and is a matter for

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national Governments. What will happen if the French Government wish to reappoint, or assert their right regarding, Mrs. Cresson?

The Prime Minister: Let us wait and see whether that is the case. As I said earlier, any appointments or re-appointments are discussed in the Council of Ministers.

Crime Reduction

4.18 pm

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Jack Straw): With permission, Madam Speaker, I wish to make a statement on forthcoming Government initiatives to tackle crime. The Crime and Disorder Act 1998 provides the foundation for our strategy on crime and disorder. The major reforms of the youth justice system for which it provides are currently being rolled out; and the House will be familiar with them. Two other major parts of the Act come into force in the next two weeks. From 1 April, effective local crime strategies to reduce crime and disorder must be in place in every area of the country. Those strategies are being drawn up by the more than 400 statutory partnerships established between the police and local authorities. They follow a six-month period of consultation between local communities, police and local authorities.

Clear and deliverable local targets are being set to reflect the priorities of each local community. Those targets will, for the first time, give local people the means to monitor how effective are the police and local authorities in reducing crime and disorder in their area. The early signs are that those local partnerships have invested considerable energy and enthusiasm. We all understand that they must now deliver.

I know that many hon. Members have been as concerned as I, the police and local authorities about the lack of effective remedies to combat serious and persistent anti-social behaviour in our communities. We have been determined to put that right. I am therefore pleased to tell the House that the new anti-social behaviour order under the Crime and Disorder Act will come into force and be available to the courts from 1 April—in only 15 days' time.

That civil order will be available against any individual over the age of 10 whose behaviour is such that the court judges it likely to cause harassment, alarm or distress to others. In terms of the rules of evidence and the burden of proof, the order will be similar to a civil injunction. It will typically impose conditions restraining the behaviour of named individuals. Those may include a curfew or prohibition on going to particular areas or houses or contact with particular individuals. A breach of an anti-social behaviour order will be an arrestable offence punishable on indictment by up to five years in prison or by an unlimited fine.

Many police forces and local authorities are undertaking work to prepare for the start date of 1 April. I am today issuing detailed guidance about the use of the orders. Copies have been placed in the Library and are available in the Vote Office.

Last July, I announced our intention to begin a £250 million, evidence-based crime reduction programme to reverse the long-term upward trend in crime. It is the biggest programme of its kind ever undertaken in this country or abroad. I am pleased to say that the first projects under that programme will soon be under way.

On Thursday, I shall announce the first 11 provisional areas to benefit from a £30 million initiative in targeted policing to establish what works. That will give targeted support to some of the most innovative and dedicated police work that is taking place. The schemes will bolster the police in their dedicated work to tackle crime.

England and Wales have one of the worst records on burglary in the industrialised world, despite recent falls owing to excellent work by the police and local authorities. Early next month, therefore, we shall announce the 60 areas that are to benefit from the first phase of a £50 million anti-burglary initiative. Over three years, our scheme will cover more than 2 million homes in about 500 of the country's high crime areas. It builds on the previous Government's safer cities campaign, which I commend, and should have a major impact on property crime rates.

I turn now to the outline announcement made by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer in his Budget statement last week. As he told the House, an additional £150 million is being allocated to boost support to crime prevention in areas in England where crime is highest. That brings the total funds for the crime reduction programme to more than £400 million.

The breakdown of the additional £150 million will be £20 million in the coming financial year, 1999–2000; £60 million in the next year; and £70 million in the third year, 2001–2002. In addition, £13 million will be available for projects in Scotland, £4 million for Northern Ireland and a further £3 million for Wales. A key focus of that additional programme will be investment in closed-circuit television systems and the infrastructure necessary to make these systems operate most effectively, including in housing estates, towns, bus and railway stations and car parks.

The evidence is clear. In the right context, CCTV can significantly reduce crime and disorder. It is like having permanently on the beat in particular streets or areas a number of police officers with eyes in the back of their heads and an incontrovertible record of what they have seen. When used properly, CCTV can deter criminals, greatly assist the police and others in bringing offenders to justice and help to reduce people's fear of crime.

Take vehicle crime, for example. It accounts for almost a quarter of all recorded crime and costs us £4 billion a year. In September, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister announced a national target to reduce vehicle crime by 30 per cent. over the next five years. The additional resources for CCTV and related security improvements are a major step on the road to meeting that target. Among other things, the resources will be targeted at improving car park security. Home Office research in six cities provides firm evidence that the installation of CCTV in car parks leads to significant reductions in vehicle crime.

A project in Hull, for example, led to a fall in the theft of cars in the targeted car park of almost 90 per cent., compared with a reduction of only six per cent. in the city centre as a whole. Given that up to 30 per cent. of all such crime takes place in car parks, the potential pay-offs from this major new investment in security are enormous. Another project in Darlington has cut the number of vehicle offences in the town by more than 80 per cent.

Funding for the new initiative will be allocated through a competitive bidding process. We will invite bids for schemes in places to which the public have access. We expect roughly half the funding to be allocated to residential areas, although the precise split will depend on the quality of the bids received. Bids must be submitted through local crime and disorder partnerships. Successful bids will be those which have the biggest impact in reducing crime, are part of a broader strategy and represent the best value for money.

The initiative will be managed jointly by the Home Office and the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, as part of the crime reduction programme, with the Scottish, Welsh and Northern Ireland Offices discharging their separate responsibilities. The joint work of the DETR and the Home Office is significant. It represents co-ordinated government at both national and local level, and will complement existing programmes, such as the new deal for communities and the single regeneration budget. My right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister and I will issue a joint prospectus as soon as possible, which will set out guidance to partnerships on the submission of bids, including time scales and selection criteria.

The measures that I have announced today are part of a coherent strategy for giving local communities the means that they need to tackle crime, the fear of crime and disorder. I commend them to the House.

Sir Norman Fowler (Sutton Coldfield): I welcome the proposal to extend closed circuit television. The previous Conservative Government introduced that measure, and it is one of the reasons why crime has come down over the past five years. In opposition, we have pressed for its extension, so we welcome the announcement. I quarrel only with the Home Secretary's description of CCTV as being like having a number of police officers permanently on the beat in particular streets. I do not agree with the implication of that remark. We certainly need CCTV, but we need policemen on the beat, too. Our fundamental criticism of the Government is that they are cutting the number of police.

CCTV apart, the Home Secretary's statement is simply a re-announcement of old policies—as we had yesterday from the Secretary of State for Health. If anyone doubts that, they need only look back to the Prime Minister's speech at September's Labour party conference, in which he said:

> "Because of the Government's policies, young children alone on the streets can be subject to curfews. From April, anti-social neighbours can be taken to court and punished. I announce today that we will be introducing measures to tackle the first of 20 worst crime hotspots around the country."

What is new is that the Home Secretary is claiming credit for extra spending on law and order. He boasts of £400 million over the next three years. If that is his claim, where will the money come from? Let the Home Secretary confirm that between 1979 and 1996–97, under the previous Government, there was a 3.3 per cent. average annual real increase in Government financing for the police. If the Government had kept to that average, they would be spending an extra £1.3 billion on the police over the next three years. It is a story with which we are familiar: the Government have taken a lot of money from one budget, namely, the police; they have given some of it to another budget, namely, crime prevention; but, most of all, they have kept the change.

On the anti-social behaviour orders, let me ask the Home Secretary two questions. First, can he give the House an assurance that the orders, which we have supported, do not offend, as is claimed by some, against the European convention on human rights? We have already seen one example this week of how that may have

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happened—contrary, I suggest, to overwhelming public opinion in this country. No one wants to see another such example.

Secondly, as the Prime Minister said, the child curfew orders were a central part of the Government's strategy. Can the Home Secretary confirm that, after six months, no local authority has applied for such an order?

Lastly, the Home Secretary mentioned targeted policing—hotspot policing, as the Prime Minister described it. The idea comes from the United States, together with so-called zero tolerance policing. It has been very successful there in reducing crime, but I emphasise that it has been accompanied by a determined drive to recruit more police in New York and throughout the United States. Surely the trouble with the Government's approach is that they are presiding over a declining police service in this country. We increased police numbers by more than 15,000 during our period in office, but police strength is now coming down in this country—down in the cities and down in country areas. Does that not mean that the full potential to reduce crime in this country will not be realised under the Government's policies?

Mr. Straw: I am glad that the right hon. Gentleman seeks to welcome what I have said about closed circuit television—and well he might, because the previous Government invested £38.5 million in closed circuit television over four years whereas we are investing £150 million over three years into such crime reduction programmes. We are not taking that money from the police.

The right hon. Gentleman said that, under the previous Administration, budgets rose by an average of 3.5 per cent. That took place at a time of much higher inflation. Police budgets are due to increase by 3 per cent. during the next year and, in other areas, budgets are due to increase by 3.5 per cent.

As for accusing us of cutting police numbers, that is an extremely dangerous line for the right hon. Gentleman to follow. Although it is true that the number of police rose in the 1970s under a Labour Administration and in the 1980s under the Conservative Administration, after 1992 the Conservative Administration presided over a serious decline in police numbers. Notwithstanding the fact that they had promised 6,000 more police officers, they delivered 450 fewer police officers in that five-year period. As for the past two years, when the numbers have decreased, we were following the previous Conservative Administration's spending plans, with only this difference: we put in a bit more money than they did.

I see the right hon. Gentleman smirking about that, as Conservatives always did when they broke their promises, but Conservative Members need to remember that they lost office so comprehensively because they broke their promises.

The right hon. Gentleman says that there was nothing new in the statement except the increased funding for closed circuit television. There was a great deal that was new, including the guidance—which I have published today—on the use of anti-social behaviour orders, which has been the subject of a great deal of consultation with local authorities, the police and others. I am very glad that the right hon. Gentleman now welcomes the use of those orders, because we received a mixed message during the legislation's passage through Parliament. I believe that one or two Conservative Front Benchers welcomed them, but the hon. Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison) described them as "dangerously unworkable" and the Conservative central office information simply dismissed them as "a gimmick". The orders will be workable, and they should make a great deal of difference. *[Interruption.]* I shall deal with child curfew orders in a moment.

I enjoyed the right hon. Gentleman's question about the European convention on human rights. There is always space for people to undergo a Pauline conversion on matters such as human rights, and we greatly welcome the Conservatives' subscribing to the convention. The answer is that I signed a clear statement to the House, saying that we believed that the provisions of the Crime and Disorder Act were compliant with the European convention.

Sir Norman Fowler: Believed?

Mr. Straw: Of course. It is a statement based on the best opinion that we received. I cannot take account of all the possibilities that may occur in Strasbourg. It is our best belief, and it has never been gainsaid.

On child curfew orders, the right hon. Gentleman is right to say that no local authority in England or Wales has applied for such a curfew, *[Interruption.]* but as my right hon. Friend the Minister of Transport is pointing out, the equivalent has been used in Scotland. When I went to Yardley in Birmingham before the election, I was asked for such orders to be used there.

This is not an exercise in central government, whereby we tell local authorities and local communities what to do. We are responding to their requests for such orders. It is up to local communities to use them. It is possible that, owing to the success of all our other reforms of the youth justice system, they may not be needed, but if they are needed, they are there.

Mr. Chris Mullin (Sunderland, South): I suggest to my right hon. Friend that if there is one lesson that we should learn from the 1980s, it is that simply pouring more resources into the police is not the right way to deal with crime. The real issue is how those resources are used. My constituents will welcome the new measures that he has announced today, and will watch with great interest to see how they work. What assurance can my right hon. Friend give the House that the resulting reduction in crime will be properly audited, and that figures will not be massaged by some local police forces in order to give a better impression than is warranted by reality?

Mr. Straw: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for the welcome that he gives. He is right to say that we must be as careful about the expenditure of resources on law and order as about that on other areas. I hope that we may be able to get beyond the rather low level of debate offered by the Opposition, whose only concern now appears to be inputs, rather than outputs—notwithstanding the fact that they sought to elevate the debate on every other public service to the level of outputs.

The document entitled "Reducing Offending" shows that there are many cost-effective ways of reducing crime. For example, the research evidence from the safer cities

programme initiated by the previous Administration shows that money invested in burglary prevention projects produces a rate of return five times higher than money invested in additional police officers. Chief constables know that, which is why, when they are offered a choice about how to spend their money, they often do not put it directly into expenditure on more officers, but invest it instead in IT systems and additional civilians.

My hon. Friend asked me to ensure that the reductions in crime are properly audited. I should tell him that a major exercise is being undertaken by the research and statistics directorate of the Home Office to lend greater credibility to the crime statistics across the country. Many police forces already ensure the highest levels of integrity in those data. Some do not, and we are taking them to task.

Mr. Bob Russell (Colchester): The thrust of the statement is to be welcomed, as is the fact that the Home Office and the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions are working together. Perhaps it would be better still if other Departments were brought in—the Department for Education and Employment and the Department of Health are two obvious examples.

Can the Home Secretary tell the House how much of the doubled crime that was experienced under the 18 years of Conservative Government will be eaten into by the measures that he announced today? When does he expect us to get back to the 1979 level that the Conservative Government inherited?

There is concern that the funding of the partnerships depends on local authorities and police forces working in partnership. Does the Home Secretary agree that local authorities are already underfunded, and that the measures that he has announced this year will lead to the police being underfunded? Although it is true that the number of police officers rose under the total period of the previous Conservative Government, it has fallen in the last few years. Does the Home Secretary agree that the number of police officers now is less than it was when he launched his "tough on crime, tough on the causes of crime" campaign?

I am interested in the crime reduction programme. Can the Home Secretary give an assurance that effective projects which started under the safer cities programme will continue and not be shelved?

Finally, is the Home Secretary seriously trying to tell people that CCTV cameras can replace the bobby on the beat?

Mr. Straw: To take the hon. Gentleman's last point first—which picks up a question asked by the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler)—no one is suggesting that CCTV should replace officers on the beat; rather, we are suggesting that it complements their work. CCTV has been successful in reducing crime in town centres and housing estates because it is literally like having a police officer on the beat with eyes in the back of his or her head and it provides an incontrovertible record of what has happened. CCTV is enormously important in providing good evidence for the police for prosecutions, in acting as a significant deterrent—and, as the hon. Gentleman will have seen if he has been in control rooms—in enabling the police to deploy their resources far better than ever before, for example where disturbances occur late on a Friday or a Saturday night. The two are therefore complementary.

A choice has to be made at the margin about how the additional resources should be spent, and we do not resile from that. Such choices must be made on the basis of the best evidence. The hon. Gentleman—like my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin)—picks up on the Conservative Government's record. It should be borne in mind that, when police numbers rose in the 1980s, we saw the largest rise in crime that Britain has ever experienced. We should consider whether there is the direct relationship between the number of police officers and the level of recorded crime that Opposition Members insinuate.

We accept that better co-ordination with other Departments is needed. The hon. Gentleman will know that health and education departments are partners at a local level in the crime and disorder partnerships, and we are working closely with the other Departments at a national level.

The hon. Gentleman asked me rashly to name the day when crime will be back to the 1979 level. I have not promised to do so, so I shall not take up his offer. However, I have been set the challenging target by the Prime Minister to bring vehicle crime down by 30 per cent. during the next five years, and I have been promised an imaginative career move if I fail.

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton): Is my right hon. Friend aware that it was futile niggling of the kind that we have just heard from the Tory Front-Bench spokesman that led to the Conservative vote in my constituency falling to 4,000 at the general election, and to the total absence of Conservative councillors from Manchester city council? That is why my constituents look to my right hon. Friend to deal with the serious problems of crime from which they have been suffering all these years.

We welcome what my right hon. Friend said about burglaries, CCTV and so on, but my constituents will be looking most to the effect of the anti-social behaviour orders. Day after day I receive letters and approaches from constituents about rowdy gangs and abominable neighbours, including named people who move from street to street, causing havoc as they go.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin) is right in saying that we will judge my right hon. Friend's announcements by the effects. Is he aware that we shall look to those effects to take away the terrible misery from which ordinary people suffer day after day as a result of such offences?

Mr. Straw: In place of a futile niggle, perhaps I may be allowed a sycophantic difference of emphasis from my right hon. Friend: surely the real reason for the fall in the Conservative vote in Gorton was the excellence of my right hon. Friend's reputation. Knowing my right hon. Friend as I do, I am surprised that there were even 4,000 Tory voters.

I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for his welcome of the anti-social behaviour orders which are built partly on the experience of the people in Manchester and Salford. I have visited many of the areas that have suffered in that way. I know that Manchester city council is one of the authorities that are preparing themselves for the introduction of the orders. It has one of the best records in the country of taking out injunctions against its

[Mr. Straw]

own tenants, but the orders are important because they will be available for use against people regardless of housing tenure.

My right hon. Friend is also correct that people are waiting for the beneficial effects of the orders. Their success will depend on the enthusiasm of the police and the local authorities in applying for orders and, in some cases, on the courage of local people in making applications to the police in the first place. It will also depend on how far the judiciary—magistrates and the Crown courts—are alert to the need to make those orders. I am pleased that we have had discussions with the Magistrates Association as well as with the higher judiciary to ensure that they understand the emphasis that the House has placed on the effectiveness of the orders.

Sir Brian Mawhinney (North-West Cambridgeshire): Talking of Pauline conversions, will the Home Secretary accept that I will not unduly delay the House by reminding it of the number of times in the first year of this Parliament that he pooh-poohed the effectiveness of closed circuit television because the Chancellor would not give him any money? Now that the Chancellor has given him some money, he is all in favour of closed circuit television. I hope that this is the real Home Secretary.

The right hon. Gentleman talked of outputs. Will he tell the House what reduction in burglary, car theft and anti-social behaviour he wants to achieve, and over what period, in order to feel that that use of the money has been justified, and that it has been money well spent in terms of law and order?

Mr. Straw: The right hon. Gentleman is entitled to tweak me on that point, but I did not pooh-pooh the value of closed circuit television at all. Indeed, I have been through all the times that I used to raise the matter with him when he sat on the Front Bench, and I raised it time after time. I could not come up with the money—here, he must take the admonition—because we did not have the money; we were following the Conservatives' spending plans and no money had been allocated. That is absolutely true and he knows it.

The right hon. Gentleman asked me what reduction in crime we anticipate. We are setting a national target for reduction in vehicle crime of 30 per cent., which is a substantial reduction and something on which we as a Government will be judged. In particular, I will be judged on that, especially if I fail, although I do not suppose that anybody will notice if I succeed. We have set a national target partly because the factors affecting vehicle crime often involve national policy—for example, the design of vehicles and co-operation in and co-ordination of policies by car park groups—to which vehicle crime is directly susceptible.

Burglary and robbery are much more susceptible to local strategies, which is why we have not set national targets. We are inviting local police and local communities to set those targets, and they are doing so, but we shall also judge the effectiveness of the individual programmes within the crime reduction programme—for example, that to reduce burglary—very carefully. If they are not working according to the target that has been set for the individual programme we will withdraw the money from similar programmes.

Mr. Robin Corbett (Birmingham, Erdington): May I tell my right hon. Friend that communities all over my constituency and the rest of Birmingham will welcome the anti-social behaviour orders, which come into force from 1 April, alongside other more positive measures to encourage young people to live more fulfilling lives? However, does he agree that the critical ingredient in combating crime in our communities is not the number of police officers or, indeed, the level of resources that they have, important as they are, but the active involvement of people within communities in retrieving the safety and security that they have had stolen from them?

Mr. Straw: My hon. Friend is entirely right about that. If we do not have the communities on side, no amount of police officers or CCTV will solve the problem of disorder. Moreover, and to emphasise the point, we know that, where there are high levels of incivility in an area, the chance of people suffering, for example, a violent crime is four times greater than in other similar areas. If we deal with disorder, we can cut a great deal of crime.

Mr. Andrew Lansley (South Cambridgeshire): The Home Secretary seemed to come perilously close to suggesting that there was an inverse relationship between the number of police officers and the incidence of crime. In fact, the opposite is the case: there is a positive relationship between the number of police officers and the ability not only to prevent but to solve crimes.

Does the Home Secretary accept that much of what he said will not translate readily into provision for rural areas, where the incidence of closed circuit television cameras and the like will inevitably be low? It is the number of police officers that is instrumental. In Cambridgeshire, for example, only by maintaining the increased levels that have been accompanied by a substantial reduction in crime over the past couple of years can we achieve a further reduction.

Mr. Straw: Many rural areas have done very well out of the Budget increases that I announced earlier. For instance, Cambridgeshire—part of which the hon. Gentleman represents—has been allowed a 4.5 per cent. spending increase in the next year. That is more than adequate to maintain the number of police officers and to secure investment, especially given the efficiency savings we expect the police to make not as a result of the number of officers, but in a number of other areas in which the service has not been efficient in the past.

I did not suggest for a second that there was an inverse relationship between the number of police officers and the rise of crime under the last Administration. What I drew to the attention of thinking Conservatives, of whom I believe the hon. Gentleman to be one—*[Interruption.]* He went to a good school, same as me. Anyway, what I drew to the attention of thinking Conservatives was the fact that there was not necessarily a direct relationship. We have learned something from the Conservatives about the efficiency of public services; they seem to have forgotten what they learned about the same thing when they were in office.

Dr. George Turner (North-West Norfolk): I welcome the general measures announced by my right hon. Friend,

but may I probe him beyond the distribution of cash? As he will know, my constituency, consisting of hundreds of square miles, is one of the most rural; but it has been at the forefront in using closed circuit television cameras in urban areas; which has helped the police to be more effective elsewhere. Does my right hon. Friend accept that his financial measures must address the deprivation in some of those urban areas? Does he also accept that, although crime may appear to be lowish in such counties as Norfolk, peaks of crime are hidden in the general average, which require every bit as much attention as crime in urban areas?

Mr. Straw: I accept what my hon. Friend says, not least because I visited his constituency about 18 months ago. On a wet Friday evening in King's Lynn, 700 people turned up to hear me speak about law and order, which suggests either that they were very worried about the situation or that there was nothing else to do in King's Lynn. I trust that it was the first, not the second.

As I saw during that visit, there are indeed serious peaks of crime in some areas, which are disguised by the overall figures. I am pleased to say, however, that next year Norfolk will have a 5.5 per cent. increase in resources. That reflects our view of the importance of giving proper resources to semi-rural counties such as Norfolk.

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): I welcome the use of anti-social behaviour orders in the criminal justice system. Such orders, however, are not akin to civil injunctions, as the Home Secretary said; they are part of the criminal justice system. Is the right hon. Gentleman content that it is constitutionally appropriate for the police or applicant local authorities to play an active part in the sentencing process? Only they may consent to a reduction in the two-year period of an anti-social behaviour order, as the right hon. Gentleman will see if he looks at his own Act. Does he think it appropriate for the police and applicants to be party to sentencing? It would surely be more appropriate for that to be entirely in the gift of the courts.

On a previous occasion, the Home Secretary was kind enough to admit that the Conservative Government had done great things with regard to the introduction of closed circuit television. Will he, as a Labour politician, join me, as a Conservative politician, in kicking the back end of Oadby and Wigston Liberal Democrat borough council, and in inviting it to apply to his Government—it refused to apply to mine—for CCTV funding for the hard-pressed people of the borough?

Mr. Straw: I am always happy to take part with Conservatives in the re-education of the Liberal Democrats—on CCTV and many other subjects. Of course, one of the reasons why all of us—I hope—are sensitive to the issue of anti-social behaviour and to problems of law and order is because of the constituency link. I make that point just in case anyone is thinking otherwise.

I acknowledge and commend the previous Government's work, for example, on safer cities. There is little point in calling into question the record of a previous Administration where we support it. I do not intend to do that.

I do not accept what the hon. and learned Gentleman says about the structure of the anti-social behaviour orders. The only point where, as it were, the applicant—the local authority or police—could play a part in what he describes as the sentencing process under the orders, is where there is an application to the court to lift the order within the two-year minimum period, but the order itself is not a sentence of the court. A sentence of the court arises only if there is a breach of the order. That is an arrestable offence. A breach of an order will be dealt with in the normal way for either-way offences. The police and local authorities will play no direct part in the sentence that either the magistrates or the Crown court judge hands down.

Mr. David Taylor (North-West Leicestershire): May I in the warmest terms congratulate the Home Secretary on his statement on crime reduction? I do so as a member of the Magistrates Association, as former chair of the North-West Leicestershire Safer Communities Forum, a forerunner of the statutory partnerships, and as chair of the Ashby-de-la-Zouch CCTV scheme, which installed cameras in that town.

It is true that the existence of cameras can have a positive effect. Does my right hon. Friend nevertheless accept that there is a need to look at the dispersal of crime that can arise with CCTV, and to tackle peripheral issues such as improving street lighting in car parks, so that the quality of the image that is produced by the camera is satisfactory? Does he accept that local authorities that are cash strapped—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael J. Martin): Order. That is far too long. Mr. Straw.

Mr. Straw: I accept what my hon. Friend says. Let me make it clear that not all the money need be spent directly on CCTV. As my hon. Friend says, if CCTV is to be effective, other things have to be done as well—for example, improvements in street lighting and action to ensure that crime is not displaced. One of the good things about the latest round of cash for CCTV is that it will be available, for example, on housing estates to which some acquisitive crime may have been displaced by CCTV in town centres.

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): Will the Home Secretary ensure that rural areas get their fair share of any money that is available? The money should go not just to areas such as Longridge in my constituency, to finance CCTV and other schemes, but to rural parts—of the right hon. Gentleman's constituency; of Lancaster, Burnley and Pendle; and all round our area. Rural areas need their fair share of the money as well.

I know that the Home Secretary has a reputation for being a hard Home Secretary and I believe him to be so.

Mr. Straw: What?

Mr. Evans: It is a compliment. Having that sort of reputation, the Home Secretary may not be popular with many Labour Members, but may I encourage him not only have a reputation for being hard, but to be hard where he has not been so far? Boot camps have proved very successful. Will he look again at that idea? A rigorous

[Mr. Evans]

and firm regime is the only language that some thugs can understand. Perhaps the right hon. Gentleman will consider establishing a boot camp in the north-west.

Mr. Straw: I did not hear the first consonant when the hon. Gentleman said "hard", and various alternative expressions were running through my mind. I accept, of course, what he said about the importance of rural areas being covered by the provisions: it is a mistake to believe that only urban areas have high crime levels. Although crime is disturbing wherever it occurs, a sudden upsurge of serious disorder or acquisitive crime in a peaceful rural area can be very disturbing. I shall certainly give an undertaking to ensure that the money is used across the country. Which areas benefit from it will depend on the quality of bids. I hope that Ribble Valley district council—to name one council—will be able to make a high-quality bid.

I feel that the debate on the precise form of detention, punishment and treatment of young offenders is not served simply by attaching to it the label "boot camp". None of the so-called boot camps in the United Kingdom, whether at Thorn Cross or at Colchester, bears any relationship to the boot camps that I have seen in the United States, which are of a totally different order.

We need tough and effective punishments, and a range of punishments. We have kept going the so-called boot camp at Thorn Cross because it has turned out to be successful. I closed the facility at Colchester only because of its cost, not because of a judgment about its effectiveness.

Mr. Tony M[illegible]er (Hemel Hempstead): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on the substantial resources that he has been able to extract from the Chancellor to achieve the laudable aims that he has described. I should like also to associate myself with the remarks made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) in commending the general drift of the Home Secretary's strategy. However, may I tell my right hon. Friend that it is difficult to give the document unqualified support when it has been impossible to read the detailed guidance on anti-social behaviour orders? Although I have seen in his hand a copy of the document—it looks very nice—copies are not in the Vote Office as he said they were. When my right hon. Friend and I last had a little discussion on these issues—when a world cup football match was on—we were almost the only two hon. Members in the Chamber. On that occasion, too, the guidelines were not available.

My query concerns the possibility of people maliciously accusing other people of behaving anti-socially, and of insufficient resources or detection methods being available to ensure that such malicious claims are rooted out. I have had several such cases in my own constituency. I should be grateful if the guidelines can be made readily available, so that we may assess whether those points have been dealt with.

Mr. Straw: If—as I now appreciate—the document is not available in the Vote Office, I can only apologise to my hon. Friend and to the House. I shall take action to find out why it is not available.

There is a very powerful filter in the body of the Act itself to ensure that malicious claims are not made. It is not possible for any individual who feels that he or she has suffered serious anti-social behaviour directly to make an application for an anti-social behaviour order. An application would have to be made by the chief officer of police in the area or the chief executive of the local authority—and I am sure that they will take very careful action to filter out malicious cases. If they fail to do so in any individual isolated case, we shall expect—I believe that it will happen—the courts to filter out such claims as are made.

Mr. Martin Linton (Battersea): Will my right hon. Friend take it from me that many people have noticed the success of his policies and that, certainly in Battersea, police and many of the community partners in crime reduction strategies will greatly welcome today's announcement? The Opposition's obsession with what they call a declining police service is unfounded, and no one but Opposition Front Benchers would call a 0.5 per cent. fluctuation in police numbers a service decline. Yesterday, we even had the spectacle of the hon. Member for Bromsgrove (Miss Kirkbride) describing as a decline in police numbers what turned out to be a reduction of four police officers that was more than offset by an increase in seven police staff.

Not only are the Conservatives' claims not true: they are not relevant. There is no evidence of a direct relationship between the incidence of crime and police numbers. As the document "Reducing Offending", to which my right hon. Friend referred, says, what really affects crime statistics is effective policing, targeted on criminals and victims.

Mr. Straw: My hon. Friend is right. Reports by the Audit Commission and Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary show that there is no direct relationship between the gross number of police officers and the number of officers available for operational duties. One of the complaints of Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary, who are all experienced former senior professional police officers, is that while the overall number of officers has risen in recent years, the number available for operational duties has stayed static or declined. That has to change. That will be achieved through better management, better deployment, often civilianisation, the use of information technology and getting a grip—as the previous Administration failed to do—on the fact that early retirements and excessively high levels of sickness make a difference to whether the police are effective on the ground.

Millennium Compliance

5.6 pm

The President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mrs. Margaret Beckett): I am announcing today the results of the fifth quarterly review of progress in tackling the millennium bug for Government Departments, agencies and key parts of the wider public sector. I have arranged for all completed questionnaires to be placed in the Libraries of the House and published on the internet. To allow people to see at a glance how well individual Departments and agencies are doing, I shall also be publishing tables illustrating their performance against a number of key criteria.

Good progress continues to be made by central Government as a whole. The majority of bodies covered by the exercise are near to completing their correction programmes. Almost half the Departments and agencies have completed their work on business-critical information technology systems, which means that the problems have been fixed, the fix has been tested and the system is back in operation. Progress on business-critical embedded and telecommunications systems is equally good. On that basis, we expect that most Departments will have finished work on their business-critical systems by July. Ten bodies—although admittedly smaller ones—report that have already completed all their correction work on critical and non-critical systems. I am also pleased by the continued progress of the Department of Social Security, the Employment Service, the Department of Health and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport.

Costs remain relatively stable. The total estimate for central Government Departments and agencies stands at just over £420 million—a 2.5 per cent. increase on the previous quarter.

I am pleased to report that the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency, the Inland Revenue and the Medicines Control Agency, which I named in my previous statement, have made significant improvements over the past quarter.

Slippage continues to be apparent in other cases, although most are minor adjustments of a month or two in the first half of this year. However, I have a number of specific concerns about departmental programmes, including that of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, although I acknowledge the unique difficulties that it faces in operating around the world. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary assures me that the serious resources that the FCO is devoting to its year 2000 programme and relevant system upgrades will ensure that it is year 2000 compliant worldwide in time. I have written to colleagues to express those concerns and will continue to monitor progress closely.

The armed forces continue to make good progress in dealing with the bug. The Ministry of Defence expects that the Royal Navy, Army and Royal Air Force front-line units will be compliant by late summer. However, there remains no room for slippage in the large and complex defence programme. I am providing more detailed information on the Ministry of Defence's programme in a separate section of the tables that I am publishing today.

I am pleased to report that work is also now well under way on business continuity planning. Departments are looking at the impact of possible bug-related failures—in their systems and in key organisations in their supply chain—on their ability to continue to deliver key services. Most Departments and agencies have initial business continuity plans in place. Those that do not are required to produce one as a matter of urgency. Those initial plans will be developed and tested over the year. Details of progress in developing initial plans are available in the published returns.

All but five Departments and agencies have had some form of additional assessment of their programmes, either by internal auditors or by external experts. Of the remainder, all have plans in place for such assessments.

In the wider public sector, the returns for British Nuclear Fuels, the BBC, National Air Traffic Services, London Transport, the Bank of England, the Post Office and the General Consumer Council for Northern Ireland show that all are continuing to make good progress. In my last statement, I expressed concern about the Environment Agency's rate of progress in tackling the bug in its business-critical embedded systems. I am pleased to report that this work is now 90 per cent. complete, and is on course to be finished by the end of June.

Progress across the police service is mainly satisfactory, although a few forces have completion dates for business-critical systems in the second half of 1999. However, progress on business continuity planning is disappointing. Twenty-seven of the 46 forces in England and Wales do not yet have an initial business continuity plan in place.

The Association of Chief Police Officers' millennium co-ordination committee is monitoring progress closely, and its chairman has written to chief constables recently to raise issues of concern. Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary is continuing to review individual forces' year 2000 arrangements and identify areas for improvement. A similar process is taking place in Scotland.

The returns for the fire service in England and Wales show an improvement over the previous quarter. All brigades expect to complete work by the end of the year, although a few do not expect to complete work until the final quarter of 1999, allowing little room for slippage. Her Majesty's fire service inspectorate will continue to monitor progress closely and offer brigades advice. Brigades in Scotland are moving forward on a similar time scale.

The results of the most recent NHS quarterly review in England were announced on 16 February. The number of organisations reporting good or satisfactory progress was slightly down on the previous quarter, at 91 per cent. However, 98 per cent. of NHS trusts and heath authorities met the NHS executive's deadline of 31 December 1998 for having identified and resourced effective solutions for all year 2000 problems that could pose a threat to patient safety. The estimated cost of remedial year 2000 work remains at about £320 million. The NHS in Scotland and Wales is also making satisfactory progress.

The Audit Commission's latest analysis of progress across local government in England and Wales shows that the situation as a whole is slowly improving, but that much more work remains to be done. The new teams in Government offices, announced by the Prime Minister on 25 January, are working with the Audit Commission and the Local Government Association to help authorities, particularly those that are furthest behind, to prioritise their programmes and to access advice and good practice.

[Mrs. Margaret Beckett]

The picture in Scotland is similarly mixed, and I am pleased that the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and the Accounts Commission for Scotland are progressing work with Scottish local authorities.

Over the last quarter, we have taken steps to put in place a rigorous and independent assessment programme for those elements of the public sector that are key elements of our national infrastructure. These assessments will include the NHS, local government, emergency services, the criminal justice system and the payment of benefits and will reinforce our existing monitoring arrangements. This will give us one of the most—if not the most—objective and comprehensive monitoring regimes in the world. I shall report on progress in my next quarterly statement. From June, I shall be backing that up with more regular reports to Parliament.

With less than 300 days to go until the century date change, it is important that Departments and agencies make the fullest and best use of the remaining time available. Looking at the overall picture, the vast majority are well placed to finish work on business-critical systems in good time. However, in a few areas, a concerted effort is required to ensure that the remaining work is finished to time. We will be also placing an ever-increasing emphasis on business continuity planning as we move through the rest of the year.

The Government will continue to lead by example, by making information on our progress in beating the bug regularly available to the House, and to the public.

Mr. Christopher Chope (Christchurch): I am grateful to the President of the Council for her statement on the findings of the Government's fifth quarterly review of progress—or should I say slippage?—in tackling the millennium bug. Will she confirm that it describes the situation as it is today and is not an historical statement referring to forms filled in by Departments many weeks ago?

Today's announcement shows that the Government are breathtakingly complacent in the face of their own failure. While they continue to fail to meet their own previously published deadlines, they have the gall to preach to the private sector on the subject. They inherited a golden legacy of action and preparation from the Conservatives. My hon. Friend the Member for Esher and Walton (Mr. Taylor) had set a deadline for all Departments to be millennium compliant by the end of December 1998.

The previous report showed that the United Kingdom had slipped from first to eighth position under the Labour Government. Can the President of the Council confirm that the United Kingdom is once again leading the field in year 2000 preparedness, as it was in May 1997?

The right hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark), when Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, said:

"I am now able to confirm that all Departments and agencies have work in hand and scheduled for completion in time—many by December 1998, a majority by March 1999 and a small number later in 1999."—[*Official Report*, 27 November 1997; Vol. 301, c. 1104.]

Today, in March 1999, we learn that fewer than half the Departments have even completed their work on business-critical systems—what a disappointing outcome—and that only 10 Departments met the Conservative deadline of completing all millennium compliance work by December 1998.

The President of the Council promised three months ago that all Departments and agencies would have business continuity and contingency plans in place by the end of January. Today, she has told us only that most Departments have them in place. What is the reason for the failure to meet that deadline? Will she ensure that the plans, once produced, are made available for public scrutiny and placed in the Library?

With the millennium fewer than 300 days away, has the time not come for more targeted reports? I welcome the announcement that there will be more frequent reports. Will the President of the Council expand on the nature of those reports, especially in the light of her statement, which gives a worrying picture of the state of preparedness in the police and fire services and in part of the health service?

Will the Government offer a millennium guarantee, that everything in the public sector will work properly on 1 January 2000? If things go wrong in the public sector, who is to be held to account? Will the President of the Council publish a list of Ministers and officials who will be in line for the plaudits or criticisms arising from their Y2K preparedness?

Who is to be held accountable in local government? Will the President of the Council arrange for all critical systems to have live testing before the millennium, as was suggested by several organisations, including the Federation of Small Businesses? Will she advise private business and individuals how much they should spend on their contingency plans? It is one thing to draw up a plan, but another to decide, on a risk assessment, how much should be invested in it.

In April 1998, the Prime Minister said:

"By treating this as an emergency we can make Britain one of the world's best prepared countries."

Can we be satisfied that the Government are really treating this as an emergency, when the statement has been delayed by a fortnight and relegated to third priority in today's business? I assure the House that Her Majesty's Opposition will continue to hold the Government to account and responsible for Y2K failure, if and when it comes.

Mrs. Beckett: Oh, dear. I had hoped that there was a vague chance of an intelligent response from the Conservative Front Bench, but that was clearly a mistake.

I will begin where the hon. Gentleman ended. He asked who should be held to account if anything goes wrong, and I will tell him. I am not in the business of dishing out blame, and I pay tribute to the work done by the hon. Member for Esher and Walton (Mr. Taylor). He did a great deal—although nothing like enough, because his Government colleagues showed no interest in his work. We picked up not a golden legacy, but a neglected baton and trebled, at least, the work that was being done. If anybody will be held to account, it will be those who were in government in 1994, 1995 and 1996, when the issues should first have been dealt with.

With the honourable exception of the hon. Member for Esher and Walton, nobody in the Conservative party wanted to know. If we are going to dish out blame, it belongs to the Conservative Government. We did not come to power until May 1997, and anybody who knows anything about the subject knows that that was very late in the day to tackle the issues.

Having listened to the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mr. Chope), I can conclude only that he knows nothing about the subject. I am surprised, because he has asked some moderately intelligent questions about it in his time, but he clearly has not listened to any of the answers. He made the throwaway remark that Britain had slipped from first to eighth in the international league tables, but, if he knew anything about the subject and had read any of the answers that he had received from us or anyone else, he would know that those league tables are worthless. If a country that knows little or cares nothing about the issue responds by saying that it is doing well—because it does not recognise the problem—it soars up the league table. Everybody knows that the league tables are worthless.

I share the regret of the hon. Member for Christchurch that not all Departments have, as instructed, business continuity plans in place. Most have, and those that have not are being actively pursued. As for advice for the private sector, I thought that the Conservatives were against the nanny state. It is not for me to tell those in the private sector what judgment they should make about their preparedness or what they should spend. It is for us to urge them to take the necessary action, and that we are doing.

We have considered the suggestions that have been made for live testing, including those from someone on the Conservative Benches whom I respect, the hon. Member for Bournemouth, East (Mr. Atkinson). However, such testing would consume enormous amounts of time and resources and would be a diversion from work on tackling the issues. For that reason, it has not been pursued by the Government or by most other organisations that have studied the matter.

I have told the hon. Member for Christchurch before that this statement has not been deferred for two weeks. The previous statement was a week early in the cycle. Last week, the statement would have coincided with the Budget and we thought, on balance, that the House would probably prefer to give the Budget a higher priority.

The hon. Gentleman asked whether we could give a millennium guarantee that nothing will go wrong. Only someone who was not paying attention or does not care tuppence about the importance of understanding the issue would even ask such a silly question, let alone expect an answer to it.

Mr. Brian White (Milton Keynes, North-East): As someone who has already suffered from the millennium bug when using a Microsoft product, I welcome my right hon. Friend's statement. Many local authorities have made progress, but some have not. Has my right hon. Friend considered secondments from those authorities that have made progress or using Government officers to help local authorities to make more progress? I was very concerned by my right hon. Friend's comments about the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. In particular, many third-world countries will suffer if supply chains—many of which are just in time now—break down. What is being done to ensure that the third world does not suffer because of the millennium bug? The Soviet fleet contains computers that are non-compliant and I would be worried if the Ministry of Defence were not talking to its Russian counterparts about the issue.

My right hon. Friend said that she would introduce more frequent reports from June. Given that, on 1 April, in 15 days' time, the year 2000 financial year will start, will she start those more frequent reports from the cycle onwards?

Mrs. Beckett: I share my hon. Friend's concern, as we all do, that there has not been more progress in local government, and we are working closely with the Audit Commission, which is considering that matter. We are considering issues such as secondments from Government offices, and we are strongly encouraging those in local government who lag behind to learn from the best practice of the leaders in the field. The Audit Commission has said that, in or around June, it will publish the particulars of authorities that are not responding well enough to encouragement.

My hon. Friend asked about the third world. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office has taken a number of steps, along with the British Council, to conduct seminars, provide advice and do what can be done directly by British diplomats. We have given resources to the World bank project and to the Commonwealth to assist in encouraging compliance and in helping to fund the right kind of programmes in third-world countries.

My hon. Friend also asked about Russia. The Ministry of Defence has formed a co-operation committee with other member states, including NATO states. Advice, assistance and support are being given. We are being proactive with the Russians. We have offered to send a delegation to Moscow to discuss the issues. We support moves by NATO to engage Russia through the Permanent Joint Council mechanism and we are working supportively with the United States and others to offer advice.

Sir Nicholas Lyell (North-East Bedfordshire): The Health and Safety Executive in Bedfordshire has reasonably pointed out that private businesses should be careful to check on the effects of the millennium bug—particularly embedded effects—that may have an impact on health and safety. However, an article in *The Business* magazine, which covered that aspect, gave little indication that guidance was being offered on what to look for and how to do so. Can the right hon. Lady satisfy us that the HSE and similar agencies will give constructive advice as well as warnings?

Mrs. Beckett: Certainly, they are seeking to do so. If the right hon. and learned Gentleman has concerns, Action 2000, among other organisations, would be happy to hear from him and to do all it could to supply information. One reason why I was fairly hard on his Front-Bench colleague, the hon. Member for Christchurch, was that, as time has gone by, people have discovered more complications. When work began on compliance, the importance of problems that might arise from embedded systems was not as greatly appreciated as it is today. As work unfolds, ever more aspects emerge. The problem is complex, but Action 2000 and other organisations would be happy to assist the right hon. and learned Gentleman.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): Can the President of the Council give us an idea of the likely total cost of the problem? She mentioned £420 million for Government

[Mr. Malcolm Bruce]

Departments and £320 million for the health service. However, those are compliance costs only, and they do not include the cost for local government or the costs of failure. Have the Government identified a range of possible outturns? We have already reached £1 billion, and the total cost will probably be billions of pounds.

Will the right hon. Lady say something about air traffic control? There are already enough difficulties with computers in that area before we have even reached 2000. There is genuine concern among the travelling public, not only about how airlines will handle the millennium, but about how the air traffic control system will function. Have the Government taken a view on whether they will need to act to control flying at the year change?

Some 27 of the 46 police forces in England and Wales have no initial business continuity plan; does the right hon. Lady agree that that is alarming? The police forces will be in the front line, facing the consequences of failure. How can they know what those consequences will cost, or how they will handle them? What about reports that the Government have instructed cancellation of all police leave, booked the armed forces and put the Territorial Army on standby? Is that true, or is it just press rumour?

Do the Government have any idea of the costs and practical implications of external failures that may impact on the public sector, such as failures in the private sector, among the utilities or in the telecommunications systems?

Finally, was the Chancellor of the Exchequer wise to announce a cut in the standard rate of income tax of one penny when there is so much uncertainty about the possible impact of failures resulting from the millennium bug and so much uncertainty about the eventual cost to the public sector, let alone the private sector?

Mrs. Beckett: The hon. Gentleman asked several questions, including some about financial consequences, on which I had best say that I shall write to him. However, let me warn him at the outset that I am not sure how much value there will be in any attempt to attach a figure, especially to the potential consequences of failure. I shall certainly look at the range of assessments available and write to him with such information as we can make available. He will be the first to appreciate that it is quite difficult to provide such information, especially when one considers the impact across the private sector. In addition, we are talking about programmes that, in the case of those that have been more forward looking, began as long ago as 1994 or earlier, so there is a wide range of potential effects.

The hon. Gentleman asked about aviation and air transport millennium compliance, which international and domestic aviation authorities are keeping under close review. Foremost in their minds is, and will remain, the safety of the public. Various audits and surveys are being undertaken, although I believe that none has yet been completed and many have to take commercial confidentiality into consideration. However, the assessments are being undertaken and, for our part, we shall make available such information as we can give.

The hon. Gentleman also asked about the police services. I share his concern, as does the inspectorate of constabulary, that the police have not made more progress on this matter. The Government have not given instructions on the subject of leave—I do not believe that we are in a position to give instructions to chief constables on such operational matters—but I understand that many forces have cancelled millennium leave, for precisely the reasons that the hon. Gentleman describes. The public celebration is expected to be extremely large and of unusually long duration, and both factors have an impact on preparedness.

No action has been taken to make extra plans, such as to have Territorial Army units on standby. There are normal preparations that have been made for potential emergencies and civil contingencies, and the length and the scale of the holiday are, and have been for some time, factored into those plans. It is not anticipated that other, wildly exceptional plans need to be made, but that is kept continually under review.

Barbara Follett (Stevenage): I thank my right hon. Friend for that report. I am pleased by the progress made in the Department of Social Security, which will go a long way towards alleviating the fears of pensioners, including the 13,000 pensioners in my constituency who doubt that they will receive any cheques in January 2000. Will my right hon. Friend do all that she can to keep that not particularly computer-literate section of our society informed?

Mrs. Beckett: Yes, I shall. Like my hon. Friend, I recognise the great concern felt by many in society that that sort of basic service should be available. She will be pleased to learn that 99 per cent. of correction work on DSS systems is complete and that all those matters are subject to review and independent assessment. As we draw nearer the relevant date, we are all anxious to ensure that the normal services on which people rely and on which they expect to be able to rely will be available to them, without any material disruption.

Mr. Derek Wyatt (Sittingbourne and Sheppey): I hope that my right hon. Friend has checked with the breweries that they will be all right on new year's eve.

On a more serious note, when we entered office on 1 May 1997, we found not a single paper on Microsoft's millennium compliance; I am not sure what sort of legacy that was. Sixty of Microsoft's leading products were not millennium compliant, but there was nothing to tell us that on 1 May 1997. I welcome the news on the tables, as that was a matter that I raised before; I shall look at them shortly.

However, to return to something that my right hon. Friend says that she will not do, may I offer her some information? The Wall street stock exchange has now done two practice days on Saturday mornings, and the results have been rather worrying. The stock exchange is concerned—its last practice day was three weeks ago—and I urge my right hon. Friend to revisit the idea of having even one Department test 10 per cent. of the system and wind it forward on a Saturday, Sunday or a bank holiday. Many people are also concerned about the 9 September 1999 date.

Mrs. Beckett: My hon. Friend is entirely right about the lack of preparedness that we discovered on coming to office. The first proper survey across Government was

undertaken by my right hon. Friend the Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark), who was then Minister for the Cabinet Office, immediately after the general election.

I am afraid that I cannot undertake to supervise the breweries—many other people will be doing that, so I feel confident that I will not need to give them my personal attention. My hon. Friend asked about compliance testing, and I do not rule that out. However, I was asked specifically by the hon. Member for Christchurch—the matter has been raised from time to time—whether we should have a national test day on which everyone should test everything simultaneously. I see from my hon. Friend's reaction that he shares the general advice that we have been given that such an exercise would divert valuable resources and would be unlikely to assist us.

I am slightly surprised to learn that Wall street has experienced such difficulties. In most countries—including the United Kingdom—the financial sectors came into contact with the problem at the earliest possible opportunity because of roll-over dates, credit cards and other things that are forward dated. As a consequence, those sectors have probably done the most work in this area from the earliest time. The United Kingdom financial sector has completed a great deal of testing, supervision and other work, but we continue to review its readiness.

Mr. Ian Bruce (South Dorset): The right hon. Lady is extremely good at castigating. However, she is on rocky ground in so doing—particularly in view of the fact that, on gaining office, the Government moved from TaskForce 2000 to Action 2000 and did nothing for six months. The responsibility for millennium compliance shifted from the Cabinet Office to the Department of Trade and Industry and then to the Leader of the House—that is three Departments of State in almost as many months.

Has the right hon. Lady read the recommendations made by Eurim, the European Informatics Market group, which is an all-party group of the House? If she has not, perhaps she will refer to the next edition of *The House Magazine*, which is to be published on Monday. It will contain an article by me and others—perhaps even the right hon. Lady will contribute—about those recommendations. The Government must examine standards and ensure that the solutions offered on the market have been approved by someone—the Government or perhaps a body sanctioned by them could perform that role—so that people will know what they can do to assist.

Will the Leader of the House also inform the House whether the money that the Government have put aside for Departments will be sufficient? At the outset, the Government estimated how much millennium compliance would cost—they decided on just under £1 billion—and the Departments did not receive a penny extra for their computer budgets. Departments have had to cope with the problem using their existing budgets, but surely extra resources will ultimately be necessary.

Mrs. Beckett: I must say to the hon. Gentleman—who follows these matters closely—that I think he is being both unwise and unfair. I did not set out to castigate: the hon. Member for Christchurch made a very silly attempt to pretend that anything that goes wrong will be the Government's fault. That is nonsense.

Mr. Chope: It is called responsibility.

Mrs. Beckett: That is stupid, and the hon. Gentleman knows it—at least, I think he does.

I am perfectly prepared to recognise that the previous Government did some work—but, I fear, not nearly enough, given that we did not come to power until May 1997. I am perfectly happy to deal with this issue on a non-partisan basis. Few people recognise the scale and the nature of the problems and the extent of the work that will be required to tackle them from the outset. I do not blame the previous Government for the fact that we inherited a very difficult situation. However, I certainly will not accept blame on behalf of this Government because of the Conservatives' neglect at the end of the 1990s. Opposition Members should stop being unwise. Rather than making silly partisan points, they should concentrate on what we can do together to ensure that there are no problems. Our constituents will face difficulties if there are problems.

The hon. Gentleman also made a point that has been repeatedly made and corrected. It is rubbish to say that nothing was done for six months. We did not renew the contract of TaskForce 2000—if I remember correctly, the previous Government gave it about £750,000—but we set up a new body to proceed with the campaign of awareness on which TaskForce 2000 had been set to work. We gave the body a budget of more than £18 million at the outset, and that has been increased. The notion that we fell down on the work plainly does not remotely stand up to the evidence.

I have not seen the recommendation to which the hon. Gentleman referred, and I am certainly happy to consider it. He is right to say that we are all anxious about the standard of work being done, and I shall consider the report carefully. Although it is not for the Government to second-guess standards in such matters, we should certainly ensure that good-quality advice is available. We have done that, and we are doing everything possible to publicise that information, and will continue to do so.

I urge Conservative Members to work with the Government on a problem that is, strictly speaking, nobody's fault, and certainly not the fault of any political party. I am happy to work on that basis, and I hope that they are too.

Mr. Derek Twigg (Halton): Is my right hon. Friend aware of the concern about millennium compliance of people on benefits in my constituency? She made a point about the Employment Service. Will she confirm that its business-critical systems are finished? Does she agree that they are important as a delivery agent for benefits?

The Opposition tried to put the blame on the Government, when they should be taking the blame. In the Public Accounts Committee on Monday, we heard a report from the Comptroller and Auditor General, who said that a system that was introduced under the previous Government as late as April 1997 was not millennium compliant. Is that not an indictment of the total hypocrisy that we have heard from Conservative Members today?

Mrs. Beckett: My hon. Friend is right: the Conservative party's record does not bear examination of

[Mrs. Beckett]

the kind that Conservative Members seek. I do not have at my fingertips the figures for the work of the Employment Service, but it has made considerable progress, as has the Department of Social Security. I should be happy to write to my hon. Friend, or he will find in the Library the tables and more details than I can give here today.

Mr. William Thompson (West Tyrone): When the right hon. Lady made her statement, no mention was made of Northern Ireland, particularly when referring to the police service, the fire service, the national health service and local government in England, Wales and Scotland. As the millennium bug is as likely to strike Northern Ireland as the rest of the United Kingdom, will the right hon. Lady tell us the position on those important services in Northern Ireland?

Mrs. Beckett: I singled out for mention those areas that gave us concern and those areas that have done especially well. The great mass of Departments that come between those two groups are those where work is being done, and we are assured—and the evidence suggests—that they will be compliant within the time scale set by the Government.

In my previous statement, I singled out as areas of concern the Department of Health and Social Services and the Department of Finance and Personnel in Northern Ireland. Both had problems with their embedded chip programmes, and the Department of Finance and Personnel also had a late completion date for its critical IT systems. Both now tell us that they expect to complete their correction work on business-critical embedded systems in June, and the completion date for the other critical IT systems has also been brought forward to June.

Work is being undertaken and monitored, and we have not had flagged up as an area of anxiety the particular services that cause the hon. Gentleman concern.

Dr. George Turner (North-West Norfolk): The House heard reference to league tables. Does my right hon. Friend accept that the only league tables on this issue that will have any validity are those that will be published in the new millennium, revealing what problems we encounter? Does she further accept that there will be problems because there is not one millennium bug, but a set of problems, and it would be a waste of resources if there were no problems? We must ensure that certain consequences do not occur. We must make sure that there is no loss of human life or breakdown in society's main functions. It is therefore very important that those who have responsibility for acting in time realise now that they will be held to account when the league tables are published in the new millennium. Although there will be problems, we want to be certain that they are minor and unimportant.

Mrs. Beckett: My hon. Friend is entirely right. Indeed, I notice that someone from the Institute of Grocery Distribution said that of course there would be problems, but

"You have to separate it out between the millennium party effect and the bug effect."

That was a very pertinent comment.

My hon. Friend is absolutely right: from the outset, the top priority not just of the Government but of all those who deal with public services has been public safety and avoidance of material disruption, including, of course, issues such as loss of life. He is also right in saying that, in the ordinary course of events, particularly during the winter, we all expect various small-scale difficulties and breakdowns. It is important that we all do our utmost to ensure that such difficulties are no worse over this Christmas and new year than they have been over any other.

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): My contention is that the right hon. Lady is not doing enough in the private sector, especially to combat the lack of transport insurance for travel on 1 January 2000. She is aware that the private sector is failing to insure air and rail travel on that day. I urge her not to absolve the Government of all responsibility, but to act, not just so that passengers can travel but so that facilities to travel by air and rail are provided.

Mrs. Beckett: I am not in the business of trying to walk on water; I cannot say that, of course, there will be facilities for air and rail travel. I certainly assure the hon. Lady that we, together with all relevant regulators, companies and bodies, are doing everything that we can to ensure that whatever facilities are made available are safe.

I know that the hon. Lady has concerns about insurers; she and I have corresponded about that matter. There is a mixed picture. Insurers are prepared to cover eventualities that people cannot foresee, but some policies in some companies have exclusions. I know that my civil servants will curse me for saying this, but I would be very happy if the hon. Lady encouraged those who have contacted her to contact us. It slightly surprises me that she has raised the issues with me as a matter of major concern to those in the travel industry, but those concerned have not raised them with us or, indeed, with Action 2000. If there are widespread concerns, we would obviously be very happy to hear about them and do anything that we could to attempt to address them.

Mr. Andrew Lansley (South Cambridgeshire): Has the right hon. Lady received a report from her hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Privy Council Office, who visited Addenbrooke's hospital in my constituency today, where I hope he will have found a model of activity in respect of millennium compliance? I think that he visited the Rosie maternity hospital as well—where, for example, there are contingent risks of unanticipated demand associated with the millennium. Perhaps such risks should be anticipated. In the next few weeks, the hospital will have had to establish the staffing, pay and associated costs that will be involved. It would take the view that, rather than a Dutch auction between public services on available staff compensation, some Government guidance would be useful.

Mrs. Beckett: I understand that my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary was impressed by the work undertaken at Addenbrooke's hospital—as always, since the hospital has a very high reputation—although, if I heard him correctly, I also understand that much of it was not undertaken or did not begin until two or three years ago. With the benefit of hindsight, one might have hoped

that the hospital had begun earlier, although that applies in very many quarters. The assessment of likely costs and service needs and how they can be met, which the hon. Gentleman seeks, is being made. We are of course considering how these issues relate to the private sector.

I say to the hon. Gentleman—with respect, this is not an attacking point—that Conservative Members are often keen for the Government not to interfere when they say that it is, strictly speaking, not the Government's business. Although I am always keen to encourage development organisations to make the right preparations, to take account of the right factors and to obtain information to enable them to make judgments about the cover that they will need, the arrangements that they should make and what costs they should anticipate covering, I am reluctant to get involved in too much second-guessing of what is required in a particular locality. The Government do keep these matters under review and, if guidance is sought, we endeavour to give what guidance we can.

European Commission

5.50 pm

Mr. William Cash (Stone): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. This afternoon, during the Prime Minister's statement, he made an important statement with respect to a view that he attributed to me. This is an important matter, given that, no doubt, many millions of people were listening to or watching the statement relating to the European Commission and the crisis that it has created. He said with reference to me:

"He believes that Britain should not be a member of the European Union at all. That is his position."

I have never made such a statement. I have never argued or stated that the United Kingdom should not be a member of the European Union, and I should be grateful if you would let me know whether you received a statement from the Prime Minister retracting that statement. If you have not done so, may I request that such a statement be made, retracting the allegation against me, and that it be placed on the record in the House of Commons, together with a personal apology?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael J. Martin): Order. The matter that the hon. Gentleman has raised is not one for the Chair, but he has helped to put the record straight anyway. The hon. Gentleman knows his way around the procedures of the House, and I am sure that he will be able to take up the matter with the Prime Minister personally.

Prevention of Delay in Trials

5.52 pm

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to provide that a person indicted for a serious criminal offence shall be brought to trial within a period of 110 days; and for connected purposes.

As I am sure that you are aware, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the 110-day rule exists under Scots law and states that, if a person is taken into custody, their trial must commence within 110 days. If not, that person must be released. In common law, there is no time for commencing an action brought by the Crown. Therefore, a prosecution may be commenced at any time after the alleged offence.

Reform would avoid the current problem of people being detained in custody for an indefinite period. Delays are particularly regrettable when those people are acquitted when they eventually come to trial.

Statistics show that, in Scotland, the number of prisoners on remand decreased by 9 per cent. in 1996–97, whereas England and Wales experienced a 3 per cent. increase in 1998 compared to 1997. From Home Office figures provided, provisional information for 26 February 1999 showed that 12,627 people were held on remand in prisons in England and Wales. That figure has actually increased in the 18 months since 28 October 1997, when I first introduced the Bill.

The Government have said that they want to reduce the time before offenders are brought to trial, particularly for young offenders. There are especially strong reasons to push for strict time limits in relation to young offenders. The Youth Justice Board for England and Wales was set up on 30 September under the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 to monitor the operation of the youth justice system.

Recent figures provided to me by the Home Office show that 11 per cent. of those aged 10 to 13 who are granted bail—and 13 per cent. of those aged 14 to 17—failed to answer that bail. The point is that young people are two or three times more likely than adults to offend while on court bail.

North Yorkshire is one of the areas successful in bidding for the Youth Justice Board's development fund to improve the support and supervision of young people on bail. Thirteen million pounds of grants is available, so obviously there is a problem with young offenders. We need to make them turn up in court when they are supposed to do so.

Coming to court is often the most stressful and disruptive occasion in many people's lives. To keep them waiting in custody without a definite time limit is unacceptable to the prosecution and the defence. Allowing trials to be brought at an early date assists witnesses in presenting evidence before poor memory fudges the strength of the case against the accused.

The Home Office has produced an introductory guide to statutory time limits as envisaged in sections 43 and 45 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998. Those sections amend section 22 of the Prosecution of Offences Act 1985 and introduce two new sections to that Act in order to set time limits to help reduce delays in the criminal justice system. However, those new time limits will be set by regulation under the 1985 Act only following consultation and pilot studies and once new procedures for case preparation and management are in place. Time limits pilots will run for 12 months from this autumn but will not be implemented nationally in England and Wales until January 2001.

That situation is totally unacceptable. The fact that Scotland should have a humanitarian yet strict provision for all trials to be brought within 110 days, setting a clear, easily applied uniform standard, while England and Wales have no current statutory right but the promise of various different changing time limits depending on the age of the accused, the severity of the crime and the ability of police to bring charges in time, will lead to a chaotic justice system and an administrative, bureaucratic, penal nightmare.

Let us today bring the Government and the Home Office to their senses. The 110-day rule is not some peculiar Scottish concept but a vital safeguard protecting the civil liberties of those detained by the police. Scots law provides a simple, comprehensive, easy-to-administer procedure; let England and Wales now follow suit.

Let me share with the House the wide-ranging support that I have received in introducing the Bill. In 1998, Richard Braithwaite, convenor of Ripon diocesan board of social responsibility penal affairs sub-committee, said:

"I am delighted that you will persist with"

the Bill.

"I have found that your Bill inherently attracts the support of most Church people as well as Liberal Democrats and their ilk."

More recently, Mr. Braithwaite said:

"You are on a winner here and I think you should push it as hard as possible. Labour soon changes its mind when it sees political advantage!"

Reverend Roderick Hamer of St. John's church, London said in June 1998:

"I have a particular concern for young people remanded in custody, particularly when, on appearance in court, they are either given a non-custodial sentence or indeed not convicted at all. The young are, I am sure you would agree, particularly vulnerable to the pressures you describe."

In June 1998, in a letter to the Deputy Prime Minister, the prison chaplaincy team at Her Majesty's Prison, Hedon road, Hull, wrote:

"As a Prison Chaplaincy Team we hope you"—

the Deputy Prime Minister—

"will support the Bill. We agree with Anne McIntosh that there should be a limit to the time a prisoner can be remanded in custody."

In May 1998, the Ripon diocesan board for social responsibility wrote to all its parishes:

"Those remanded in custody add to our already overcrowded prisons; when they come to trial many are found Not Guilty and released, and some of those who are convicted are not given a custodial sentence. Recent figures indicate that more than half of all male prisoners on remand (56 per cent.) and almost three-quarters of female remand prisoners (71 per cent.) were not given a custodial sentence. More than a fifth (23 per cent. of males and 20 per cent. of women) were actually acquitted.

The stress of being on remand is very considerable. In 1995 there were 55 self-inflicted deaths in prison and a further 603 attempted suicides. Many of these were of people on remand. In addition the families of those prisoners who were not given a custodial sentence also suffered the absence of one of their members."

Furthermore, there is the issue of common justice, for justice deferred is justice denied. Paul Cavadino, the principal officer of the National Association for the Care

and Resettlement of Offenders, said, in November 1997, when I first proposed the Bill:

"I strongly support this for all the reasons which you clearly set out when you moved the Bill in October 1997, together with one additional reason—that reducing the number of remand prisoners by cutting delays will provide relief for the overcrowded and overstretched prison system."

We are now 18 months down the road, with the number of those on remand awaiting trial in England and Wales having increased substantially. I beg the House to support my Bill.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Miss Anne McIntosh, Mr. Martin Bell, Mr. Dennis Canavan, Mrs. Margaret Ewing, Mr. Michael Fabricant, Mr. James Gray, Mr. David Prior, Mr. Keith Simpson and Mr. Robert Walter.

PREVENTION OF DELAY IN TRIALS

Miss Anne McIntosh accordingly presented a Bill to provide that a person indicted for a serious criminal offence shall be brought to trial within a period of 110 days; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 23 April, and to be printed [Bill 64].

Orders of the Day

House of Lords Bill

Order for Third Reading read.

6.2 pm

The President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mrs. Margaret Beckett): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

In my speech on Second Reading, I described the Bill as exquisitely simple, although momentous in its effects—a description which, for some inexplicable reason, seemed to trouble some commentators, as though simplicity were incompatible with significance.

The Bill is a clear fulfilment of our manifesto pledge to remove, by statute, the right of hereditary peers to sit and vote in the House of Lords, as an initial self-contained reform. It deals only with that point and with its essential consequences, most notably conferring on peers who leave the House of Lords the right to vote in elections to the House of Commons, and indeed to stand for election without having to relinquish their title.

After a two-day Second Reading debate, and four full days in Committee, the Bill reaches its Third Reading with its simplicity unimpaired. It has been fully—some might say extensively—debated, and those debates have been, for the most part, good-humoured and constructive.

There were one or two slightly desperate attempts to pretend that the Government were trying in some way to curtail or obstruct debate, but those claims foundered on the clear evidence to the contrary. There were also attempts to take our discussions beyond the Bill itself—to draw in proposals that might be made at a later stage in Parliament's consideration of the Bill, and that, if made, would be the focus of further debate in the House—or to dwell on other issues raised by our White Paper, including those now before the royal commission. I take the opportunity now to assure the House that the Government do, of course, intend to provide time to debate the White Paper later in the Session.

One evident feature of our debates so far has been the difficulty experienced by the official Opposition in knowing how they should attack the Bill. On Second Reading, the hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) managed—as he did in response to my statement on 20 January—in the course of one opening speech to accuse the Government first of undue delay and secondly of undue haste, or perhaps it was the other way round.

The hon. Gentleman complained that the timetable for the royal commission was too short, but he also said

"that the Government want to scrap the hereditary peers and then kick the whole process into the long grass"—[*Official Report*, 1 February 1999; Vol. 324, c. 619.]

and that the Government have no intention of reform before the next general election.

Mr. Dominic Grieve (Beaconsfield): The right hon. Lady seems to be maligning my hon. Friend the Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox). The delay and the undue haste are perfectly compatible. The delay was in setting up a royal commission, and the undue haste was in proceeding without one.

Mrs. Beckett: That is a helpful re-interpretation of what the hon. Member for Woodspring would argue that he meant, but it is not, I fear, what he said. Far from maligning the hon. Gentleman, I was quoting him.

[Mrs. Beckett]

It was not at all easy to be clear about the nature of the charge that the Opposition were striving to lay against the Government, or of the evidence on which it might be based. Nor was it clear whether the Opposition did or did not support the hereditary principle.

Sterling work was done to help Opposition Members make up their minds by many of my hon. Friends, particularly my hon. Friend the Member for Corby (Mr. Hope), who pursued the issue with a tenacity that all on the Government Benches—and even, in the end, some on the Opposition Benches—admired.

Support for the hereditary principle had, after all, featured in the Conservative party's 1997 campaign guide. Despite attempts by the hon. Member for Woodspring to put a slightly different gloss on it, there is no question but that it appeared there squarely in the context of a discussion about the House of Lords. That is the element of the hereditary principle that all candidates for the Conservative party were sent out to defend in 1997: the right to sit as a Member of Parliament by inheritance and birth. As to whether Conservative Members still support that principle, on that question, too, in our debates, first they did and then they did not—at least, I think so.

It seems that we may have arrived at the position where the Conservatives have, for the most part rather grudgingly, reaffirmed that heredity cannot be the basis for a place in our legislature. I say "reaffirmed" because, in theory, their party came to that view at least 88 years ago. The problem is just that, in all their ensuing decades of power, they never got round to doing anything about it. I think it was the hon. Member for Woodspring who said, with commendable frankness, that it had not been a priority.

Although Conservative Members will, I am sure, affirm yet again that that is the view of the modern Conservative party, it has been noticeable how frequently during the days of debate the amendments that they moved just happened to have the effect of retaining for a few more years or reinstating after a couple of years the existing House of Lords, complete with its in-built Tory majority.

St. Augustine, with his plea to be made holy, but not quite yet, had nothing on the Conservative party. At least he was asking to be made holy within the lifespan of an adult man. The Tories have already strung the matter out for longer than that. As I recall, St Augustine's reported words were

"Give me chastity and continency—but not yet".

If earlier generations of hereditary peers had shared his wish and practised chastity, we would all be spending this evening doing something else.

The nearest the Tories have got to a justification for yet more procrastination is the argument that has sustained debate and delay for all those 88 years—the less-than-perfect nature of every alternative that has ever been proposed. That that argument is disingenuous is demonstrated by more than the decades over which it has been advanced.

In this Parliament, in which the life peers have been appointed by eight Prime Ministers over 40 years; in this Parliament, in which only just over half of the appointments made by the present Prime Minister were of Labour peers, whereas Tory Prime Ministers have usually taken the opportunity to add still further to their in-built majority among hereditary peers; and in this Parliament, in which, for the first time in our history, a Prime Minister has volunteered to reduce his own powers of patronage, the Conservatives continue to claim that what they fear is a House of Lords made up of what they dub "Tony's cronies". What would they have done for an argument if the Prime Minister had been called David?

Mr. David Davis (Haltemprice and Howden) *rose—*

Mrs. Beckett: A David! I am delighted to give way.

Mr. Davis: That is as good a cue as any.

Some Conservative Members have concerns about the lack of independence of a future House of Lords. Three categories of public servant—High Court judges, the ombudsman of this House and the Comptroller and Auditor General of this House—are subject to dismissal only by a vote of both the House of Commons and the House of Lords to protect them from influence by the Executive. What does the right hon. Lady propose to do with a House of "Tony's cronies" to protect them in the future?

Mrs. Beckett: I expect that the right hon. Gentleman will know that the Government envisage that the central Cross-Bench group, which is always regarded as independent by all commentators, including Labour Members, and so described, will be appointed by an independent appointments commission. It will comprise a smallish number of people, one nominee from each of the political parties made by those political parties, and others, with an independent chairman, all appointed on Nolan principles. The members of that central Cross-Bench group, as we know them, will continue to be appointed by that appointments commission, not by the Prime Minister. We have also given an undertaking that the individual political parties will be able to make their own nominations without the Prime Minister having, as he has had to up to now, a veto. All those things preserve a proper measure of independence.

It has been rather a feature of our debates here that some Conservative Members, although not, I think the right hon. Gentleman, have argued that independence in the House of Lords can come only from the hereditary peers. We do not accept that argument, and I am pleased to see the right hon. Gentleman shaking his head. We are determined that the House of Lords shall have a proper measure of independence. What we do not wish is for it to remain, as it has always been, in the control of the Conservative party.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): The thrust of the arguments from many Labour Members, including the right hon. Lady, during these debates, has been that the Cross Benchers are not properly independent. I am delighted that she now admits that they are. We now have her affirmation that she regards the Cross Benchers as being truly independent. Is that right?

Mrs. Beckett: I have never ever said that the Cross Benchers were not independent.

Mr. Andrew Tyrie (Chichester): Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Beckett: I shall deal with this point first, if the hon. Gentleman does not mind.

I was careful to say that that is how they have always been described. I have sat through most of the debates and I have endeavoured to read each contribution that I have not sat through, but I cannot say, hand on heart, that no hon. Member has ever cast doubt on the independence of any Cross Bencher. It is within recent memory that some have crossed from the Tory Benches to the Cross Benches. I have never impugned the independence of the Cross Benchers and the White Paper specifically describes them as such and says that that independent element, should, in the Government's view, be preserved.

Mr. Tyrie: The right hon. Lady has covered herself a little with those remarks, but in a speech in the House a few weeks ago, the Home Secretary made it clear that he believes that the Cross Benchers are not really independent. I shall gladly provide the right hon. Lady with the reference in due course.

Mrs. Beckett: There is no doubt that my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary is prone to teasing Conservative Members, usually quite successfully. However, the Government's view of Cross Benchers and the life peers' potential for independence is clear from the White Paper.

On Second Reading, I suggested that proper debate about what a second Chamber should do and, in consequence, be, had always been bedevilled and diverted by the voices and the potential votes of the hereditary peers. In past debates, those who oppose reform have always thrown their weight against any individual reform. They have joined those who wanted an elected House against a mixed House. They have joined those who feared for the effect on the House of Commons of elections to a Second Chamber to defeat an elected House. All the time, their agenda—sometimes their hidden agenda—has simply been to maintain the hereditary peers.

Just as it is true that the debate has always been bedevilled by the issue of the hereditary peerage, and hijacked by opponents of any change, it is equally true that it has always been bedevilled by the interests of the Conservative party, which has, I fear, always seen its interests as being at best identical to, or, if needs be, more important than, the interests of the country.

It may be that, out of the discussions in the House of Lords, out of the work of the Royal Commission and the study of the Joint Committee, will come a broad consensus of view on the best way forward. That would not only be a good thing in itself; it could mean fairly speedy progress towards longer-term reform and a new Second Chamber, even in this Parliament. That may happen. It may be that the Conservative party will see the value of reform. I hope so. We shall see.

However, what I have never doubted, and what the debates have overwhelmingly confirmed, is that even stage 1 of reform will be better than what we have today. We will have the emergence of a House of Lords, all of whose Members have earned their place on the basis of their contribution to our public life. I say that without discredit to those who, whatever the service they have tried to give, owe their place to the contribution of their forebears.

One of the unfortunate features of the debate—I hear mild echoes of it from the Opposition Benches now—was the way in which some Conservative Members slid towards attacking life peers, making the point that a mere 500 of them were insufficient to carry out the business of a House of Parliament. Most insulting of all, they claimed that only hereditary peers could be truly independent.

When hereditary peers go, distinguished scientists, doctors, business people, retired soldiers, public servants, even some farmers, will still sit in the House of Lords, but all will be sitting there because of their distinction. Many life peers are distinguished former Members of this House, yet some Conservative Members have repeatedly suggested that this eminent group of men and women are quite incapable of managing without the hereditary peers.

Sir Patrick Cormack: Conservative Members have never suggested any such thing. We have said that half those who regularly attend the other place are hereditary peers. The figures have been produced time and again, and to that particular charge there has been no effective answer.

Mrs. Beckett: With respect to the hon. Gentleman, it has repeatedly been said—as I say, not only have I sat through the debates, but I have read them—particularly by Conservative Back Benchers, that, in some way, the life peers will be insufficient to cope in the House of Lords without the hereditary peers. It is, of course, true that many of those who attend today are hereditary peers; it is equally true that large numbers of life peers attend. As has been pointed out by hon. Members, including Conservative Members, there are quite enough among the life peers to sustain the work of a Second Chamber.

In these days of debate, we have seen a range of contradictions, but as I looked back over them, I was suddenly struck by one curious, perhaps significant, omission. It has been a constant feature of detective fiction, from Conan Doyle onwards, that so often what is not said is as significant or more significant than what is—the dog that does not bark. The Conservative party has aired its purported fears about what the Government intend and their real attitude, but what about their own attitude to the transitional House? That is the dog that has not barked in this debate.

Mr. Tyrie: Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Beckett: No, not for a moment.

All the attention has been given to whether, or how fast, the Government might move on to stage 2. Where do the Opposition stand? Much of the thrust of their amendments and their speeches in support of them have been to protest that nothing should be done to the existing House of Lords without a wide-ranging and fundamental overall review of our constitution.

The hon. Member for Woodspring, in his opening speech on Second Reading, said:

"we shall have to decide not only what we want Parliament to do, but Parliament's relation to the Executive, to the judici. y and to Europe. Only after we have decided what we want Parliat ent to do should we divide the powers between the two Houses—assuming we believe in a bicameral system. Only then can we decide the membership and size of the two Chambers."—[*Official Report*, 1 February 1999; Vol. 324, c. 622.]

[Mrs. Beckett]

A moment's thought serves to suggest that that undertaking would take not months, but probably a considerable number of years.

Dr. Liam Fox (Woodspring): Can the right hon. Lady tell me which of my remarks she disagrees with?

Mrs. Beckett: I disagree with the fact that it is impossible to contemplate removing the hereditary peerage from the House of Lords without contemplating all those major constitutional questions. That clearly was the hon. Gentleman's contention at that point.

I should like the hon. Member for Woodspring, who leads for the Opposition on these matters, to address two questions on behalf of his party. First, although I recognise that only a couple of his hon. Friends have touched on this issue in passing, will he say whether the Conservative party would recreate today's House of Lords if it won the next election? If not even the Conservative party would recreate a House of Lords with 750 people entitled to a place in it by virtue of their birth, what are its intentions towards the transitional House?

Secondly, when I introduced the Bill on Second Reading, I quoted from our manifesto, making it crystal clear that we do not intend to

"seek more than parity in numbers with the Conservative party in the transitional House, and that we do not believe that any party should seek a majority in the House of Lords."—[*Official Report*, 1 February 1999; Vol. 324, c. 615.]

I then challenged the Opposition to say the same. In all the six days of debate that have ensued, as far as I can see only one Opposition Member—the hon. Member for Gainsborough (Mr. Leigh), who does not always speak for his Front Bench—has said that it is not good for the Conservatives to have a permanent in-built majority, but no Conservative Front Bencher has felt able to give the assurance that I sought on the first day of our debates.

Mr. Mike Hancock (Portsmouth, South): The right hon. Lady is asking the hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) to deal with certain issues in his speech. Before she reaches the end of her speech, I should be grateful if she answered a question in respect of the timing and the length of stage 1, which has preoccupied so many of our colleagues on the Tory Benches during the six days of debate. Is she now able to give the House and the country a better steer on what the Government anticipate will be the length of stage 1? She asks Conservative Front Benchers to come clean, and I support her in that, but the nation would like some steer from the Government about how long they expect the transitional period to take, even if they do not receive support from the official Opposition on that.

Mrs. Beckett: I cannot answer the hon. Gentleman's question—I do not think that anyone can, at the moment—because we are at too early a stage. I shall give him two reasons why. First, the royal commission has begun its work. When it gets into that work, and when we see the reaction to the consultation that it is undertaking, we may have a clearer idea of whether consensus is possible or whether views are so divided that it will be difficult to come to common ground.

Secondly, the hon. Gentleman may been, as I have—or may not have been—reading the most recent debates in the House of Lords on the White Paper. This is the third occasion since the autumn on which the House of Lords has debated those matters, perfectly legitimately—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael J. Martin): Order. I am reluctant to interrupt proceedings, but we are debating Third Reading and such debates tend to be narrow. The Bill, too, is narrow; it deals with the abolition of the hereditary peerage. I can understand the difficulties that the House has, but we must try to keep within the constraints of the debate on the Bill.

Mrs. Beckett: I am grateful to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I will say no more, except to recommend that the hon. Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Hancock) read the White Paper debates. He will see that the atmosphere of those debates is one of growing anxiety, which leads me to question the issue of time.

Mr. Richard Shepherd (Aldridge-Brownhills): I am sorry that the right hon. Lady has lost most of her speech on the basis that we are debating Third Reading. She sought a steer. Two former Conservative Prime Ministers, a former Conservative Chancellor of the Exchequer and, looking around the Chamber, a number of Conservative Members have argued for an elected House. That is the steer to which we are trying to lead her.

Mrs. Beckett: I accept that completely. I do not want to stray for too long, but the hon. Gentleman will be the first to appreciate that he is talking about stage 2; I am talking about the transitional House, which will arise on the passage of the Bill. We will no doubt debate stage 2 at length on some happy occasion in the future.

One reason why I am asking about the attitude of the Opposition towards the transitional House is that, when he spoke of the in-built party advantage—the control, indeed—that the Conservative party permanently enjoys in the present House of Lords, the hon. Member for Woodspring said:

"there must be better reasons for reforming part of our Parliament than that".—[*Official Report*, 1 February 1999; Vol. 324, c. 618.]

"That" is permanent Conservative control, which leads me to ask him to say at least a little about what are the real policies and plans of the official Opposition. I will not disguise from him or from the House the fact that we have suspected throughout that the Opposition's plan was to maintain, by hook or by crook, the hold that they have always had on the second Chamber of our Parliament.

Mr. Bowen Wells (Hertford and Stortford): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Could you clarify for me your ruling on the breadth of the debate? Are we allowed on Third Reading to debate the question of the transitional House, to which the abolition of hereditary peers will inevitably lead, or is that banned from our debate as well?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Obviously some elbow room has to be given; that is the best way that I can put it. Hon. Members can debate what is in the Bill, and perhaps related matters, but if they go into related matters to the exclusion of the Bill, the Chair will bring them to order. I hope that that is helpful.

Mrs. Beckett: I am sure that your remarks have been of great assistance to the hon. Gentleman, Mr. Deputy

Speaker. Let me hasten to assure him that I am not inviting the hon. Member for Woodspring to enter into lengthy debate. I am simply asking him to clarify whether the Conservative party accepts that no party should seek a majority in the transitional House. If that is accepted, it would be helpful to us all to have it made plain. Otherwise, the suspicion will remain that the Conservative party is ending this century in the way that it began it: speaking of change, but hanging on to power at any cost; pursuing its own interests, irrespective of the interests of the country; still standing for the past rather than for the future; and still standing for the few rather than the many. If Conservative Members vote against Third Reading, we shall certainly be entitled to assume that what they find unacceptable is not the specific proposals that the Bill enshrines, but anything that challenges their long hegemony.

The Government believe that the removal of the hereditary peerage from Parliament is a prize worth securing in its own right. The Bill addresses the key deficiency in the composition of the present House of Lords: it forces everyone to address the question of the role of the hereditary peers on its own terms.

The hereditary peerage has had an honourable history of service. Lord Cranborne said some months ago—in the House of Lords I think—that he was sad that his family's centuries of public service would now be brought to an end. That is neither the purpose nor the effect of this Bill, which are simply that neither he nor any other will have a reserved place in our public service, irrespective of interest or capacity. They will be free to serve in the same way and on the same terms as all their fellow citizens, and I am sure that some of them will seek to do so. That is the effect of this Bill. I commend it to the House.

6.29 pm

Dr. Liam Fox (Woodspring): Never can the official Opposition's response to a Third Reading debate have been so widely trailed by the Minister in charge of the Bill. It is rather flattering that the Government should seek our ideas where they have none of their own. I hope that I can give the right hon. Lady some help as she stumbles on the Government's way towards stage 2.

There are four ways in which we need to consider the Bill: as an end in itself; as part of the Government's intended eventual policy for this stage of reform; as part of the wider reform of the House of Lords; and as part of the wider constitutional architecture that the Government seem to be constructing, albeit incoherently.

On Second Reading, the Leader of the House said that the Bill would achieve three things: it would remove the ability to sit in the House of Lords by birthright, it would modernise our handling of legislation, and it would improve our Parliament. It is worth weighing up what our debates have shown about those three aims.

Let me give the Leader of the House her due. I welcome the news that we shall be able to engage in further debate on the White Paper. I think it worried all hon. Members that the rules of the House restricted debate on the wider issues. I leave others to judge whether that was the intention of those who drafted the Bill; but the Bill was tightly drafted, and hon. Members on both sides of the House were not sure what they could and could not debate. Given that we are debating a major constitutional issue in a major constitutional arena, I welcome the chance to debate that issue in a wider context as, I think, will Members of all parties.

One of our difficulties was that we had no concept of whether or not the Bill was an interim measure, because no time scale was specified at any stage. The hon. Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Hancock), who is no longer present, asked the Leader of the House for a "steer". We have had no such steer. It is difficult for us to interpret the Government's proposals, because we have no time scale in which to place them.

Originally, we were not to be allowed a royal commission, but the Government discovered—doubtless from the focus groups that are the real powers behind the way in which we are governed nowadays—that that was not popular. We are, therefore, to have a royal commission, until December 1999.

Rather mischievously—not that that is the way in which she normally does business—the Leader of the House tried to—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I am reluctant to interrupt again, but the hon. Gentleman is straying from the subject of the Bill.

Dr. Fox: I am responding to what the Leader of the House said at the outset, Mr. Deputy Speaker. She said that the Opposition were complaining both that the Government were too fast, and that they were too slow. The Government were too slow in not providing for a royal commission in the first place, and they are now asking the commission to consider the proposals with undue haste. That makes it difficult for us to consider the Bill in the context of time.

The Leader of the House set out a number of principles on Second Reading. First, she dealt with the ability to sit in the House of Lords by birthright. Interestingly, some of her hon. Friends failed to distinguish between belief in the hereditary principle—in any hereditary principle—and belief in the principle of heredity in the House of Lords. Conservative Members made it clear that our party was perfectly happy with the hereditary principle. As it is the basis on which the monarchy operates, we have no constitutional problem with it. Many Labour Members took the same view, although—interestingly again—a number of them did not accept the hereditary principle governing the monarchy either. That may cause the Leader of the House some trouble when we actually embark on reform.

Mr. Bill Rammell (Harlow): We have heard these spurious points about the monarchy from Conservative Members before. Does the hon. Gentleman not accept that there is all the difference in the world between a constitutional monarchy acting on the basis of advice, and Members in the second Chamber who are part of our system of government deciding on legislation that will affect the lives of millions of people, on the basis of the hereditary principle?

Dr. Fox: That is exactly the point that I was making. My point is that, while many hon. Members were able to make the distinction to which the hon. Gentleman refers, a number of Labour Members failed to do so, expressing the view that the hereditary principle was wrong in itself. We make the distinction made by the hon. Gentleman and, indeed, by the Leader of the House.

Our difficulty on Second Reading was this. The Leader of the House said then that it was unacceptable for Members to sit in the House of Lords because of who

[Dr. Fox]

is unacceptable. It shows their lack of courage. Perhaps I am being unfair; perhaps it just shows the lack of thought that has gone into the process.

The Leader of the House mocked what I said on Second Reading about requiring the Bill to fit into wider constitutional reform. I said at the outset of my speech that we had to consider the Bill as it fitted into the wider constitutional architecture. I stick by what I said on Second Reading.

Properly thought out reform would decide what Parliament would do. There is a strong case for reforming Parliament. The most important part of that is increasing the powers of Members of the House of Commons against the Executive, but we have to consider—I repeat what the Leader of the House quoted—what we want Parliament to do, and the relationship of a bicameral Parliament as a whole with the Executive. What will the relationship with an ever more politically active judiciary be?

What is to be our relationship with Europe? Given the events of the past 24 hours, it might have been better if the Government had been expending their energies in reforming parts of the European constitutional architecture, rather than trying to tackle the operation of the other place.

Dr. George Turner (North-West Norfolk): Does the hon. Gentleman accept that it is a matter not of whether, but of when we should consider those issues? If the Government had presented in the Bill a full blueprint for reform, might we not be accused of having misled the electorate in our manifesto, and of trying to make major constitutional changes that we had not presented in our manifesto to the electorate? Moreover, will we not require an election if we cannot reach a consensus on the second Chamber?

Dr. Fox: I am rather confused by that intervention. However, I do not think that the electorate would have minded being misled on yet one more promise in the Government's manifesto.

A proper debate on the issues would have been welcome. During the Bill's passage, especially in Committee, a cross-party consensus began to emerge, that the House could very usefully concern itself in overall reform of Parliament and its operation. One of our final debates in Committee, on an Opposition amendment, was the most interesting one, in which a genuine cross-party consensus seemed to be developing that the House of Commons was not holding the Executive sufficiently to account. In that debate, we gave the example of Ministers' ability to go to a European Council of Ministers and agree a measure that would become a directive that would, by law, apply to the House of Commons. That is undemocratic.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I repeat what was said earlier: the Bill has been quite tightly drafted, and the House must discuss only its contents. References to what may or may not happen in other places and other times are permissible, but are not to be dwelt on in any detail.

Dr. Fox: I am grateful to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for that ruling, and for allowing me to finish the paragraph before stopping me.

One of our suspicions about the Bill is that we may never reach a subsequent stage, and that we shall end up, perhaps for a considerable time, with what is called the interim House. In her failure today to give us any clear steer on a time scale, the Leader of the House has merely reconfirmed those specific fears.

The Government have given us no idea of what they want in subsequent stages. Therefore, we have to suspect that they have no plan to reach subsequent stages. That would be a great pity, as hon. Members on both sides of the House think that the imminent interim Chamber will be an unsatisfactory part of Parliament's operation.

What role do Ministers envisage for the second Chamber? What powers do they want it to have? The suspicion must remain that the Government are creating in the Bill a compliant halfway House of yes men who will do the Executive's bidding and fail to bring the Government to account.

Our basic criticisms of the Bill remain. Its proposals are piecemeal and incoherent, and, ultimately, will create instability. For those reasons, we oppose the Bill.

6.53 pm

Mr. Peter Mandelson (Hartlepool): When the hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) was challenged to say what the Conservative party's own views were on reform of the House of Lords, he summed up very eloquently that party's attitude to the Bill and the subject. What did he say? He seemed to say, "We will bring forward our own proposals when we like, when it suits us, and when it can cause the maximum discomfort and damage to the Government." He said nothing about the wider implications for government in the United Kingdom or the modernisation of Parliament, and expressed no thought on wider United Kingdom constitutional reform. There was not one bit of it.

Conservative Members' whole attitude might be summed up by the single phrase, "What we have, we will hold; thank you very much. Everyone else, and everything else, can go hang." Their protestations about the United Kingdom constitution are completely bogus. We have heard nothing from them but endless pretence about their concern for the democratic operation and underpinning of Parliament.

Three features have characterised our debates on the Bill, through which many of us have sat very enjoyably and constructively. The first feature has been the Government's complete dominance in their arguments for making the changes; there has been a complete lack of any coherent, sustained or well-argued position to the contrary. No well-argued position against the Government's proposals has been articulated by the Opposition, or by anyone else who opposes the proposals—and I know why. Not only do the Government's proposals make eminent sense, but the Government's proposals chime with what the public want us to do.

It is perfectly clear to the public that hereditary peers sitting as of right in the House of Lords have no place in a democratic and modern legislature. It is very clear also that the public should like there to be some erosion of the powers of patronage exercised by the Prime Minister.

I think that the public have it right. The public are not revolutionaries, or at least they were not when I most recently consulted them, either directly or—

Mr. Shepherd: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Mandelson: They were not revolutionaries when I consulted them, either directly or using one of those spurious focus groups that the hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd) continually refers to, right on cue.

Mr. Shepherd: I am, as always, bemused by the prince of spin. However, his characterisation of one side of the House did not dwell upon some of his own colleagues, who—in our consideration of some of the Bill's clauses—fought and argued coherently against the Bill. I simply refer him to the speech of the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn). One should not think that the House is not trying to wrestle with a great principle of the United Kingdom legislative process, which is important. There is no point in the right hon. Gentleman spinning away like that. He should start telling the truth about why it is a worthwhile Bill.

Mr. Mandelson: Certain individual hon. Members, the hon. Gentleman included, have very directly addressed some of the substantive issues. I was describing the official position of the Conservative party, and what we have heard from Opposition Front Benchers, whom I clearly distinguish. Nevertheless, if he does not mind, at the end of my speech, I shall return to the subject matter that he sought to introduce.

The Government's arguments have dominated in our proceedings on the Bill because of the very clear, precise and well thought through manner in which the then Opposition Labour party constructed the section of its manifesto on reform of the House of Lords. That section in the manifesto was not casually penned by some toiler down at Millbank, but flowed from the rather expensive fountain pen of a very eminent lawyer, who now occupies a very senior and prominent place in the House of Lords.

What was carefully considered and constructed was a two-stage process—a two-stage journey—in which the clear principles of initial reform were stated. It was a process that would enable us to proceed with important albeit limited reform, and without getting bogged down in such procedure and debate in this place that any reform, at any stage, would be prevented—which is exactly what happened when previous Governments and Parliaments embarked on the journey of reform of the other place.

Another very important feature of the Government's manifesto was our desire to take into account other people's views—to listen to other people, and to hear what other people, parties, hon. Members and interested bodies had to say—on the future of the House of Lords. The two-stage process that the Government have set out allows us to get under our belt a limited but important reform that fulfils the principle set out in the Bill, while proceeding concurrently with our desire to take the views of others into consideration when formulating a longer-term approach.

Dr. Fox: The right hon. Gentleman does not understand our criticism. It is not that there is a two-stage reform, but that we have one stage without knowing what the second stage will be. We are on a mystery tour of constitutional change. Either the Government do not know what they want and what their guiding principles are for the second stage or they are not telling us. Which is it?

Mr. Mandelson: The hon. Gentleman has missed the point of what I am saying. We do not have to agree on our eventual plans for reform of the House of Lords to fulfil the principle set out in our manifesto and enshrined in the Bill that hereditary peers should not sit as of right in the House of Lords. That is a simple, elementary principle that is unaffected by any other consideration or wider reform of the House of Lords. Surely even the hon. Gentleman accepts that the Government would be open to immense and justified criticism if they tore in to the House with a ready-made, ready-baked, pre-cooked set of reforms that had been the subject of plentiful discussion and debate behind closed doors in various Cabinet committees, but which had not attracted the views of anyone outside the Government and on which no one had had an opportunity to express their opinions.

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Aldershot): I am fascinated by the right hon. Gentleman's wonderful, flowing, honeyed words of soothing reassurance to the British people about consultation and measures that are eminently reasonable. If he is concerned about what other people think, will he reflect on the fact that an ICM poll conducted last November found that 68 per cent. of those consulted thought that the Government should not proceed with the first stage until they were prepared to put an alternative before the British people? The Government have failed to do that.

Mr. Mandelson: The people sampled in the ICM opinion poll are probably the same people who, by supporting the Labour manifesto, voted for the two-stage process that the Government are implementing. Having set out in their manifesto a clear two-stage process, it would be outrageous for the Government to abandon that the moment that they were elected to office. I do not know what democratic principles the hon. Gentleman is trying to espouse by suggesting that we should jettison the manifesto pledge on which we were elected and proceed in a different way six months later.

Mr. Wells: If the Government intended to implement the two-stage process that the right hon. Gentleman describes, why did they not appoint a consultative body—a Speaker's Conference or a royal commission—as soon as they came to office? That would have given opportunities for proper discussion, bringing in those on all sides of the argument, including the Official Opposition. I am not aware of any consultation having taken place with the Conservative party on the issue before the Bill was introduced. Does that not give the lie to the right hon. Gentleman's honeyed arguments about a two-stage process?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. We are straying further and further from the contents of the Bill. I should be grateful if we could return.

Mr. Mandelson: I am grateful to you for saving me from this torture, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I regard it as a

[Mr. Mandelson]

torture to be led astray in that way. The suggestion of the hon. Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr. Wells) would have achieved the same end that has befallen other Governments that have embarked on a process of reform—endless, continuous and constant wrangling and debate between parties, without anyone being able to move a step further on reform of the House of Lords.

I am not surprised that the Conservatives find the process so worrying and fear that the approach set out in our manifesto will undermine them. Throughout their contributions during the debates on the Bill, the Conservatives have been on the horns of a democratic dilemma. On the one hand they desperately desire to oppose and upset the Government's plans, because that is what they think that they are there for.

In the process, they want to keep their inbuilt majority in the other place, which is the ulterior and not very well hidden motive of most of their contributions on the Bill. On the other hand, they know that championing unelected legislators as they have done and defending, extending and prolonging the life of hereditary peers does not play very well in the pantry—or is it in the kitchen, or on the kitchen table, or under the kitchen table; wherever the discussion is taking place between the Conservative party and the handful of members of the public who are interested in what they have to say on this or any other subject. They find it very difficult to make an argument against the Bill that does not sound like what it is—a defence, using one permutation of argument or another, of the hereditary peers.

The effect of that is that the Conservatives have taken a long time to fail to lay a glove on the Government's position, adding not a scintilla of sense or improvement to the Bill. They have succeeded only in embarrassing themselves by their rhetorical contortions and linguistic gymnastics, as they have wriggled and squirmed on the horns of the dilemma that I have described.

I do not want to dwell on the third feature of the House's consideration, but the hon. Member for Aldridge–Brownhills asked me to comment on the genuinely felt and interesting debate on the further changes to the Lords that the Bill will make possible. The hon. Member for Woodspring rightly said that the Bill will create a new ethos in the House of Lords. It will whet the appetite for further reform. I have two points on that in conclusion. There is clearly a strong and widely held surface desire in the House for an elected second Chamber to give a thorough, democratic underpinning to Parliament. My hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central (Mr. Fisher), who has spoken before and may speak again if he is lucky enough to be called, will no doubt repeat that argument. It is a matter that I understand, but on which I feel agnostic.

I suggest that as the debate grows, however, other factors will find greater weight in people's consideration. One is the rather unattractive prospect of confrontation and gridlock between the two Houses of Parliament. Many have spoken of the immense contribution that the House of Lords has made to the legislative procedures of Parliament through its ability to review, to revise and to improve legislation without the tendentious grandstanding that more adversarial politics brings to debates in this place.

As the debate about further reforms goes on, people will find it increasingly possible to resist the attraction of the second Chamber being taken over and dominated by party politics to an even greater extent than it is at the moment, which would be the inevitable result of the second Chamber being elected, with all of the selections, re-selections and elections and with the party machines rolling into place to dominate the composition, powers and procedures of the House of Lords—something which I, for one, do not find attractive.

7.11 pm

Mr. Robert Maclennan (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross): I would not wish to follow the right hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson) into a discussion on the nature of an elected second Chamber, and how it might operate—simply beyond entering a slight note of dissent with what he said, for I see no reason why gridlock should be the necessary consequence of election, if the powers of the two Houses are distinct and clearly defined and the possibility of second-guessing is not written into the constitution. However, as the right hon. Gentleman will acknowledge, that debate is for a later date.

What is remarkable about the debate and the Bill is that a major step is being taken to reform the House of Lords as we know it—a step that has eluded the grasp of Governments over the past 50 years. The grandfather of the right hon. Member for Hartlepool—[HON. MEMBERS: "Where is he?"] I did say that I was not proposing to follow the right hon. Gentleman's speech closely. That could be taken as an indication that he was free to go.

Mr. Christopher Fraser (Mid-Dorset and North Poole): It is a discourtesy.

Mr. Maclennan: I do not take it is as a discourtesy.

Mr. Fraser: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is it not appropriate to respect the traditions of this House by listening to the debate after one's contribution? Is not the right hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson) abusing the House by leaving the Chamber?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: It is a strong convention of this House that hon. Members should stay to hear at least the speech following their own. Leaving the Chamber without doing so is to be strongly deprecated.

Mr. Maclennan: I regret that I have triggered this exchange.

When the post-war Labour Government were elected—with a substantial majority, and an upper House in which there were no appointed peers—the proposed abolition of the hereditary peers would not have been regarded either as a high priority or as a practical proposition. How our constitutional affairs have rolled on since then is a matter for comment and note. Even the later attempt, in the 1960s, to bring about a change comparable to this one defeated a Labour Government with a substantial majority.

To some extent, what has been different on this occasion is that the Labour party has not only recognised the importance of making the reform, but was prepared to think it through in advance before it came to office. It was recognised that removing the hereditary peers from the

upper House was not a matter that would command enormously high priority in the minds of the British public, but none the less it was an important step towards modernising our legislature—and one for which we should be prepared.

Therefore, it was right for the Labour party to enter into discussions with the Liberal Democrats before the election as to how to bring the change about. Those were constructive discussions, and the two parties reached agreement on how to proceed. The Government have proceeded with all due diligence and speed to give effect to that pre-election agreement, which was reflected in the Labour party's manifesto—as it was in ours. There is reason for a little satisfaction, in that something that was clearly thought through in advance is proceeding according to plan.

The passing of the hereditary peers is a moment in which one can look back and consider with gratitude the work that has been done by many of the noble families who have served the public interest of our nation down the centuries—the Cavendishes, the Cecils, the Russells and so forth. I agree with the Leader of the House that the prospects of those families serving the public again are not in any way diminished by the enactment of the Bill.

My noble Friend Earl Russell speaks with eloquence, incisiveness and knowledge on matters concerning the students whom he teaches and the social security system, which he has studied. Those activities can be continued, and I hope that people such as my noble Friend will find a place in the interim house—

Dr. Starkey: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Maclennan: I will when I finish my sentence. I know that I speak in rather long sentences, but I will be happy to give way then.

Those people have a part to play—a part which I hope they will find—but I also do not doubt that their offspring will contemplate a career in the public service and that, like other citizens of this country, they will think it appropriate to stand for election.

Dr. Starkey: Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that one of the advantages of the electoral, as opposed to the hereditary, route is that rather more members of those important families—the women, as well as the men—will be encouraged to put themselves forward to carry on the traditions of public service?

Mr. Maclennan: The hon. Lady has a good point. The tradition of public service will be sustained, and the Bill will do nothing to stop that.

The Leader of the House was right to emphasise that although the Bill will not give us an ideal upper House, it will give us a better and more effective House than the present one. [HON. MEMBERS: "How?"] I will explain how. Viscount Thurso is a hereditary peer who comes from the part of the country that I have the honour to represent. His grandfather was the Member of Parliament for that constituency. He has said, in contemplation of his job in the House of Lords, that he puts a great deal of time and effort into it and into the policies that he wants to see promoted there. He finds it frustrating that, because the upper House lacks legitimacy, its most careful and deliberate views are inevitably given second rank to the views of this House if there is a conflict.

It is baffling to those who sit in the House of Lords and try to make the views of that House carry that, ultimately, they can be told on a matter of great controversy, such as the Scottish student fees, which divided the two Houses, because they are not elected and are merely hereditary, their views will have to be overturned. If one seeks genuinely to create a strong second Chamber to hold the Executive to account, one must take account of that criticism and recognise that the principle of election will be essential if that Chamber's power is to be strengthened.

Among the most vocal and persuasive of those arguing that case in the upper House are hereditary peers who recognise, as have some distinguished Members of Parliament of all parties, that the time has come for the electoral principle to be enshrined at the centre of our constitution. Having taken the step that we have, we have advanced the process in deliberate fashion to the point where we will certainly get there. A dynamic force has been released that will result in the second phase being much more in accord with the experience of second Chambers in other countries.

Mr. Grieve: Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that, if hereditary peers believe that further reform is needed, it would have been appropriate for the Bill to come into operation at the conclusion of this Parliament? That would have sealed the fate of the hereditary peers but deferred it, enabling them to participate in the process of formulating an elected second Chamber.

Mr. Maclennan: No, I do not agree, because there are many ways in which the second Chamber could be constructed to meet the democratic principle. Many arguments can and will be advanced about the shape of the second Chamber, the nature of its constituencies, its precise powers, and whether it can second-guess the House of Commons. All those matters do not directly follow from the Bill, but the dominant presence of the hereditary peers in the upper House greatly complicates the deliberations on them. Undue weight is given to a section of the public that owes its presence in our legislature to an accident of birth. That does not make sense. Debates about reform have in the past fallen at that hurdle.

We may feel a certain nostalgia for such distinguished public servants as those members of the Cecil family and other families to whom I alluded, when their automatic occupation of the red Benches comes to an end, but we will also rejoice at the prospect of an upper House that will be a more effective and efficient participant in the democratic process, capable of performing roles that could never have been contemplated for a House dominated by hereditary peers.

The upper House will, for example, be able to scrutinise the prerogative powers of the Crown exercised in treaty making. As of right, I believe, the legislature ought to be able to do that, but it has not been done and could not have been done by an upper House as currently structured.

It would not be possible to give to a House dominated by hereditary peers powers over subordinate legislation, but it would be reasonable for those in a reformed upper House to enjoy those powers if we are to extend the effectiveness of our democratic scrutiny of legislation.

I congratulate the Government on taking this important step, and taking it early in this Parliament. It is perfectly timely. It has gone ahead with an eye to making it possible

[Mr. Maclennan]

to proceed to the next stage of reform even within the lifetime of this Parliament if, as may be thought desirable, there is a consensus about the second phase; but if there is no consensus to enable the enactment of the second phase to take place by agreement—there should be agreement, if at all possible—at least proposals can be made that can be ratified either in a referendum or in a general election following the proposals' publication.

This is a typically British, incremental approach to reform, but at least it is a deliberate approach, one that has been thought out and one that, unlike previous attempts, can and will work.

7.27 pm

Mr. Gerry Steinberg (City of Durham): I am delighted to be here on a day that I regard as historic, to fulfil the pledge that I gave my constituents at the general election by implementing the Government's manifesto commitment, on which all Labour Members fought.

The manifesto stated:

"The House of Lords must be reformed. As an initial, self-contained reform, not dependent on further reform in the future, the right of hereditary peers to sit and vote in the House of Lords will end by statute. This will be the first step in a process of reform to make the House of Lords more democratic and representative. The legislative powers of the House of Lords will remain unaltered.

The system of appointment of life peers to the House of Lords will be reviewed. Our objective will be to ensure that over time, party appointees as life peers more accurately reflect the proportion of votes cast at the previous general election. We are committed to maintaining an independent cross-bench presence of life peers. No one political party should seek a majority in the House of Lords.

A committee of both Houses of Parliament will be appointed to undertake a wide-ranging review of possible further change and then to bring forward proposals for reform."

That is what we promised and that is what has been delivered.

The Third Reading of the Bill moves us a giant step towards fulfilling the objectives and keeping the manifesto commitment. It is the first step in the essential modernisation process.

Mr. Tyrie: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Steinberg: I have only just started, but I will.

Mr. Tyrie: If we have a vote on the Weatherill amendment, will the hon. Gentleman vote against it, on the grounds that it diverges from the manifesto pledge to which he is clearly so deeply attached?

Mr. Steinberg: If that occurs, I will decide at the time. I will probably follow the party Whip.

The reform, which is on the point of enactment, is long overdue. It will ensure that Parliament is ready for the 21st century. We are not abolishing hereditary peers, as some have tried to imply, but simply their automatic right to vote in Parliament—a right derived only from the accident of birth. It is indefensible that people whose only claim is of birth should be able to legislate in a democracy. I am completely amazed that anyone can defend that.

On reflection, perhaps it only almost amazes me. It is no wonder that the Conservatives want to keep the status quo. That historic process has given the Conservative party a built-in majority. In the House of Lords, the Conservatives outnumber Labour by nearly 3:1. As we have seen over the years, they do not hesitate to use their majority to try to pervert the course of democracy. Recent examples include the banning of handguns following the Dunblane tragedy. The whole country wanted to get rid of handguns, but not that lot sitting at the opposite side of this building.

More recently, the minimum wage—a manifesto commitment for which millions of people voted at the general election—passed through this House, but was not supported by the House of Lords.

The most recent challenge—on the European Parliamentary Elections Act 1999—demonstrated that the House of Lords had deliberately set out to undermine the authority of a Government elected with a huge popular mandate. That action led to the use of the Parliament Act 1911 for only the second time in 50 years—and only 20 months into a Labour Government. We can see what the attitude of the House of Lords was from the beginning. Within 20 months they took action to try to stifle legislation coming from the Labour Government.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: The hon. Gentleman is clearly very concerned about challenges to this House from the other place. Could he tell us what will happen when this Bill goes through and the other place is reformed? Does he expect that the other place will always follow the line of this House, or does he expect it to challenge this House in the future?

Mr. Steinberg: If the hon. Gentleman listens to my speech, I will make that clear later. In the previous Session, even though the Conservatives had just lost a general election overwhelmingly, they were able to defeat the Labour Government 33 times by using their hereditary peers. Suppose the situation had been reversed, and Labour had had three times as many peers as the Conservatives. Is it possible to imagine the Conservatives allowing the situation to persist for 18 years? Would Mrs. Thatcher have accepted such a situation? She could not even accept that the Greater London council, carrying out its democratic mandate, should be allowed to continue. We all know what happened to the GLC, because it became a thorn in Mrs. Thatcher's side.

Mr. Grieve: The hon. Gentleman seems to be confused. He said that the Parliament Act 1911 had to be used 20 months into this Government, but it did not. The last time that the Parliament Act had to be invoked was by a Conservative Government who were seeking to get their legislation past the House of Lords. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that most of the remarks he has just made are complete nonsense?

Mr. Steinberg: I am not confused. I may be wrong and I apologise to the House if I am, but I seem to remember that the Parliament Act was used recently, and I was here when the Parliament Act was used to get through the War Crimes Act 1991.

We do not want to remove the ability of the House of Lords to ask the Government to think again, and Labour will not have an overall majority.

The hereditary system is not only undemocratic: it is unrepresentative. I am sure that the statistics have been cited many times during our debates, but can anyone really argue that the hereditary peers are representative when 45 per cent. of them went to Eton; when, of the 635 sitting in the House of Lords, only 16 are women; when 42 per cent. had careers in the armed forces; when 60 per cent. claim land management and farming as their occupation; and when only two—a staggering 0.31 per cent—are from ethnic minorities? Is that truly representative of the people of this country? I am sure it is not.

Many attempts have been made to reform the House of Lords—in 1911, 1917, 1948 and 1967. In all those attempts, the hereditary principle was not felt to be credible or legitimate, but all of them failed because of the smokescreen put up about what should be put in its place. Now we have a Government who will not be put off. The Tories have argued that we should do nothing until we have a total package—and we have heard that argument again today. They realise that that approach is a tried and tested formula for doing nothing and safeguarding their built-in, gerrymandering majority, which will continue to thwart Governments—as long as they are not Tory Governments.

The fact that the Tories now argue that we should do this or that gives rise to the question of why they failed to tackle this unrepresentative and undemocratic body in their 18 years in Government. Eighteen years of inaction speak louder than the weasel words that we have heard from the Opposition in the past few weeks. The Conservatives used the hereditary peers to force through unpopular measures such as the poll tax and rail privatisation. They need only 37 per cent. of their peers to vote to defeat 100 per cent. of the Government's vote. No wonder they want to keep the hereditary peers.

The Tories do not want to remove hereditary peers from Parliament because their presence means that, whoever wins the general election, the Tories stay in power in one of the Houses of Parliament, while a Labour Government get through only the legislation that the Conservative hereditary peers allow.

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): How many of the hon. Gentleman's constituents go to Scottish universities and are grateful to the other place for overturning Government legislation that would have charged £1,000 extra in fees to those of his constituents attending Scottish universities?

Mr. Steinberg: I have not got a clue. I will write to the hon. Gentleman—as the response goes.

The 1997 Conservative general election campaign guide said that the hereditary principle was

"An asset to Democracy. Hereditary peers bring colour, tradition, youth and a wealth of experience to Parliament. They are a link to the customs and traditions that formed and shaped this country . . . It is important to defend the hereditary principle in its own right."

The Conservative manifesto contained three lines on the subject, opposing our manifesto pledge. It said that the Tories

"would oppose change for change's sake".

That is hardly an indication of a commitment to democratic reform. If the Tories had won the general election, we would have had almost 25 years—a quarter of a century—of a Tory Government with no desire or willingness to reform the House of Lords.

The Tories' arguments have lacked any credibility. I was not surprised to learn that a recent poll found that 49 per cent. of Tory Members of Parliament did not want any change at all. Recent history has shown that the hereditary peerage is incapable of changing—and unwilling to change—to reflect the attitudes of society. The most recent proof of that was found in the results of the general election, when an estimated 5 million voters switched directly from the Tories to the new Labour Government. In addition, two Members of the Conservative party crossed the Floor to the Labour Benches. How many Tory peers said that they could not stand the stench of Tory sleaze, the little Englander mentality or the bankrupt policies of the Conservative party? None.

The Labour party gained more than 13.5 million votes in the election. With only 17 hereditary peers, Labour's representation in the House of Lords is some 797,000 votes to one hereditary peer. The Tories polled 5.9 million votes and have 300 hereditary peers, bringing their representation in another place to 32,000 votes to one hereditary peer. That is hardly a fair reflection of electoral support.

Mr. Fraser: For the sake of clarification, would the hon. Gentleman tell us the source of the poll on Conservative voters to which he has referred, and who conducted it? I should be happy if he would write to me on that point.

Mr. Steinberg: I will write to the hon. Gentleman.

The people would not stand for a House of Commons that had such an in-built bias. Why should we tolerate it in the House of Lords? The Government are determined to implement reform before the millennium to make sure that the principle of democracy—not birth, not privilege—should be our driving force. There will be wide-ranging consultation and debate. The argument that the timetable for that process is open-ended is spurious. The royal commission's terms of reference are explicit:

"Having regard to the need to maintain the position of the House of Commons as the pre-eminent Chamber of Parliament and taking particular account of the present nature of the constitutional settlement, including the newly devolved institutions, the impact of the Human Rights Act and developing relations with the European Union:

To consider and make recommendations on the role and functions of a second chamber: and

To make recommendations on the method or combination of methods of composition required to constitute the second Chamber fit for that role and those functions.

To report by 31 December 1999."

That is clear.

A tight timetable will enable the commission's recommendations to be completed in sufficient time for the Government to respond before the next general election. That shows the Government's resolve that there will be full reform of the second Chamber.

Sir Nicholas Lyell (North-East Bedfordshire): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Steinberg: I will give way to the right hon. and learned Gentleman because he will make a sensible intervention.

Sir Nicholas Lyell: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman, and I have listened carefully to his argument.

[Sir Nicholas Lyell]

If the Bill is enacted in its present form, the House of Lords will be wholly nominated. Does he believe that that is democratic?

Mr. Steinberg: No, that will not be fully democratic, and I hope that once the commission has reported and the necessary consultations have taken place, there will be a democratic second Chamber. My own view is that it should be wholly elected. However, a transitional Chamber is better than what we have now.

It would be wrong at this stage to debate the pros and cons of the various options. There will be plenty of time for that in future. Whether the Chamber is directly elected, or constructed, perhaps, by having elected regional assemblies elect it on the basis of proportions of their political make-up, the most important point is that whatever the royal commission comes up with cannot be worse than the existing House of Lords. Whatever it is, it will be a damn sight better. I would go so far as to say that to have no second Chamber at all would be better than having our current system. I do not advocate scrapping the second Chamber, but it would be better than having the current House of Lords.

The House of Lords suffers a lack of credibility that makes the use of its powers almost impossible. On the occasions on which that power is used, it is deeply offensive in a democracy. Even a transitional House will be more representative, more balanced, more modern and fairer than the existing House of Lords.

There is no intention to change, reduce or emasculate the legislative powers of the House of Lords. It will still be able to act as a check on the Executive and on the House of Commons, asking both to think again. The most important point is that it will not be a biased, Conservative Chamber—a Chamber which has in the past been prepared to act as a check only on Labour legislation, and which has supported Conservative laws no matter how dreadful they have been.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Steinberg: No, I have given way enough, especially to you.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman has not given way at all to me. He must use the correct parliamentary language.

Mr. Steinberg: I am sorry, Mr. Deputy Speaker. To be frank, the hon. Member for Aldershot (Mr. Howarth) gets under my skin and makes me forget proper parliamentary language.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister will be the first holder of his office to reduce, voluntarily, his own powers of patronage. He will give up his current right to nominate life peers, retaining the ability to influence only nominations from his own party. The Conservatives have been happy to continue with a Chamber dominated by inheritance and by new Tory patronage.

The Government have a mandate to modernise, and we are modernising schools, hospitals, the criminal justice system, economic institutions and our welfare system. Part of the drive for renewal is the modernisation of the democratic framework of our country. We are not doing that for its own sake, but to make Parliament better. The United Kingdom needs a second Chamber that is representative of the people of the UK. The transitional House will be better than the one we have now. The royal commission has been asked to ensure that we will ultimately have a second Chamber fit for a new millennium.

Everything that I have said today has been said before in the past few weeks. It has also all been said before since 1911—on many, many occasions. The Bill leaves the Commons in the same shape in which it started. Now the Lords can have their say. It will be interesting to see whether they accept the will of the House of Commons and of the people. If they do not, they will show how out of touch they really are.

7.46 pm

Sir Nicholas Lyell (North-East Bedfordshire): I apologise to the President of the Council and my hon. Friend the Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) for being unable to be here for their opening speeches.

It is our tradition in Third Reading speeches to discuss what is in the Bill, not what is not in it. I must say that that is a bleak prospect. Although we heard useful debates in Committee on the Bill, the fact remains that the Bill is at present nothing more than an act of destruction. It destroys finally what was for 500 years—until 1963—the primary foundation of the second Chamber in Britain.

I do not complain about that, because I do not seek to support the hereditary principle as the long-term basis for the House of Lords. I do, however, complain that the Bill puts nothing in place of the existing House. As the Bill leaves the House of Commons, it leaves the future House of Lords an entirely nominated body, albeit mildly but usefully spiced by the corporatism—the only corporatism that we have at present—of the Law Lords and the bishops.

The original justification for the hereditary principle in the upper House was that it represented the power bases of the land—as it genuinely did for many hundreds of years. Initially, peerages were not hereditary. The early monarchs summoned the great power bases of the land by sending out spies to all corners of the kingdom to find out who were the great men. Those men were then invited to attend the monarch's councils. Monarchs gained the benefit of the support—or at least the views—of the powerful, thus bolstering their royal positions.

The obtaining of the views of those who represent the power bases is today confined to a wholly nominated system. It is worth reflecting that we abolished rotten boroughs in 1832 because they were wholly nominated by powerful individuals. The Bill leaves something of a vacuum, and that requires us to focus on two points essential to the future working of an effective upper House—the composition of the Chamber pending stage 2, and what the royal commission should propose for that stage.

Angela Smith: The right hon. and learned Gentleman seems to be complaining that once hereditary peers are

removed, the only peers remaining will be those who were nominated. Does he not accept that all hereditary peerages are rooted in a nominated system?

Sir Nicholas Lyell: The point about hereditary peerages is that they represented a power base. The only power base represented by currently nominated peers is that of the Prime Minister, or of the current parties. The nominated peers have no democratic legitimacy, a fact that the hon. Member for City of Durham (Mr. Steinberg) was good enough to recognise.

During our earlier debates, I set out in detail my views on the proper balance of the upper House at stage 2: partly nominated, as it now is; partly corporate, with some extension to the groups who find representation currently confined to the law and the Church; and partly elected for a substantial term on a rolling basis. That way, one can hope to recreate an upper House that has diversity, independence and a basis of legitimacy. I suspect that that proposal will gather a good deal of support in the coming months and years. Those who are elected must be elected for a substantial term and on a rolling basis, otherwise they will lack the essential ingredient of independence.

That is for the future, however. The Bill in its present form demands that we consider further how, in the interim, to recreate what is being sacrificed on the altar of modernisation—the huge spectrum of experience and independence which, as Labour Members have been good enough to recognise, can still be found among the ranks of hereditary peers. The answer is readily to hand, for it is what the Government themselves, the Opposition and the whole country have been discussing over the past 20 months, first behind the scenes and then, since the Cranborne debacle and the Weatherill amendment, quite openly: that is, the proposal to keep at least 91—or perhaps at most 91; certainly approximately 91—hereditary peers in the interim. That has to be a sensible approach, because it is those 91 hereditary peers—in fact, it is rather more than 91, as I shall explain in a moment—who in practice do a significant amount of the day-to-day work in the upper House.

In my earlier speeches, based on research through the House of Commons Library, the careful work by David Shell in his book on the House of Lords in 1989 and some welcome further research by a body calling itself Common Sense for Lords Reform, which has recently circulated a briefing to all hon. Members, I have shown that the actual number of hereditary peers who still play a significant role in the workings of the upper House is not a mere 91, but is between 100 and 200. If it is ever possible to persuade any Member of this Chamber of anything, I should like to persuade Ministers that there is merit in considering increasing the 91 to a somewhat higher number for the interim period.

If Ministers are anxious that that might lead to the Government being voted down, a quick reckoning will show that that is not at all likely. On the basis of 91 or of 150 hereditary peers remaining, the Government would be defeated in the upper House only in circumstances where they had lost the argument—where they were voted against, not only by the Conservatives, but by the Cross Benchers as well. If the Government have lost the argument, it is right that they should be checked, at least to the extent that the upper House is entitled to check them. To identify those 100 or 200 hereditary peers and to permit them to continue to play an active role would keep the House of Lords alive and help to restore some of the Government's lost reputation—a reputation that they were busy losing until they began to consider the Cranborne amendment.

Constitutional reform is not the perquisite of any one party, however large its majority after a particular general election. Although theoretically possible, it seems highly unlikely that we shall actually see legislation that details the future composition of the upper House during the lifetime of this Parliament. The royal commission reports at end of this year—a swift achievement indeed, if it meets that deadline—and consultation on its proposals or the options it puts forward will need to be exceptionally snappy during the millennium year if a Bill is to be drafted in time for the 2000-01 Session, which must be done in order to encompass the next general election. One does not have to be a cynic to doubt whether any Government are particularly likely to embark on such major constitutional reform in the final year of a Parliament.

The Bill as it stands leaves the upper House as little more than a destructive totem to Labour's manifesto pledges. Like so many of the Government's policies, their pledge on the House of Lords was shown to have been ill thought through at the outset. What is to come after the fulfilment of that pledge appears to have remained a vacuum in the Labour mind until public outcry demanded that the matter be given further thought. However, there is hope of redemption, since what the Government—somewhat shamed by the reaction of thoughtful commentators—are now, belatedly, thinking is based on the Cranborne-Weatherill proposals, on which the Government can build and I hope will build. That will not threaten their power, for the current Government, like most Governments, lose in the Lords only when they have lost the argument and are unable to persuade both the Conservative peers and the Cross Benchers of their case. The hon. Member for Basildon (Angela Smith) shakes her head, but she has not examined the position. On the European Parliamentary Elections Bill, the Government were defeated time and again because they could never persuade the Cross Benchers of their case.

Let us look ahead a few months, to the time when the Bill returns to us from another place. Let us hope that it contains, at that stage, clear provisions to preserve for the interim as much as possible—and almost everything is possible—of all that is still best in the current House of Lords. What is kept in being by the acceptance of the Weatherill amendment, or some similar amendment, will inevitably have been vitrified, and the position can be preserved for only a limited period—a few years—because there will be no opportunity for fresh blood to be introduced through the hereditary system, although some fresh blood can be introduced through the nominated system. It is to be hoped that, in the next Parliament, if not in this one, stage 2 can be agreed and we can have proper constitutional reform.

As I said, one does not have to be a cynic to wonder whether matters will proceed so quickly as to achieve reform even in the next Parliament. However, if we can make progress by keeping a sensibly active House of Lords in the interim and making the best use of the existing hereditary peers who play a full and constructive role, and if we can keep up the impetus to get stage 2—I am glad that the hon. Member for City of Durham is keen on this—we shall have moved from an unpromising

[Sir Nicholas Lyell]

If the Bill is enacted in its present form, the House of Lords will be wholly nominated. Does he believe that that is democratic?

Mr. Steinberg: No, that will not be fully democratic, and I hope that once the commission has reported and the necessary consultations have taken place, there will be a democratic second Chamber. My own view is that it should be wholly elected. However, a transitional Chamber is better than what we have now.

It would be wrong at this stage to debate the pros and cons of the various options. There will be plenty of time for that in future. Whether the Chamber is directly elected, or constructed, perhaps, by having elected regional assemblies elect it on the basis of proportions of their political make-up, the most important point is that whatever the royal commission comes up with cannot be worse than the existing House of Lords. Whatever it is, it will be a damn sight better. I would go so far as to say that to have no second Chamber at all would be better than having our current system. I do not advocate scrapping the second Chamber, but it would be better than having the current House of Lords.

The House of Lords suffers a lack of credibility that makes the use of its powers almost impossible. On the occasions on which that power is used, it is deeply offensive in a democracy. Even a transitional House will be more representative, more balanced, more modern and fairer than the existing House of Lords.

There is no intention to change, reduce or emasculate the legislative powers of the House of Lords. It will still be able to act as a check on the Executive and on the House of Commons, asking both to think again. The most important point is that it will not be a biased, Conservative Chamber—a Chamber which has in the past been prepared to act as a check only on Labour legislation, and which has supported Conservative laws no matter how dreadful they have been.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Steinberg: No, I have given way enough, especially to you.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman has not given way at all to me. He must use the correct parliamentary language.

Mr. Steinberg: I am sorry, Mr. Deputy Speaker. To be frank, the hon. Member for Aldershot (Mr. Howarth) gets under my skin and makes me forget proper parliamentary language.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister will be the first holder of his office to reduce, voluntarily, his own powers of patronage. He will give up his current right to nominate life peers, retaining the ability to influence only nominations from his own party. The Conservatives have been happy to continue with a Chamber dominated by inheritance and by new Tory patronage.

The Government have a mandate to modernise, and we are modernising schools, hospitals, the criminal justice system, economic institutions and our welfare system. Part of the drive for renewal is the modernisation of the democratic framework of our country. We are not doing that for its own sake, but to make Parliament better. The United Kingdom needs a second Chamber that is representative of the people of the UK. The transitional House will be better than the one we have now. The royal commission has been asked to ensure that we will ultimately have a second Chamber fit for a new millennium.

Everything that I have said today has been said before in the past few weeks. It has also all been said before since 1911—on many, many occasions. The Bill leaves the Commons in the same shape in which it started. Now the Lords can have their say. It will be interesting to see whether they accept the will of the House of Commons and of the people. If they do not, they will show how out of touch they really are.

7.46 pm

Sir Nicholas Lyell (North-East Bedfordshire): I apologise to the President of the Council and my hon. Friend the Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) for being unable to be here for their opening speeches.

It is our tradition in Third Reading speeches to discuss what is in the Bill, not what is not in it. I must say that that is a bleak prospect. Although we heard useful debates in Committee on the Bill, the fact remains that the Bill is at present nothing more than an act of destruction. It destroys finally what was for 500 years—until 1963—the primary foundation of the second Chamber in Britain.

I do not complain about that, because I do not seek to support the hereditary principle as the long-term basis for the House of Lords. I do, however, complain that the Bill puts nothing in place of the existing House. As the Bill leaves the House of Commons, it leaves the future House of Lords an entirely nominated body, albeit mildly but usefully spiced by the corporatism—the only corporatism that we have at present—of the Law Lords and the bishops.

The original justification for the hereditary principle in the upper House was that it represented the power bases of the land—as it genuinely did for many hundreds of years. Initially, peerages were not hereditary. The early monarchs summoned the great power bases of the land by sending out spies to all corners of the kingdom to find out who were the great men. Those men were then invited to attend the monarch's councils. Monarchs gained the benefit of the support—or at least the views—of the powerful, thus bolstering their royal positions.

The obtaining of the views of those who represent the power bases is today confined to a wholly nominated system. It is worth reflecting that we abolished rotten boroughs in 1832 because they were wholly nominated by powerful individuals. The Bill leaves something of a vacuum, and that requires us to focus on two points essential to the future working of an effective upper House—the composition of the Chamber pending stage 2, and what the royal commission should propose for that stage.

Angela Smith: The right hon. and learned Gentleman seems to be complaining that once hereditary peers are

removed, the only peers remaining will be those who were nominated. Does he not accept that all hereditary peerages are rooted in a nominated system?

Sir Nicholas Lyell: The point about hereditary peerages is that they represented a power base. The only power base represented by currently nominated peers is that of the Prime Minister, or of the current parties. The nominated peers have no democratic legitimacy, a fact that the hon. Member for City of Durham (Mr. Steinberg) was good enough to recognise.

During our earlier debates, I set out in detail my views on the proper balance of the upper House at stage 2: partly nominated, as it now is; partly corporate, with some extension to the groups who find representation currently confined to the law and the Church; and partly elected for a substantial term on a rolling basis. That way, one can hope to recreate an upper House that has diversity, independence and a basis of legitimacy. I suspect that that proposal will gather a good deal of support in the coming months and years. Those who are elected must be elected for a substantial term and on a rolling basis, otherwise they will lack the essential ingredient of independence.

That is for the future, however. The Bill in its present form demands that we consider further how, in the interim, to recreate what is being sacrificed on the altar of modernisation—the huge spectrum of experience and independence which, as Labour Members have been good enough to recognise, can still be found among the ranks of hereditary peers. The answer is readily to hand, for it is what the Government themselves, the Opposition and the whole country have been discussing over the past 20 months, first behind the scenes and then, since the Cranborne debacle and the Weatherill amendment, quite openly: that is, the proposal to keep at least 91—or perhaps at most 91; certainly approximately 91—hereditary peers in the interim. That has to be a sensible approach, because it is those 91 hereditary peers—in fact, it is rather more than 91, as I shall explain in a moment—who in practice do a significant amount of the day-to-day work in the upper House.

In my earlier speeches, based on research through the House of Commons Library, the careful work by David Shell in his book on the House of Lords in 1989 and some welcome further research by a body calling itself Common Sense for Lords Reform, which has recently circulated a briefing to all hon. Members, I have shown that the actual number of hereditary peers who still play a significant role in the workings of the upper House is not a mere 91, but is between 100 and 200. If it is ever possible to persuade any Member of this Chamber of anything, I should like to persuade Ministers that there is merit in considering increasing the 91 to a somewhat higher number for the interim period.

If Ministers are anxious that that might lead to the Government being voted down, a quick reckoning will show that that is not at all likely. On the basis of 91 or of 150 hereditary peers remaining, the Government would be defeated in the upper House only in circumstances where they had lost the argument—where they were voted against, not only by the Conservatives, but by the Cross Benchers as well. If the Government have lost the argument, it is right that they should be checked, at least to the extent that the upper House is entitled to check them. To identify those 100 or 200 hereditary peers and to permit them to continue to play an active role would keep the House of Lords alive and help to restore some of the Government's lost reputation—a reputation that they were busy losing until they began to consider the Cranborne amendment.

Constitutional reform is not the perquisite of any one party, however large its majority after a particular general election. Although theoretically possible, it seems highly unlikely that we shall actually see legislation that details the future composition of the upper House during the lifetime of this Parliament. The royal commission reports at end of this year—a swift achievement indeed, if it meets that deadline—and consultation on its proposals or the options it puts forward will need to be exceptionally snappy during the millennium year if a Bill is to be drafted in time for the 2000-01 Session, which must be done in order to encompass the next general election. One does not have to be a cynic to doubt whether any Government are particularly likely to embark on such major constitutional reform in the final year of a Parliament.

The Bill as it stands leaves the upper House as little more than a destructive totem to Labour's manifesto pledges. Like so many of the Government's policies, their pledge on the House of Lords was shown to have been ill thought through at the outset. What is to come after the fulfilment of that pledge appears to have remained a vacuum in the Labour mind until public outcry demanded that the matter be given further thought. However, there is hope of redemption, since what the Government—somewhat shamed by the reaction of thoughtful commentators—are now, belatedly, thinking is based on the Cranborne-Weatherill proposals, on which the Government can build and I hope will build. That will not threaten their power, for the current Government, like most Governments, lose in the Lords only when they have lost the argument and are unable to persuade both the Conservative peers and the Cross Benchers of their case. The hon. Member for Basildon (Angela Smith) shakes her head, but she has not examined the position. On the European Parliamentary Elections Bill, the Government were defeated time and again because they could never persuade the Cross Benchers of their case.

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beginning to the right way in which to carry out constitutional reform in this country, which is not through acts of destruction and revolution, but through evolution.

7.58 pm

Mr. Mark Fisher (Stoke-on-Trent, Central): Like many people, I welcome the Bill—democrats have been dreaming of it and waiting for it for a century. It a great credit to the Government that they have broken a parliamentary taboo by introducing the Bill. Hon. Members on both sides of the House have enumerated the attempts made by other Governments which have failed, rather weakly and feebly. As my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House said, the Government are doing something momentous in this Bill: we are rethinking Parliament, rebalancing the two Houses and rebuilding our political constitution. That effort goes to the heart of why we are Members of Parliament—what we do and what we want to do in this place.

As Members on both sides of the House have said, the Bill is only a start. It destroys one aspect of the second Chamber that is undemocratic—the hereditary principle—but does not touch the other aspect of the second Chamber that many of us find totally unacceptable, which is that it is a nominated Chamber. The right hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Mr. Maclennan) and the right hon. and learned Member for North–East Bedfordshire (Sir N. Lyell) emphasised that nominated aspect. The right hon. and learned Gentleman referred to the rotten boroughs as being a different source of nomination, but—

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I rise to seek your advice about a written answer that I received from the Chancellor today. I asked him on 10 March whether he had received, had knowledge of or discussed a Select Committee report on the taxing of child benefit—either a draft or the eventual report—prior to its publication. In answer, the Chancellor said:

"A preliminary draft of a report was given to my Parliamentary Private Secretary, but not the final report."

That is surely a further abuse of the processes of this House.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. It is impossible for me to deal with a point of order if I cannot hear it.

Mr. Duncan Smith: Mr. Deputy Speaker, given the huge import of that written answer—which displays the Government's total disregard of the House and of the public whom these processes serve—will you now adjourn the House in order to allow the Chancellor time to come to the Chamber and make a statement about exactly what he had to do with the leaking of that report?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: That information is sufficient to allow me to deal with that point of order. Select Committees have procedures laid down for investigating such matters and, if things are as the hon. Gentleman says, the Committee concerned will undoubtedly follow the normal procedures. In any case, it is not a matter for the Chair, and it certainly should not disrupt this evening's important debate.

Sir Brian Mawhinney (North-West Cambridgeshire): Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I have dealt with the point of order. We shall now continue with the important debate before the House. I call Mr. Fisher.

Mr. Fisher: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Sir Brian Mawhinney: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Is it a separate point of order?

Sir Brian Mawhinney: It is a separate, but related, point of order.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I have dealt with the matter for this evening. I call Mr. Fisher.

Mr. Fisher: I shall resume my separate, but related, speech. Here was I thinking that members of the shadow Cabinet could not wait to hear my views on the constitution.

Angela Smith: Has my hon. Friend noticed that, further to that point of order—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I have dealt with the point of order for hon. Members on both sides of the House.

Mr. Fisher: As I was saying, I think all hon. Members hope that the Bill will mark the beginning of the process that takes us towards a full and modern democracy. That process has two parts: the transitional House, to which the hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) referred; and the royal commission. We must also consider how the two parts relate to each other.

The Leader of the House talked today about the transitional House. I agree with the right hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Mr. Maclennan) that the transitional House will be better for several reasons—some of which he identified—not least because it will be a smaller House. The second Chamber has swollen to nearly 1,200 Members in the past 50 years. That does not make it an effective Chamber and, at the very least, this legislation—pace the Weatherill amendment—will reduce its size by more than half, to 503 Members.

I believe that the transitional House will be a better Chamber. However, for those hon. Members who, like me, want to see an elected second Chamber, it will remain totally unsatisfactory. I hope that, in responding to the debate, the Minister will elaborate slightly on the remarks of the Leader of the House about the transitional House and make it clear that the Government would share a general democratic unhappiness if the second Chamber—which is a transitional and interim Chamber—were to be permanent.

The Leader of the House mentioned the virtues of life peers, their independence on the Cross Benches, their diversity and the expertise and excellence that they bring to the second Chamber—all of which is indisputable. However, the fact remains that they are not accountable to or representative of anybody and, in that sense, they cannot play a permanent and constructive role in our democracy—however expert they are and however great a contribution they make.

Dr. Fox: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the logic of that point means that it would be unacceptable for any political party to go to the next general election without a clearly defined policy on what stage 2 should be if we have not already achieved it at that point?

Mr. Fisher: I am sure that that will be the case. The royal commission will report at the end of the year and we will then begin a major debate. I hope that the House—perhaps the Minister will help us when he responds to the debate—will understand the role of the royal commission and its relationship to the Government's responsibilities. It seems to me that it is the responsibility of the Government—and subsequently of the House—to decide the principles upon which both the remit and the membership of the second Chamber will be based. It is not for the royal commission—a group of people—to consider fundamental constitutional issues. The royal commission should act as a gathering house for all views and should comment intelligently on the nuances of different approaches, their implications and what their implementation would mean.

We are dealing with a huge constitutional change that we have not addressed in this Chamber this century. The Government must lay down the principles. It is for the royal commission to do the decorative work and for the Government to establish the political principles. Although we do not expect the Government to make those principles clear tonight, I hope that the Minister will agree that there is a distinction between the Government's responsibilities and the opportunities that are open to the royal commission. There is a rather important distinction between those two things, and I hope that the Minister will express his views about it tonight.

I believe that this is a good Bill in that it destroys something that is no longer acceptable or relevant in our democracy: the hereditary principle. However, as other hon. Members have said, it is essentially a destructive Bill: it destroys something that is unacceptable but replaces it only with a vacuum or by implication. That is acceptable only in a transitional and interim sense.

Unspoken in the debate so far is the future of this Bill to which we are giving a Third Reading tonight. The strong likelihood of the Weatherill amendment overshadows our debate. If that is accepted, this Bill will go to the other place and return a completely different Bill: hardly a word will remain the same. Clauses 1, 2 and 4 will have to be completely deleted and rewritten. If the Weatherill amendment is accepted, we will see a wholly separate Bill. It was right to initiate debate in the House. We have had six or seven days of interesting debate, and it is to the Government's credit that they have given us that opportunity and are driving the legislation through. However, we must recognise that, when the Bill returns to this place following the Lords' scrutiny, it will be very different and we shall have to consider it afresh.

8.9 pm

Mr. Michael Fallon (Sevenoaks): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central (Mr. Fisher). If I may say so, I should have thought that he was an example of an hereditary politician whose family did not have an in-built majority, because they have been represented on both sides of the House.

The House has today received reports of the institutionalised shortcomings, at the very least, of one wholly appointed body nominated by politicians and heard much talk of the need for more democracy and accountability and an independent element in the European Commission. I find it ironic that, on the very same day, we shall create one half of a Parliament that will be wholly appointed and consist only of a Prime Minister's placemen and nominees. The Bill will turn the second Chamber into a quango or commission.

The Bill is short, but extremely dangerous. It will expel 40 per cent. of the membership of the Houses of Parliament without proposing how a future Chamber might be reformed or committing the Government to carrying through that reform. Hon. Members who have already spoken have referred to that proposal as the stage 1 House, the temporary House or the transitional House, but the only circumstances in which we might have been prepared to consider a Bill that set up a temporary House would have been those in which there was at least a commitment to the legislation that would follow.

The Government do not even do us the courtesy of including in the Bill a preamble that would set out that commitment. Previous Bills did. The ill-fated Parliament (No. 2) Bill in 1968 had a preamble and the Parliament Act 1911 had the now-famous preamble that has so often been quoted in our debates. When the Minister winds up, will he tell us—this point was raised about the Government of India legislation in the 1930s—whether the fact that the Bill has no preamble means that the Government regard the preamble to the 1911 Act as still valid? Is that why the Bill has no preamble?

There is no commitment in clause 4, where it could be enshrined, which deals with the commencement and transitional provisions. All we have to rely on is the curious sentence in the White Paper that states:

> "If there is consensus, the Government will make every effort to ensure that the second stage of reform has been approved by Parliament before the next election."

First, those are vague, heavily qualified words. No Minister has explained what consensus would be required before that commitment was deemed to be met. Secondly, the words commit the Government only to best endeavours; they make no firm commitment to introduce proposals. Thirdly, there is no commitment in that sentence to legislation. All it suggests is that the Government's proposals should be approved by Parliament. That could simply be a White Paper debate.

The House that the Bill will create is therefore one that we shall be stuck with for, I venture, at least 10 years, and perhaps 30 or 40 years. Half our legislature will be wholly appointed. It will be a permanently insecure House, and thus incapable of holding the Executive to proper account.

Dr. Stephen Ladyman (South Thanet): Have I heard the hon. Gentleman correctly? I presume that, if the Bill is so bad, and if there were ever another Conservative

[Dr. Stephen Ladyman]

Government, they would take action on it. He has therefore admitted that there will not be a Conservative Government for 40 years.

Mr. Fallon: The hon. Gentleman is trying to be a little too clever. I was suggesting that, if we take the Government's commitment at face value and if they are re-elected, we will not have a proper second Chamber, but will be stuck with the measures that we are considering tonight.

Because the Bill will set up a temporary Chamber—a House of insecurity—those nominated peers will, from November, be for ever anxious to ensure their own personal transition to any stage 2 Chamber that may result. If that is to be an elected House, they will want to be sure that, after tonight, they keep in with their Whips and central party offices. If it is to be a part-nominated House, they will be equally keen to ensure that they stay in the team. That will be an insecure House which is far less likely than the present House to hold the Government to proper account.

Dr. George Turner: I am not certain whether the hon. Gentleman is talking about what the Bill will produce or what he imagines will happen after the Bill goes to the Lords. I should have thought that, unless we changed the nominations to make them annually renewable, once people were appointed to the House they would have an independence that many an elected Member does not have.

Mr. Fallon: But that independence is limited by the knowledge that the hon. Gentleman's Government are committed to one day producing a stage 2 House of which that nominated peer may not be a Member.

The Bill could have been improved by the amendment that was so skilfully moved by my hon. Friend the Member for Epping Forest (Mrs. Laing). That would have introduced, upfront and honestly, the transitional element that was first proposed by Lord Weatherill—who is my constituent—before Christmas. That would have allowed continuity in experience of the present House, but it was voted down.

We saw the extraordinary spectacle of the hon. Member for City of Durham (Mr. Steinberg) complaining about the present unbalanced and biased membership of the House of Lords, but telling us at the beginning of his speech that he would slavishly obey the party Whip to vote in favour of the Weatherill amendment that he voted against only a couple of weeks ago. I assume that he held up that situation as a model of democracy that the second Chamber should replicate.

The Weatherill amendment would undoubtedly strengthen the Bill's overall effect, and that amendment should have been made when it was first tabled. If the amendment is made, even the 91 hereditary peers who survive will still have to weigh up their chances of election or selection in any new model that is devised. They, too, will become part of a hostage House that will be less able to use even the existing powers of the Lords properly in case they accelerate their own replacement.

Dr. Starkey: I am following the hon. Gentleman's argument, but does he agree that it seems to contain a logical inconsistency? My understanding is that he is saying that the Government are highly unlikely ever to move on from the transitional Chamber to the final Chamber, but in that case the Members of the transitional Chamber will not experience any uncertainty whatsoever and will be able to be entirely independent.

Mr. Fallon: The Government started with good intentions. They probably thought that the whole process would be a lot easier and simpler than it has turned out to be, but we are unlikely to have legislation on a stage 2 House in this Parliament, as hon. Members who have spoken before me have said. Who knows what composition the next Parliament will have? The House that the Bill will create is likely to be around for a while, but working on the knowledge that its own legitimacy is not as good as it should be and that proposals for a stage 2 House can be made.

Dr. Ladyman: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Fallon: No, I must make progress.

Our proceedings have been enlightened by two very odd speeches by the right hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson), to which I shall refer. In a number of ways, he seems to be waking up to the implications of his policies. On Second Reading, he was fretting about the glue that held the United Kingdom together. He thought that it was dissolving under the proposals for devolution, and suggested that that might provide a role for the second Chamber. In this debate, he warned us, quite bizarrely, of the dangers of gridlock if we had an elected second House. Clearly, the architect, the Lenin of new Labour, is belatedly waking up to the implications of what his Government are doing.

The Government, too, have learned far too late in the day, as these proceedings have unfolded, that we cannot ever separate the issue of composition from that of powers. We must decide, first, what the second Chamber is for and, secondly, what its proper relationship with the Commons should be. However, there is nothing in the Bill about powers. A royal commission has been set up, but the notorious chapter 7 of the White Paper suggests a series of ways in which even the existing powers should be circumscribed.

The result of all this botched reform and the Bill will be not a stronger second House, but a weaker one—this, when the Government have a huge majority and are already treating this House with contempt. The Government will probably get their Bill through later tonight, but they will no longer be able to pretend that it is part of some serious constitutional reform. On the contrary, by this one Bill, they are simply expelling hereditary peers as an act of political spite.

That is not the Conservative way of constitutional reform. Our reforms have been evolutionary, gradual. We introduced life peers alongside hereditary peers, building on what worked, going with the grain of our constitution. This Government have chosen a very different route and a fundamentally un-British way. This is a lopsided reform. It leaves the House of Lords weaker and less secure—and, even worse, it makes for a weaker Parliament.

8.22 pm

Dr. Phyllis Starkey (Milton Keynes, South-West): When my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House introduced this debate, she made the point that this is a very simple Bill. The arguments in support of the Bill are also very simple, although they have been considerably obscured by extremely lengthy debates on Second Reading and in Committee, through which I have sat.

Although the Bill is simple, it is momentous. I am surprised that Opposition Members have agreed that it is momentous. Many of them appear to think that it is quite a threatening measure; yet, although numbers swelled momentarily in the excitement over a point of order, the Opposition Benches immediately emptied once we returned to the momentous business of discussing fundamental reform of our constitution. That rather belies Conservative Members' comments; they do not really think that the measure is particularly important, and certainly cannot spare the time to participate in the debate on it.

The arguments over the Bill are extremely simple and very clear. Our lengthy debates have allowed the exploration of many interesting byways of those simple arguments. My hon. Friend the Member for Battersea (Mr. Linton) amused many of us with his extensive research on the multifarious reasons why various people had inherited peerages. I seem to remember custard powder looming fairly large in the debate as a particularly derisory reason why one should be entitled to participate in proceedings in the House of Lords.

Opposition Members have deployed several arguments. They suggested that life peers, although extremely estimable persons on the whole, were incapable as a body of carrying the business of the House of Lords unless they were stiffened by the injection of hereditary peers. There was also an interesting excursion down the byways on the position of Lord Cranborne. I am terribly grateful to hon. Members who illuminated the intricacies of the fact that one family can have two seats in the House of Lords at once by sharing the peerages among them democratically—provided, of course, that they are all men. There was also an interesting and sudden recognition among Opposition Members that perhaps peers should be paid, which seemed to escape them over 18 years in government.

We have undergone a lengthy and fascinating exploration of the proper relationship between the House of Commons and the powers of the Lords. We have debated whether there should be only one Chamber—with which I do not agree—whether the final shape of the second Chamber should be decided purely by election, by appointment, or by a mixture of the two, whether there should be regional representation and whether there should be some representation of Members of the European Parliament. The royal commission will of course explore such matters. I hope that all Members who contributed to the debate on such issues will have put their ideas in writing and sent them to the royal commission.

Opposition Members have also explored how hereditary peers somehow represent the only protection of the British people from the excessive power of the Executive. I found that idea particularly curious, since it seemed to require Opposition Members to run down hon. Members—irrespective of whether they belong to the Conservative party, the Labour party or the Liberal Democrats. If they think that we need hereditary peers to stand up to the Executive, they must believe that this House is not fulfilling its duties properly. I hope that, if that is indeed what Opposition Members feel, they will support the measures proposed by the Modernisation Committee to give hon. Members greater opportunities to hold the Executive to account. I look forward to seeing those Opposition Members who have spoken very strongly about the inability of this House to control the Executive being at the forefront of the debate on reforming this House and giving Back Benchers greater powers.

Although I have found all those arguments extremely interesting, they are largely a smokescreen. The Bill is about two or three very simple things, which I want to repeat to make clear. First, the hereditary principle in the legislature is indefensible. I think that the Conservative party agrees with that, and that that was the purport of the comments of the hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox); although he supports the hereditary principle in the monarchy, he does not support it in the legislature.

The variety of arguments expounded by Labour Members on how Members of the House of Lords are unrepresentative, and those on whether hereditary peers are competent, are irrelevant. Regardless of whether they are representative, and they are largely unrepresentative, and regardless of whether they are competent, and some are highly competent, while others are less so, it is wrong that they should be in the House of Lords by virtue of their birth, and their birth alone. It is entirely irrelevant whether they are good or bad at their job. I have not heard one single Conservative argument to gainsay the fact that the hereditary principle in the legislature is indefensible. The Bill's purpose is to get rid of that indefensible principle.

The second reason why the Bill is excellent and an improvement to our democracy is that it cannot be right to have an entrenched one-party majority in part of our Parliament. I simply need to repeat the statistics which have been quoted over and over again in these debates which illustrate that the House of Lords is interested only in defeating Governments when they are Labour Governments.

According to the Library, on average, the House of Lords has defeated the Government eight times a Session when there is a Conservative Government and 63 times a Session when there is a Labour Government. Interestingly, the number of defeats is highest soon after a general election, when the Labour Government's mandate is the clearest. There cannot be a clearer demonstration of the fact that the House of Lords seeks to frustrate the mandate of the electorate when the electorate choose to vote Labour.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: Does the hon. Lady accept that the only time that the Parliament Acts were used was by the Conservative Government against the other place when the latter sought to frustrate the will of the House during the passage of what became the War Crimes Act 1991, and that they have never been used when the Labour party has been in government to promote and ensure the passage through the House of Government legislation?

Dr. Starkey: Of course I accept that.

Mr. Tyrie: And on the Bill that became the European Parliamentary Elections Act 1999.

Dr. Starkey: Yes, the European Parliamentary Elections Bill recently, but the hon. Gentleman cannot

[Dr. Starkey]

gainsay the huge weight of defeats that Labour Governments have sustained compared with Conservative Government defeats.

Labour Members would cite the poll tax as the most obvious example of a measure that, although it was not in the Conservative Government's manifesto and was hugely opposed by all the professional bodies concerned with local government and local government finance, the House of Lords—which had a rather specific interest in it, as it was largely composed of Lords, not dustmen—did not seek to overturn.

Sir Patrick Cormack: As one who consistently voted against the poll tax, may I point out that it was indeed in the manifesto?

Dr. Starkey: I do not have the requisite manifesto before me. My recollection, having been in local government then and having had to explain to various voters, when the poll tax was implemented, that they should have noticed that it was coming, is that the Conservative manifesto said that the Conservatives would be committed to the reform of the rating system—it did not explain what the reform would be. It was the detail of the poll tax to which people took such enormous exception, not the fact that it was a change to the rating system. I suspect that we are starting to go off on a byway.

On Second Reading, some Conservative Members suggested that the House of Lords defeated this House more often when there was a Labour Government because Conservative Governments had much more common sense than Labour Governments. I was astonished by that view because it denotes considerable contempt for the electorate.

The electorate choose the Government. Although, naturally, hon. Members think that the Government of the opposite party is the wrong one and that the electorate probably did not consider things enough, it demonstrates contempt for democracy to say that the electorate are wrong when they choose a Labour Government and that the House of Lords is right to send back a Labour Government's measures.

The truth—which has been repeatedly stated in the House, including in the 1911 debate on the Bill that became the Parliament Act—is that the Conservative party favours the continuation of the hereditary principle in the House of Lords because it means that, even when it loses elections to the House of Commons, it retains power in the second House. That was clearly spelled out by a Liberal Member of Parliament in the 1911 debate; the Liberals were then arguing what Labour Members are arguing today.

Thirdly, the two-stage reform set out in the Bill is essential. It cannot be right that the membership of the current House of Lords should be allowed to decide the final composition of the second Chamber. That is why we must go by way of a transitional Chamber—ridding the transitional Chamber of hereditary peers, so that they have no voice in the final shape of the second Chamber, which will be decided after the royal commission has expressed its views.

Mr. Grieve: I should be very interested if the hon. Lady amplified her reasons why, in practical terms, that is unacceptable. If the principle is established of change and of the hereditary element leaving by the next general election, why should the present House of Lords not contribute to the discussion, especially as, whatever happens ultimately, the House of Commons will have the deciding voice on the issue?

Dr. Starkey: It is obvious. The hereditary Members of the House of Lords have a huge vested interest. They are unrepresentative of the population at large. They represent, largely, a certain class of person, with a certain class of interest—and certainly with a certain gender. The reason for getting rid of them from the second Chamber is that they have no democratic legitimacy. It is for precisely that reason that they do not deserve to have a special voice, over and above anyone else, in the designation of the future shape of the legislature.

Mr. Grieve: Why, in those circumstances, should the appointees of previous Prime Ministers have any better right to decide those issues? That is the question on which I am trying to draw the hon. Lady. I understand her point about lack of democratic legitimacy, but does she not agree that those who were appointed have no more democratic legitimacy than those who are there by hereditary right?

Dr. Starkey: Life peers do not have any more democratic legitimacy, but they are more representative. There is a better gender balance among life peers, and there is a slightly better, but still not very good, representation of the cultural diversity of our society. Life peers have much wider experience than hereditary peers. They are more representative, but they are not as representative as one hopes a properly elected Chamber would be. They are an improvement on the hereditary Members of the House of Lords, and they are only a transitional Chamber.

Mr. Alan Clark (Kensington and Chelsea): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Dr. Starkey: I am rather disinclined to give way to a Member who has only just come in and has not listened to the whole debate.

Mr. Clark: I have been listening to the hon. Lady from behind the Speaker's Chair. I have a huge respect for the way in which she expresses her argument. I hope that, if I catch your eye later, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I will be able to repudiate aspects of it.

The hon. Lady said that there was a better gender balance among appointed peers than among hereditary ones. Would she moderate her opinion of the hereditary Chamber, were eldest daughters of hereditary peers to be allowed to inherit the title and sit in that Chamber?

Dr. Starkey: That is, of course, an entirely hypothetical question. I am aware that a Member of the House of Lords tried to introduce such a reform at some time in the past; it would have been a slight improvement. However, the question that I was asked was about the transitional House and its composition vis-a-vis the current House of Lords. Therefore, the point raised by the right hon. Gentleman is not relevant, although it may be an interesting debating point.

The Bill is an absolutely necessary first step in modernising Parliament as a whole and moving this country into the 20th century, just before we get into the 21st century. To most people outside the House, the Bill's aim makes good sense and is self-evident. I imagine that most people would be amazed at the time that we have all spent discussing simple legislation.

I understand, especially as I have been involved in extremely lengthy discussions in the Modernisation Committee, that the main weapon of an Opposition party in this place is delay, but the Conservative party seems to have used the weapon of delay in the reform of the House of Lords not only when in opposition, but when in government.

I look forward to the fact that, 88 years after the Parliament Act 1911, which was taken by Parliament as a form of transitional measure—a first step, so to speak, in limiting the powers of the House of Lords, with a view to moving on to better and more substantial modification of the second Chamber—we are finally moving to establish a legislature that is based on the democratic principle and has no place for people to be Members by privilege of their birth.

8.39 pm

Mr. Andrew Tyrie (Chichester): I disagreed with almost all that the hon. Member for Milton Keynes, South–West (Dr. Starkey) said, except the last few words about a second Chamber based on democratic principles, a matter to which I shall return.

When we look back on these events in a few months or years, it will be clear that we were brought to a constitutional crossroads by the Bill. Either we will end up going down the road of unicameralism, or there was, and still is, an opportunity for creating a genuine bicameral system as a result of the reform of the second Chamber.

We have had six days of fascinating debate. A number of Labour Members, but some Conservative Members as well, at least by implication, have made it clear that they are unicameralists. They do not believe in a second Chamber; they want only one Chamber. Quite a large number of hon. Members have also moved from an unclear view to a much clearer view in favour of a second Chamber, many wanting an elected second Chamber. I remain firmly in the latter camp.

It would be ridiculous to suggest that bicameralism is essential to democracy, but we need to ask ourselves whether this Chamber, in its present form, is capable of doing the job prescribed for it in the constitution of scrutinising the Executive. It is the shortcomings of this piace which make the Bill so relevant and important to our constitution's future.

With control of the business of the House through Standing Orders, with the decline of the independent Back Bencher, with the doubling of the payroll vote during the past 40 years, and with the supremacy of the Whips over both parties, which dominates the Chamber, the scope for genuine scrutiny, as traditionally used to take place, has been gravely restricted. The only exceptions have been when there has been a near party balance in the Chamber.

It would be inappropriate to return to 19th century scrutiny. I want a strong Executive, but with a duty to explain their actions to Parliament in detail. I think that few hon. Members sincerely believe that the scrutiny of the Executive in this place is adequate.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. The hon. Member has now made sufficient allusion to proceedings in this House by referencc to the Bill and he must now return to the Bill itself.

Mr. Tyrie: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It is the inadequacy of this place that leads me to want a Bill other than the one that we are discussing tonight.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is entitled to put that argument and he is now putting it for a second time, but he cannot use it as a bridge to discuss in some detail proceedings in this House.

Mr. Tyrie: Many accept the argument for a second Chamber, but none the less feel that we need go only as far as the Bill provides. Perhaps with only some modest changes further down the road, those people would be happy with that state of affairs. However, it is extremely unlikely that the Executive will be scrutinised effectively if this House stays as it is and the other House is reformed and kept broadly as an interim Chamber, as the Bill suggests .

The risk is that the interim Chamber created by the Bill will feel even less legitimate, even less capable of holding the Executive to account than the existing House. The reason for that is fairly obvious. The interim House created by the Bill will have a perfectly understandable and overwhelming objective, a desire for survival, as anything called interim usually does. It will be vulnerable to threats from the Executive. It will all too easily be reduced to supine subservience in the hope of lasting a few more years. The biggest threat of all would be a whiff of a stage 2 with substance.

The odds must be that, when it matters, an interim House will toe the Executive line. The fear must be that a strong coalition could easily build up to prevent a stage 2 of substance ever coming before the House—a coalition between the Members of the interim House created by the Bill and the Executive.

Many on both sides of the House have also alluded to the power of patronage which the Executive will wield in the interim House. We debated that in Committee, and that remains a serious concern about the interim Chamber.

It is becoming clear that the Executive do not want to create a second Chamber that could ever cause them too much trouble. That is why stage 1 has been described as a stand-alone change, not dependent on further reform. The Government would clearly rather stop here. The last thing that the Executive want to do is to give the second Chamber any legitimacy.

I may be wrong and the interim House might push hard for a more legitimate and democratic replacement of itself, but it is asking an enormous amount of a group of men and women to plead for an opportunity to go to the gallows, and that is what we would be asking the interim House to do.

Mr. Alan Clark: The guillotine.

Mr. Tyrie: They will go to the guillotine, as my right hon. Friend says. That is exactly what will happen to

[Mr. Tyrie]

Members of the interim House if they embrace, or push for, a democratic alternative to themselves. For democracy is as much a threat to the lifers as the Bill is to the hereditaries.

We have heard that the movers of the Weatherill amendment would not mind stopping at stage 1—they have already formed that coalition. Lord Weatherill himself gave the game away when he said:

"The government has got something"—

from this deal—

"if its business is not disrupted . . . I'm saying to my friends I believe if this works, as I hope it will work, it's within the bounds of possibility that the Royal Commission may say this has been working well—let's leave it alone. That would preserve continuity . . . Surely a consummation devoutly to be wished!"

Those are the words of Lord Weatherill on his amendment.

Dr. Ladyman: I am finding it difficult to accept the hon. Gentleman's argument. Surely it is ultimately up to this House to decide whether the interim Chamber should be replaced. Labour Members have said that they are determined that there will be a further reform, as have the Liberals. I understand from what the Conservatives are now saying that they are also determined that there will be a further reform. What possible political upheaval could stop a further reform?

Mr. Tyrie: The overwhelming power of the Executive to avoid creating something that might in any way interfere with their legislative plans and their plans to run the country. As Labour Members have pointed out, that has been a major obstacle to all reform of the House of Lords for so many decades after the passing of the 1911 Act. Only the Lords getting in the way of the Executive in 1911 resulted in any reform being pushed through.

I have read the White Paper carefully and I am afraid that I do not trust the Government's pledge to introduce a democratic alternative. Those are weasel words. The commitment in the White Paper is basically to reduce the powers of the second Chamber, not to increase them. The commitment to democracy is wafer thin and scarcely visible. It comes as an afterthought, framed with reference to opposition to the hereditary principle, rather than as a principle in itself.

Mr. Maclennan: Is not the hon. Gentleman rather underestimating the strength of his own arguments which, if deployed to the country, could make an all-appointed House that was anything other than an interim Chamber appear to be a constitutional monstrosity? Surely he is not alone in thinking in such a way and the Government are sufficiently politically astute to be aware of the power of his arguments.

Mr. Tyrie: The right hon. Gentleman sits in Cabinet Committees with the Labour Government and I am sure that he has been persuaded of their conviction that they intend to introduce stage 2 legislation of substance and content, but I am a little less convinced of that than he. I gratefully take on board the idea that my arguments might have some strength and merit, and I hope that they resonate somewhat. Towards the end of my speech, I want to discuss how they might resonate more effectively.

The most likely outcome of a coalition between the interim House and the Executive, which might be created as a result of the Bill, could be a damp squib of a stage 2—an unappealing damp squib, which would be quite the opposite of what the right hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Mr. Maclennan) suggested a moment ago. Such a stage 2 would be little better than stage 1 and, at worst, could amount to little more than a retirement home for ex-politicians and civil servants with a few industrialists, trade unionists and the great and good thrown in, perhaps with a few elected Members from the new Parliaments—all bedded down on a reduction in the powers of the second Chamber, as set out in the White Paper. Such a Chamber could scarcely be expected to play an effective bicameral role. The risk is that, by then, we would be living in a virtually unicameral constitution—a one-Chamber Parliament in all but name.

I believe that only democracy can save the bicameral system in Britain. The only way to give the second Chamber legitimacy is to grant it a mandate from the people. Many Members of the House of Commons are uneasy about that idea. Would not such a system dilute our own legitimacy? Would not such a second Chamber encroach on our turf? Those are legitimate concerns, although I think that they are largely misplaced. This Chamber should, and can, remain supreme. I shall not develop that argument now, but I hope to do so when we debate the White Paper. In any event, the argument is more germane to the White Paper than to the Bill.

The Government have not been prepared to tell us where the Bill will lead. At no point have they been prepared to say what the end result will be. During our most recent debate, we have been presented with no evidence suggesting that we can rely on the Executive to secure and preserve a genuine bicameralism; nor, as I have said, can we rely on those who are likely to survive in the interim House to push through such a change.

One group, however, can make a major contribution when the Bill goes to the House of Lords. I refer to the hereditary peers. It is with those who are already condemned to death by the Bill that the best hope lies for a democratic and effective second Chamber. There is some irony in that, but I believe it to be the case. The hereditary peers can make that contribution because, quite simply, they have little to lose. It is the Conservative and Cross-Bench backwoodsmen who can play one last role on the constitutional stage, by making amendments to the Bill that can force the Executive back down the road of bicameralism. Unlike us, they can force the Government to deliver a stage 2 of real substance.

I urge peers to consider three amendments. First, they can and should add a "sunset clause": they can force the Government to present proposals for reform to secure an effective second Chamber, or to accept—after, say, three years—the reconvening of the existing House of Lords. Secondly, better still, careful redrafting of the Bill should enable them to add a clause specifying what they would reconvene to achieve. They should add a clause stating that, say, within 12 months of reconvening, they would send a Bill to the House of Commons providing for the replacement of the other place by an elected second

Chamber. That would enable us to debate the option of such a Chamber when the Bill returned to the Commons—a debate that we have been denied so far.

As for the third possible amendment, the House of Lords could reform the Bill to ensure that a referendum took place. The Lords should demand that, whatever the content of stage 2 and whether it is framed by the second Chamber itself or by the Executive, the Government should put it to the country in a referendum.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The Chair ruled earlier that, in Third Reading debates, Members can normally speak only about what is in the Bill, but accepted that some references can be made to the situation created by the Bill. The hon. Gentleman, however, is going much too far.

Mr. Tyrie: I am trying to say what I think will happen when the Bill goes to the Lords, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We already know almost for certain that a clause will be added to it; I am making suggestions—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. That is exactly my point. The hon. Gentleman had a legitimate thread in relation to the first point that he tried to make, but he is now trying to build on that to go well outside the scope of the Third Reading debate.

Mr. Tyrie: Thank you for that ruling, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

All the constitutional reforms that the Government have proposed since their election in May 1997 have been put to the country, or to parts of the country, in referendums. Why should not this reform be treated in the same way?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman seems not to have heard what I said. I advise him to return to the terms of Third Reading.

Mr. Tyrie: I believe that, although the Government had a mandate to push through the abolition of hereditary peers, they never had—and still do not have—a mandate to allow the interim situation to rest where it is. Almost certainly, the Government's original intention was never to go beyond this Bill, which they described as a stand-alone measure. I think that, if they intend to let the interim House continue, they should at least be prepared to go to the country, and arrange a referendum to justify it, or whatever further reform they propose to bring about, in what they will then describe as stage 2. That is why it is a tawdry Bill. It lacks any clarity about what direction the Government want to follow in reforming the Lords. We have no clear description of what the end point should be. That is why I cannot support the Bill.

8.55 pm

Mr. Martin Linton (Battersea): I can assure you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that I intend to stick to the proposals in the Bill: stage 1, as set out in the White Paper. I have no doubt that we will progress to stage 2, perhaps even in the current Parliament, as my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House suggested.

I agree with the Leader of the House that stage 1 will be an improvement and a prize in its own right. As my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central (Mr. Fisher) said, it will provide a better House. It will be better for at least four different reasons, none of which seem to have impinged on the contributions of Conservative Members.

The first reason is purely political and I make no apology for making it. In the House of Lords, the majority are there by hereditary right. Out of the majority—those who have the writ, who are not on leave of absence and have the right to vote—80 per cent. are either Conservatives or Cross Benchers. While I do not imply that Cross Benchers are really Conservatives, on many issues, many Cross Benchers vote with the Conservatives. The net result of the fact that 50 per cent. of hereditary peers are Conservatives and more than a third are Cross Benchers is clear: the House of Lords is a Conservative House in its ethos and another hurdle for any Labour Government to deal with.

I agree with my right hon. Friend the Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson): at the root of the Opposition's arguments is the simple philosophy that, what we have, we hold. That is at the centre of the debate. The right hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Mr. Maclennan) also made the point that that is the central issue for the Opposition. That is a prime reason why it is timely that we should deprive hereditary peers of their right to vote.

The second reason why stage 1 is a prize in its own right is that it removes the hereditary principle. I shall not insult hon. Members by rehearsing the reasons why the hereditary principle has no place in politics. All but the hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) have finally come round to that view, although I mention in passing that the House of Lords is not based on the hereditary principle. If it were, I suspect that every hon. Member who is here today would be a Member of the House of Lords. Let me explain.

The barony de Ros is now represented in the House of Lords by the 28th baron. The barony was created in 1264. If we make the simple assumption that the first baron had two descendants and each of those had two descendants—a conservative estimate—there would now be 134 million descendants of the original Baron de Ros. By all means check my arithmetic. That would mean that every person in this country would probably be a descendant of the original Baron de Ros two or three times over, and that is only one peer, so we are talking about not the hereditary principle—the notion that the qualities of the parent pass to the child—but male primogeniture.

Mr. Grieve: The hon. Gentleman had better be careful because he is beginning to justify the continuation of hereditary peers on the basis that they are a random sample of society as a whole.

Mr. Linton: That is interesting, but the point is that those peers are not a random sample, but an arbitrary sample. There is a difference. They are chosen by arbitrary selection—the eldest son of the eldest son—which means that only one of those 134 million has the seat. It is not random, because they are not a representative cross-section. By the very nature of their upbringing, they comprise a completely unrepresentative cross-section. For example, 45 per cent. of peers went to Eton. That is hardly the mark of a random sample.

The third and—to me—most important reason why reform is good in itself is that many of the people who are now represented in the House of Lords are there

[Mr. Linton]

because their titles were bought. It is a stain on our constitution that, over the generations and centuries, seats in a House of our own legislature were effectively sold to their holders.

I do not dispute that many hereditary peerages have been bestowed on eminent people—admirals, generals, lords-lieutenant, governors-general—in grateful recognition of their services to the nation. However, many hereditary peerages have murkier origins, in some long-forgotten favour that the original titleholder did either for a monarch or a Prime Minister.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes, South–West (Dr. Starkey) said, I have previously mentioned one or two of the more famous cases. The Duke of Norfolk, for example, is in the other place because his ancestor was believed to have helped Richard III to the throne. There is also the well-known case of the four Dukes, who are there because their ancestors were the love children of Charles II. However, I shall deal not with such cases but with cases in which it is clear that the original titleholder gained his position because of a financial transaction.

Although monarchs very rarely give invoices when they sell peerages, in some cases, it is very clear that there was a financial transaction. The oldest case of which I am aware is that of Lord Teynham, whose ancestors bought his barony, for £10,000, not from James I himself, but from his favourite, George Villiers—who himself held the title of Duke of Buckingham. Another clearly established case is that of Earl Romney, who bought his title, for only £5,000, from George I. Earl Ilchester bought his title from the Countess of Yarmouth, the mistress of George II. There are many cases in history in which the precise sum that changed hands is known.

Mr. Shepherd: I am not sure what distinctions the hon. Gentleman is making. Does he not recognise that, in some cases, the holders of life peerages have made contributions to political party funds? One could perhaps say that that is not so dissimilar from the circumstances that he is adumbrating. I am not sure why we are going down this pathway interminably.

Mr. Linton: That issue will be for the hon. Gentleman to address when we are dealing with stage 2 and life peerages. I am dealing now with the existence of hereditary peerages, many of which are based simply on the purchase of titles over the centuries.

William Pitt was one the first Prime Ministers to sell peerages in a big way. He scandalised the aristocracy of the day by giving peerages to the new industrialists—the best-known case being that of Lord Carrington whose ancestor was a Nottingham draper who paid the gambling debts of the Prince of Wales, who was later George IV. For his pains, he was made Lord Carrington. When he took his seat in the House of Lords, the landowners walked out in protest at the elevation of the first tradesman to the House of Lords.

The hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd) was quite right to say that, this century, contributing to party funds has been the main reason why people are given hereditary peerages. The practice goes right back to the days of Arthur Balfour—who, in 1903-05, created the first press barons, and completely and overtly rewarded the first contributors to party funds.

David Lloyd George, the Liberal Prime Minister, took the practice on to greater heights when he created five press barons. He also rewarded many industrialists who had been willing to write a sufficiently large cheque to the Lloyd George fund. I have mentioned Lord Borwick, who was a custard powder manufacturer. There were many others, including the Earl of Iveagh, a Guinness brewer, and Lord Forteviot of Dewar's whisky. There were also many industrialists who made their fortune out of the first world war. Although Lloyd-George condemned people who made money out of the war, he also ennobled them—notably, that included Lord Forres, who was accused of selling oil to German nitrate factories, yet was rewarded with a peerage. There was the case of Baron Vestey, who gloried in the fact that he paid no tax, but who paid £20,000 to the Liberal party. There was also a famous retailer who was quoted as saying that he was not going to buy a peerage, but if he became a peer he would give £25,000 to the Liberal party. I could go on.

Mr. Alan Clark: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will allow me to add to his repertoire for the next time that he entertains the House with this list. He might care to remember Lord Farquhar, who elevated himself from a viscountcy to an earldom and was the treasurer of the Conservative party. When it was time to pay for the literature for the 1922 election, Lord Farquhar's cheque bounced because he had used party funds when raising himself from a viscountcy to an earldom.

Mr. Linton: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman, who is my parliamentary neighbour, for casting that light. Lord Farquhar's elevation was a classic case of the trade in peerages that went on throughout the 1930s and may have continued until much more recently. Even though the sale of peerages was made illegal in 1925, it continued apace with the elevation of known Conservative party donors such as Lord Brassey, Lord Palmer of Huntley and Palmers biscuits, Baron Luke the Bovril tycoon and many more press barons. All those families are still represented in the House of Lords.

Mr. Tyrie: Is the hon. Gentleman aware that a good number of the peers appointed by the current Prime Minister are listed as having donated more than £5,000 to Labour party funds?

Mr. Linton: I said at the beginning of my speech that I would stick to the subject of the debate. It is open to the hon. Gentleman to raise his point when we discuss the White Paper, the second stage of reform or the future of life peerages. I may well support him then. I am concentrating on the effect of having a Chamber of this legislature that, for 700 years, has been based to an alarming extent on the sale of seats. All the families whom I have mentioned are still represented in the House of Lords by their sons, their grandsons or their great-grandsons. All those who attend are Conservatives or Cross Benchers. In the next few weeks, they will have a chance to vote on whether to agree to their abolition.

The fourth reason why the Bill is a good reform in itself is this country's need to see the end of the last vestige of the feudal system and the aristocracy before the end of the century. The explanatory notes to the Bill say:

"The Bill does not affect the rights of holders of a hereditary peerage to keep all the other titles, rights, offices, privileges and precedents attaching to the peerage which are unconnected with membership of the House of Lords."

Why not? Why do we want to keep in existence privileges and precedents attaching to membership of the aristocracy? Once the right of a peer to sit and vote in the House of Lords has been done away with, as I very much hope that the Bill will do, all the rest will disappear like a house of cards. There is nothing to the aristocracy other than the right to sit and vote in the House of Lords.

Mr. Grieve: Given that the hon. Gentleman is going on with this extraordinarily irrelevant peroration, would he care to comment on why the aristocracy in continental countries has been so successful in maintaining its position and status, even though it has no legislative function?

Mr. Linton: Far from it; the aristocracy in every other European country has no political power. In every country but ours, the aristocracy has lost any meaningful role in society. One or two titles may still be used, but that is all. The French abolished their aristocracy by the use of the guillotine. I do not advocate that in any way. The Swedes did the opposite, and circulated a memorandum to all Government Departments—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is straying into byways where he should not be.

Mr. Linton: I merely ask my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House to explain the statement that the rights, titles, privileges and precedents of the peers will remain after the Bill has been passed.

9.11 pm

Mr. Dominic Grieve (Beaconsfield): I shall try to confine myself strictly to the contents of the Bill, and to address my remarks—in so far as they go outside that—solely to the issues that make me take the view that the Bill is seriously flawed. In an interesting speech, the hon. Member for Milton Keynes, South-West (Dr. Starkey) referred to the hereditary principle's lack of justification. I have always taken the view that it is an historical anachronism.

Before I pass on to the contents of the Bill—and because I suspect that this may be the valedictory moment to say something about the hereditary principle—it is probably right to say that, in so far as it concerns the legislature as it has existed in this country, the hereditary principle has served us extremely well, and acted as the principal power to break monarchical tyranny.

The principle was established precisely because it was discovered that when people succeeded to hereditary rights, they tended—because of that—to be more respectful of other people's rights, rather than trample on them. It is for that reason that hereditary peers have tended to act as a check and a balance in the constitution, and why they have tended to be respectful of the rights of others.

That tradition continues to this day, and the various complimentary remarks about the role of hereditary peers—even by the Leader of the House—derive straightforwardly from the fact that most of them have a tradition of service, a good understanding of the limitations on their own rights and an appreciation of the need to respect the rights of others.

There have been occasions when this House has tended to be willing to ride roughshod over the rights of people, simply because it claimed an electoral mandate to do so. We should be grateful to the hereditary peers for having set the ethos in the other place, which has tended to put a check on this House, and has often insisted on rights and liberties that have subsequently been upheld elsewhere—even by the European Court of Human Rights—when we have failed to respect them in this place.

The hereditary principle is an anachronism—particularly when one considers the changed state of society. It was probably an anachronism in the 16th century, when there were comments about certain peers who were becoming too poor and were thought no longer to be able to represent themselves or their proper interests. This is an old chestnut.

The principle has become an anachronism because we live in a fluid society, and there must be good and powerful arguments why this House and the other place should look carefully at trying to find a replacement that might be better. However, this is where we come back to the initial problem. I am happy to go down that road, and I believe that the end result, almost certainly, will be an elected second Chamber. I do not believe that any intermediate stage will prove to be acceptable or will provide the necessary legitimacy to the other place that is required.

I am even prepared, since the Government established on Second Reading the principle that there would be a two-stage reform process, to accept that we have to regard the Bill as the first stage, but I want to consider whether it is legitimate or could be improved on, given the Government's insistence on an appointed second Chamber. There are some serious flaws in the way in which the Government have decided to proceed.

The major flaw that will never go away is the issue of patronage. Labour Members have said a great deal about the lack of legitimacy of the hereditary peers because their ancestors were simply placed there by the patronage of others, but the new second Chamber will be based purely on patronage, which I find profoundly unacceptable.

It has been suggested, based on some comments in the White Paper that we are assured will be reflected in the way in which the Bill operates, that in certain areas, the Prime Minister's power of patronage will be curbed, because he will hand it to a commission or to other party leaders. That is all very well, but it would have been perfectly possible to preserve the principle of an appointed second Chamber as an intermediate stage and to get rid of the patronage of the Prime Minister and other party leaders altogether, replacing it with an independent commission. That would be the first and most compelling step in reassuring me that the future constitution of the House of Lords will be very different from what it is now.

There appears to be universal agreement among life peers that the much-praised ethos in the other place is entirely derived from the independent standpoint of the hereditary peerage, members of which are dominant there. I cannot believe that if we follow the Government's policy, we shall end up with an upper House that is similar, but with the illegitimate element of hereditary peers removed. I believe that there will be a rapid deterioration in the quality of debate and the ability to provide adequate scrutiny of the Government, because of the lack of that independence. I hope that I am proved wrong, but I have great anxiety about that real danger.

[Mr. Dominic Grieve]

Anything that could have been done to remove the impression and effect of patronage in placing life peers in the other place would have been mightily desirable. It is a major flaw in the legislation which could have been remedied now without in any way interfering with stage 2.

If the Weatherill amendment is to be accepted at some point, our failure to make it now is simply wrong. It is an extraordinary way to legislate for the Government themselves to vote down a proposal that is thought to be acceptable to them.

I took it as a compliment when the Minister described me as being someone who comes up with bizarre constitutional issues. I find it odd, when we are embarking on a constitutional proposal designed to create greater democratic legitimacy—the Government's words—that we should start by failing to respect the established rights under our constitution of others, who are deprived of the vote in return for the right to represent themselves, for the duration of the Parliament in which they sit in the other place. Of course that is a minor matter, as there are only 750 of them, even if their vote might have influenced at least one or two results in seats at the general election.

The Government had available an easy method of passing now the legislation ensuring the oblivion of the hereditary peers at the next general election, and then setting about the discussion of stage 2 with the hereditary peers, who, knowing that they were facing oblivion, might have contributed the most creative discussion of sensible alternatives to succeed them.

The Bill will ultimately sound the death knell of the life peers, and I shall not shed many tears over their disappearance. However, there will be a problem if they remain as a powerful vested interest for their own position, balanced only by the small corporate element who are unlikely, because of the nature of the debate that will take place, to be willing to voice their views very forcefully.

Far from the Bill being a sensible paving Bill for a better and more accountable democracy, it is in danger of being the opposite. I accept that the President of the Council may have good intentions, but the road to hell is paved with them and, in this context, the road to a permanent, appointed second Chamber is also paved with them. I do not want that and many Labour Members agree with me. The power of the Executive is the principal menace that threatens our democratic life and liberties. It is growing, and this Bill will contribute to it. For those reasons, I shall not vote for it.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

9.21 pm

The Minister of State, Lord Chancellor's Department (Mr. Geoffrey Hoon): This has inevitably been a wide-ranging debate. It is not surprising that it sometimes strayed from the contents of the Bill, given the importance of the issues. The Bill's provisions are clear, simple and straightforward. They are—perhaps surprisingly, given the sound and fury of earlier stages—now relatively uncontentious. I say "now", because the hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) accepted that there will be no permanent place for hereditary peers, whichever party wins the next general election. I do not understand why, having made that considerable concession, the Conservatives intend to continue to oppose the Bill. They have, in the short time since the general election, abandoned a fundamental principle on which they were each elected.

The Conservative manifesto made it clear that Conservatives see no need to reform the House of Lords and it contained no proposals to do so. It is now clear that, one by one, Conservative Members are ripping up the manifesto on which they were elected, presumably in order to find a new manifesto in time for the next general election.

As my right hon. Friend the President of the Council pointed out, notwithstanding the fact that we have reached the conclusion of the first main stage of proceedings on the Bill, we still do not have any clearer an understanding of the Opposition's position on the question of House of Lords reform. We know what the Conservatives are against, although it seems to be limited only to the contents of the Bill and—it would seem—any Bill that would deal with House of Lords reform in separate, discreet stages.

Dr. Ladyman: I must disagree slightly with my hon. Friend. He suggests that Opposition Members have dropped their support for the hereditary principle, but I have not detected that happening. Only a few moments ago, we heard a speech from the hon. Member for Sevenoaks (Mr. Fallon) who clearly said that he was still in favour of the hereditary principle.

Mr. Hoon: My hon. Friend may have missed the significant speech in which the hon. Member for Woodspring said that, in the highly unlikely event of the Conservatives winning the next general election, they would not seek to restore the hereditary element to a second Chamber. In the light of that concession, I invite Conservative Members to consider why they continue to oppose the Bill. If that is to be their policy at the next election, we are surely assisting them by sorting out one difficulty before they prepare their proposals on what a reformed second Chamber should look like.

We have heard that the Conservative party is against the tradition of evolutionary change that is the hallmark of our constitutional arrangements. Instead, and quite inconsistent with the manifesto on which each of them was elected, Conservative Members have argued in favour of what has been described as a big bang. They have argued that all House of Lords issues—composition and powers—should be resolved at the same time in a single stage, however complicated the process.

I observed previously that a Conservative Government carried through the Life Peerages Act 1958, a single-stage reform that, according to Conservative Ministers of the day, significantly altered the composition of the House of Lords, improving its efficiency and operation. They argued precisely the virtues of single-stage reform to improve the operation of the second Chamber, just as we are arguing the same today to justify our reform of the second Chamber.

Mr. Tyrie: Is the Minister aware that when the Conservatives tried to introduce life peerages in 1958,

the Labour party opposed the Bill on Second Reading, and that Gaitskell made an impassioned speech against the proposals?

Mr. Hoon: The hon. Gentleman is entirely right. The Labour party opposed that Act, arguing that there should be more fundamental review of the House of Lords.

Mr. Tyrie: That is exactly what we are arguing. We do not want a half-way House. We want to go the full hog, just as the Labour party did in 1958. Allusions to 1958 do nothing for the Minister's case.

Mr. Hoon: The difference is, of course, that the Labour party lost the argument in 1958. The reform provided by the Life Peerages Act 1958 was a successful single-stage reform of the operation of the second Chamber. History has proved that the Labour party was wrong and Conservative Ministers were right in 1958.

Mr. Fisher: My hon. Friend is beginning to worry me. Is he saying that the Government intend to stop at single-stage reform? The White Paper—and all that I have heard from my right hon. Friend the President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons—gave an absolute and clear commitment to a second stage, presaged by the royal commission. Will my hon. Friend confirm that there will be a second stage?

Mr. Hoon: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising that point, because I would not want to give him or anyone else the impression that the Government were not committed to the second stage. I shall deal with that commitment in a few moments.

Dr. George Turner: Does my hon. Friend accept that we will not know what the Conservative party and many Members of the House of Lords really think until the Bill is enacted? The argument over the Bill has been bedevilled by bluff and double bluff, by arguments designed to raise cohorts of opposition rather than to get down to the nitty gritty of what we really want. The advantage of proceeding as the Government are is that there might be an honest debate in the country once the Bill is an Act.

Mr. Hoon: My hon. Friend anticipates my argument. By proceeding as we are, and by demonstrating our commitment to the first stage, we have opened up a serious debate about the second stage of reform. That would not have been possible but for our determined commitment to carry through stage 1, which has been advantageous to all those who take seriously the reform of the second Chamber.

We have not been told precisely what reform Conservative Members favour; no doubt, in due course, we shall hear their proposals. My right hon. Friend the Leader of the House made more eloquently than I can the observation, which I paraphrase, that the Conservatives' position is essentially, "Make me virtuous, but not yet." That appears to characterise their attitude toward reform of the House of Lords. From their opposition to change, we can conclude that they are at least being consistent—consistently conservative and, like all conservatives, arguing that change is difficult, dangerous and will inevitably open the floodgates. Woodrow Wilson defined conservatism. He said:

"make no change and consult your grandmother when in doubt".

Whenever I hear the hon. Member for Woodspring talk about constitutional reform, I am sure that he has consulted an ancestor before speaking, but that attitude has characterised the approach taken by all Conservative Members' towards each of the important constitutional changes that the reforming Labour Government have introduced.

My hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes, South-West (Dr. Starkey) made the point, echoed by others, that the Conservatives' opposition to the Bill is a smokescreen for their determination to do nothing, to preserve the hereditary element by default and to ensure that there can be no change at all because of the complexity of sorting out both composition and functions in a single stage. That complexity has repeatedly frustrated reform in the past. When we discuss the composition of the House of Lords, as the Bill enables us to do, Conservative Members furiously debate the question of functions, so it is likely that if we were to set out proposals on functions, they would get extremely anxious about composition.

My suspicion and cynicism have been confirmed this evening by my taking a look at the manifesto on which Conservative Members were elected. It contained no reference to any intention to reform the House of Lords; indeed, there was a clear commitment to retain the hereditary element in the legislature. It was an attempt to satisfy the electorate that the constitutional arrangements of the United Kingdom were quite satisfactory. The hon. Member for Woodspring has started a process of abandoning those commitments, but it has taken him some time to do so.

Dr. Ladyman: My hon. Friend is on the subject of the Conservative manifesto, but I wonder whether the Conservative canvassers guide for the last election has been brought to his attention. In that document, Conservative canvassers were instructed to argue on the doorsteps in favour of the hereditary principle.

Mr. Hoon: Entirely by coincidence, I have a copy of that document here. It states:

"It is important to defend the hereditary principle in its own right".

As I said, the hon. Member for Woodspring has moved a little from that position today.

Dr. Starkey: Does my hon. Friend suspect that that instruction might have been a last desperate attempt by the Conservatives to try to keep their voters with them by relying on the hereditary principle when the argument had been defeated?

Mr. Hoon: It would not have done them much good in Ashfield.

If one doubts the Conservatives' intentions, one need only examine their record of achievement between 1979 and the introduction of the Bill. Not once in that entire period has any senior Conservative Front Bencher called for fundamental reform of the House of Lords—or, indeed, for any sort of reform of the House of Lords.

Mr. Peter Bradley: I am somewhat confused, because I am unsure whether the Conservative party is being

[Mr. Peter Bradley]

consistent with its manifesto pledge to stick with the hereditary principle, or whether, in opposition, it is capable of breaking its promises to the electorate. Can my hon. Friend enlighten me?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The debate is on Third Reading of the Bill, not anything that is happening on the other side of the Chamber.

Mr. Hoon: I am grateful to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. However, it is relevant to Third Reading to consider why the Conservative party might be anxious to maintain a composition for the House of Lords that is different from the one set out in the Bill. Judging from the arguments that we have heard in the course of the proceedings, because Labour Governments have suffered consistently at the hands of a Tory-dominated second Chamber, Conservative Members might be content to preserve the rights of hereditary peers precisely because, having lost an election, they want to retain their rather tenuous grip on some remaining legislative power.

Mr. Nigel Griffiths (Edinburgh, South): If Conservative Members are advancing that argument, Conservative peers certainly are not. As evidenced by not just the arguments on this side of the House but the lack of arguments on the other side and the failure to defend what was accepted along the corridor, surely it is Conservative Members who are out of step. Indeed, Conservative peers—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. We have heard quite enough about that issue.

Mr. Hoon: My hon. Friend makes a very good point, but I will not risk your further wrath, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The point that I was setting out was well made by my hon. Friend the Member for City of Durham (Mr. Steinberg) who pointed out that, in the short time since the 1997 general election, the Labour Government have been defeated 33 times in the House of Lords. That point was developed further by my hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes, South–West.

Dr. George Turner: Can my hon. Friend think of any example when a Conservative Government were defeated only by the votes of hereditary peers? Conservative Governments have suffered a modicum of defeats in the other place but, on every occasion that I can recall from my interest in politics, they were defeated also by the Cross Benchers.

Mr. Hoon: I certainly cannot recall any such occasion.

Mr. Gerald Howarth *rose—*

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough) *rose—*

Mr. Hoon: I see that I am about to get some help.

Mr. Garnier: I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for Aldershot (Mr. Howarth) was about to cite an example that even the Minister will remember: the War Crimes Bill.

Mr. Hoon: The essential question that we are debating is whether the Government are right to make the reforms in two separate stages. The Government firmly believe the answer is an emphatic yes, and there are several reasons for that.

Dr. Ladyman: Before my hon. Friend continues, he should refer to the occasion when hereditary peers in the other place kept one of the Conservative Government's Bills going. Hundreds of hereditary peers were bussed in to support the Maastricht treaty and force through a Bill that Conservative Members now say was completely wrong.

Mr. Hoon: My hon. Friend makes a good point. Ever since the passage of that legislation, many Conservative Members have complained about the fact that it was passed at all.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, South): Is it not interesting that the only example the hon. and learned Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier) could give of the other place's defeating the previous Government involved the War Crimes Bill, which the vast majority of Labour Members believed was absolutely essential? We have no apologies to make about it.

Mr. Hoon: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's observation.

There are clear reasons why the Government are right to proceed in two stages. Arguably, the least important reason is that it was a clear manifesto commitment. However, the Opposition must not ignore the fact that that commitment was carefully drawn, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson) pointed out in his typically elegant contribution. Conservative Members should be cautious about the consequences of claiming too stridently that that is irrelevant. They should bear in mind also the thoughtful words of the right hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Mr. Maclennan).

The commitment appeared in the manifesto in a particular form for several very good reasons. First, the hereditary membership of Parliament is, in principle, wrong. We are not debating the monarchy or the inheritance of a family home: we are discussing the power to make laws by which the rest of the country is required to live. The social and economic conditions that might once have been said to justify the hereditary element in the legislature have long since passed into history. Even in the heyday of the hereditary peerage, many of the most distinguished Members of the House of Lords were the peers of first creation, not those who sat as the result of inheritance. In those days, the House of Lords constantly renewed itself by new appointments, as confirmed in the interesting historical survey made by the right hon. and learned Member for North-East Bedfordshire (Sir N. Lyell) and the more entertaining survey by my hon. Friend the Member for Battersea (Mr. Linton).

Sir Nicholas Lyell: I am grateful to the Minister for giving way, because he is just getting to the point, which is that, as the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central (Mr. Fisher) said, the Bill is destructive, whatever the Minister may say. What is important is what will happen in the interim between now and the second stage. Will he say a little about the contribution that the hereditary peers

continue to make and the plans that he and his Government have to enable them to continue to do so as long as they are not frustrated in their overall objectives?

Mr. Hoon: I shall not be tempted on to that subject, because it is not within the terms of the Bill that we are debating. In the event of such an amendment being tabled in the other place, there will clearly be opportunities for further discussion of that point.

The second argument for our proposal is that experience suggests that small evolutionary steps to reform are the way to make effective progress in changing our constitution. That is, as the Conservative party's general election manifesto indicated, completely consistent with our country's constitutional arrangements. I have previously related the comments made by Conservative Ministers in debates on the Life Peerages Act 1958 which support that view.

The House of Lords is not the same as it was in 1900. Its powers and its composition have been altered. Attempts in 1948 and 1968 further to change it foundered. Progress was made in 1949 because the then Government had a fall-back of partial reform already decided. This Government have learned those lessons of history.

There is also a practical difficulty in having any sensible debate on the future while the position of hereditary peers remains unresolved. By removing that issue, we are all forced to consider the future, instead of merely debating the past. That strategy, as I said in response to a question from one of my hon. Friends, is already working. We already now have a detailed debate about the second stage and what will happen when the Bill is passed.

It has been suggested that we do not intend to proceed with a second stage. I refute that. The royal commission has been appointed and started its work. It has been asked to report by 31 December. That is an entirely realistic timetable. We have said, moreover, that we shall use our best endeavours to ensure that Parliament has the opportunity to approve the second stage of reform by the next general election.

It has been suggested that we intend to subvert the House of Lords in the meantime. Again, I shall set out the principles on which the transitional House will operate, in particular to answer the questions asked by the hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) in his opening remarks.

First, there should be broad parity between the two major parties, with appropriate and proportionate creations for the other parties and Cross Benchers. Secondly, we have made a public pledge to allow party leaders a free hand with their nominations within the previously agreed ballots. That is the first time that such a public pledge has ever been made, and we could not have expected it from the Conservative party.

Mr. Winnick: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Hoon: If my hon. Friend will allow me, I must make progress.

Mr. Winnick: That's gratitude for you. *[Laughter.]*

Mr. Hoon: Fortunately, I did not hear that remark.

Thirdly, there is a pledge to maintain the independent Cross-Bench presence. Those peers will be genuinely independent and can be life or hereditary peers. The Government are committed by our manifesto and White Paper to retaining that presence.

Finally, a power to recommend non-political appointments and to vet all appointments will be passed to an independent appointments commission, itself appointed under Nolan principles and subject to the jurisdiction of the Commissioner for Public Appointments. That adds up to a considerable reduction in the Prime Minister's powers of patronage. It is the first time that a Prime Minister has volunteered to reduce his patronage in that way, and I hope that that is a complete answer to the criticisms of patronage made by the hon. Members for Chichester (Mr. Tyrie) and for Beaconsfield (Mr. Grieve).

This Bill, despite its modest length, provides for a significant, long-overdue constitutional reform. It constitutes a vital step in modernising our Parliament, preparing it for the conditions of the 21st century. It is not simply about the legislative process and the role of a second Chamber. It is fundamentally about the rights of the British people to have the kind of government and legislation for which they vote in parliamentary elections. It is about the kind of democracy in which we live.

It is right to place on record the fact that we are grateful to those hereditary peers who have served with distinction in the House of Lords. The more thoughtful of them have known that there can be no real justification for their presence in Parliament. The time has come for them, and for the country, to move on.

9.45 pm

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): The one thing for which the people of this country did not vote at the general election was a Government who would treat Parliament with contempt and seek to steamroller legislation through the House using their huge majority, and with absolute disdain for any other point of view. This debate has been a classic illustration of the Government's intolerance.

I do not remember any previous occasion in this House when the Minister's winding-up speech has been made before that of the Opposition spokesman. Nor do I remember an occasion on which the Deputy Chief Whip has so blatantly toured his Back Benches, asking Labour Members not to make a speech but to intervene on the Minister of State, Lord Chancellor's Department so that his speech could continue for 25 minutes.

Before the Minister got up to speak from the Government Front Bench, several hon. Members—I can see at least two of them in the Chamber—rose in the hope of catching your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I would not accuse any Government or any Opposition Member of trying to filibuster; this has not been a long debate. There were three statements and a ten-minute Bill, so it was 6 o'clock before we began Third Reading. Members on both sides of the House have taken a close interest in this Bill, and wanted to contribute to Third Reading. Had they all been allowed to do so—speeches were averaging no more than about 12 minutes—we would have concluded our proceedings at about 10.30 pm which is hardly a very late

[Sir Patrick Cormack]

hour of the night. Instead, the Deputy Patronage Secretary has been urging his hon. Friends not to take part. Then, the Minister—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I remind the hon. Gentleman that we are discussing Third Reading.

Sir Patrick Cormack: That is precisely what we are trying to do, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and what some of my hon. Friends have been deprived of doing.

The Leader of the House described the Bill as significant, simple and exquisite. I certainly accept that it is a significant measure, because it attempts to re-write the constitution, and there can be nothing more significant than that. I accept that the Bill is simple, because it is very brief. But to describe it as exquisite is about as gross a misuse of the English language as I have heard in this Chamber.

There have been some interesting speeches, but none has been more interesting, and none more significant, than that of a fellow Staffordshire Member, my hon. Friend—I deliberately call him that—the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central (Mr. Fisher), who made the very pertinent point that all the indications were that, when the Bill comes back to us from the other place, it will have been wholly re-written. I see him nodding.

There are very few precedents for such legislative change. The Leader of the House and other Ministers have indicated that an amendment similar to the one voted down in this place at the behest of the Government Whips will, if tabled in the other place, be accepted—as long as their lordships behave themselves. Then those very Members who, a couple of weeks ago, were dragooned through the Lobby to vote down the amendment when we proposed it, will be dragooned through the Lobby to do the opposite.

Dr. George Turner: I assure the hon. Gentleman that the vast majority of Labour Members will go with joy through the Lobby to see the Bill reach the statute book, and that the vast majority of us will be delighted if it does so without amendment by the Lords.

Sir Patrick Cormack: I fear that one of the dangers of the present Parliament is that the vast majority of Labour Members would go through the Lobby with joy to vote for anything and everything that the Government sought to place before them. If ever there was a negation of parliamentary democracy—a denial of what this place should be about—it is that.

We had several significant speeches—

Mr. Gerald Bermingham (St. Helens, South): I seem to remember that, some years ago, the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues went through the Lobby willy-nilly on something called the poll tax. Is there any difference?

Sir Patrick Cormack: I never went through the Lobby in support of the poll tax. I consistently voted against it—I was one of only two Tories who did not support its introduction in Scotland before the 1987 general election—so the hon. Gentleman had better be careful what he says to me on that subject.

Mr. Gordon Prentice (Pendle): But did the hon. Gentleman vote to set aside the 1689 Bill of Rights, which allowed his friend Neil Hamilton to bring an action against *The Guardian* for matters which were being discussed—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. That is completely out of order.

Sir Patrick Cormack: Had I so voted, it would have been out of order, but I did not.

The hon. Member for Battersea (Mr. Linton) launched into an extraordinary diatribe. He said, with some reluctance, that he was not actually proposing the guillotine, but I nevertheless felt that the sea-green incorruptible Robespierre had been changed for the drab grey uniformity of the hon. Gentleman, who stands for everything that is colourless in our national life. The hon. Gentleman wants to reduce everything to a sort of digital anonymity; what a ghastly speech it was.

Tonight we are discussing the removal from the House of Lords of the hereditary peers. My hon. Friend the Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) and I—and our right hon. and hon. Friends—have made it abundantly plain that, although we agree with the hereditary principle, as anyone who is a monarchist or who wants to leave his house to his child must, we accept that the Government have a mandate for removing from the other place those who are there because of their birth.

Mr. Malcolm Savidge (Aberdeen, North): Does the hon. Gentleman not recognise that selection on the basis of first-born sons may be better suited to the biblical plagues than to British Parliaments?

Sir Patrick Cormack: When I look at the hon. Gentleman I am certainly warned of plagues, but we entirely accept that the Government have a mandate. We are very much opposed to the Government's giving so much priority to the Bill, but we accept that they have a mandate. We nevertheless believe that they are doing a great disservice to the institution of Parliament by the way in which they are proceeding. What the Government are seeking to do, by removing the hereditary peers without telling us in any detail what they have in mind for constitutional reform, is to place the institution of Parliament in jeopardy.

Labour Members said that the Bill would improve the House of Lords. The hon. Member for City of Durham (Mr. Steinberg) was especially eloquent on the subject. However, when we sought by amendment to ensure that the House of Lords could continue to perform its vital functions of debate and of scrutiny of legislation and its vital Committee work, every amendment that we tabled was rejected by the Government, including the so-called Weatherill-type amendment, which the Government, by their own admission, accept will be necessary if the other place is to function. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh."] Oh yes. What we have been able to demonstrate as we have debated during these six, or, rather, seven days is that about half those who regularly attend the House of Lords are hereditary peers. By that, I mean those who play an active part in its deliberations.

I have cited before the fact that some 10 members of the European Communities Committee, which scrutinises European legislation, and does so to the admiration of the legislatures of the world, are hereditary peers. If we

wanted any reminder of the need for proper scrutiny of European legislation, we had it in the Chamber this afternoon, with the first statement that followed questions.

If we are to have a functioning House of Lords able properly to perform the functions that we expect it to perform, we must do something about the numbers. Every time we have tried to do that in Opposition amendments, the Government have denounced us; the Government's troops have voted against those amendments and we are still left with the Bill.

I remind hon. Members on both sides of the House that the Bill does not mention the word "interim". The Bill will take away from the House of Lords a large percentage of its active and diligent membership and will put nothing in its place. Nor is there any timetable for the emergence of a new type of second Chamber. There will almost certainly be at least four years, and much more likely 10, of the so-called interim Chamber, which is not referred to as such in any part of the Bill.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: Is not the logical consequence that the Government, through an excessive application of patronage, will have to appoint a vast raft of new Members to the interim House, who will have no experience, and will therefore be unable to exercise the necessary scrutiny? That means that the Government will enjoy a huge majority in this House and will be subject to no scrutiny in the other place.

Sir Patrick Cormack: My hon. Friend makes an extremely pertinent point.

Mr. Keith Bradley (Treasurer of Her Majesty's Household) *rose in his place and claimed to move,* That the Question be now put.

Question put, That the Question be now put:—

The House divided: Ayes 326, Noes 152.

Division No. 106] **[9.58 pm**

AYES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Stuart *(Middlesbrough)*
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Butler, Mrs Christine
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Caborn, Richard
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Canavan, Dennis
Caplin, Ivor
Caton, Martin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Curtis–Thomas, Mrs Claire
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davies, Rt Hon Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, John
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Etherington, Bill
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, John
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Home Robertson, John
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Ms Jenny *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kingham, Ms Tess
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Laxton, Bob
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Linton, Martin
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Lock, David
Love, Andrew
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Mrs Rosemary
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall–Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan

Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'd Heeley)*
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Mitchell, Austin
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Alasdair *(Galloway)*
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morgan, Rhodri *(Cardiff W)*
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mountford, Kali
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Eddie
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Mrs Diana
Osborne, Ms Sandra
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Ms Linda
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quinn, Lawrie
Radice, Giles
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Rt Hon Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Robertson, Rt Hon George *(Hamilton S)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Salter, Martin
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Short, Rt Hon Clare
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Miss Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Stott, Roger
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Straw, Rt Hon Jack
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Vaz, Keith
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. David Clelland and Jane Kennedy.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Body, Sir Richard
Boswell, Tim
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burnett, John
Burns, Simon
Burstow, Paul
Butterfill, John
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Kensington)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rayleigh)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Cran, James
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Evans, Nigel
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Fearn, Ronnie
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam
Fraser, Christopher
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gibb, Nick
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorrie, Donald
Gray, James
Green, Damian
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Hancock, Mike
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson Smith, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Keetch, Paul
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
McIntosh, Miss Anne
Mackay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maginnis, Ken
Major, Rt Hon John
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Nicholls, Patrick
Norman, Archie
Öpik, Lembit
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Prior, David
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Ross, William *(E Lond'y)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Faversham)*
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
St Aubyn, Nick
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, Rt Hon John D *(Strangford)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thompson, William
Trend, Michael
Tyler, Paul
Tyrie, Andrew
Wardle, Charles
Waterson, Nigel
Webb, Steve
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Willis, Phil
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Woodward, Shaun
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Stephen Day and Mrs. Eleanor Laing.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Question put accordingly, That the Bill be now read the Third time:—

The House divided: Ayes 340, Noes 132.

Division No. 107] **[10.15 pm**

AYES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Stuart *(Middlesbrough)*
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnett, John
Burstow, Paul
Butler, Mrs Christine
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Caborn, Richard
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Canavan, Dennis
Caplin, Ivor
Caton, Martin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cotter, Brian
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davies, Rt Hon Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, John
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Etherington, Bill
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fearn, Ronnie
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gorrie, Donald
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hancock, Mike
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, John
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Ms Jenny *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Keetch, Paul
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kingham, Ms Tess
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Laxton, Bob
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Linton, Martin
Livingstone, Ken
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Lock, David
Love, Andrew
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Mrs Rosemary
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'd Heeley)*
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Mitchell, Austin
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moore, Michael
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Alasdair *(Galloway)*
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morgan, Rhodri *(Cardiff W)*
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mountford, Kali
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Eddie
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Öpik, Lembit
Organ, Mrs Diana
Osborne, Ms Sandra
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Ms Linda
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quinn, Lawrie
Radice, Giles
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Rt Hon Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, Rt Hon George *(Hamilton S)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Salter, Martin
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Short, Rt Hon Clare
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Miss Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*

Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Stott, Roger
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Straw, Rt Hon Jack
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Temple–Morris, Peter
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
Webb, Steve
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Willis, Phil
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. David Clelland and Jane Kennedy.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Body, Sir Richard
Boswell, Tim
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Butterfill, John
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Kensington)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rayleigh)*
Clifton–Brown, Geoffrey
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cran, James
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Day, Stephen
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Evans, Nigel
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam
Fraser, Christopher
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gray, James
Green, Damian
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat–Amory, Rt Hon David
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson Smith, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maginnis, Ken
Major, Rt Hon John
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
Moss, Malcolm
Nicholls, Patrick
Norman, Archie
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Prior, David
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Ross, William *(E Lond'y)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Faversham)*
Ruffley, David
St Aubyn, Nick
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, Rt Hon John D *(Strangford)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thompson, William
Trend, Michael
Tyrie, Andrew
Wardle, Charles
Waterson, Nigel
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Woodward, Shaun
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mrs. Eleanor Laing and Mr. Tim Collins.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill read the Third time, and passed.

Prevention of Terrorism

10.27 pm

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Jack Straw): I beg to move,

That the draft Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1989 (Continuance) Order 1999, which was laid before this House on 4th March, be approved.

I am aware of the long line of Home Secretaries who, since 1974, have risen to speak at the Dispatch Box, as I do now, to propose the renewal of the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1974 for a further year. In doing so, many of them have reflected on the mixture of signs of optimism and violence that have characterised the preceding year. I, too, shall draw the House's attention to some of the key events, encouraging and depressing, over the 12 months since the previous renewal debate.

However, I am perhaps the first Home Secretary in 25 years to say that I hope that this may be one of the last—although maybe not the last—of the annual debates on the renewal of the prevention of terrorism Act. As the House will be aware, the Government propose the introduction of permanent counter-terrorist legislation, which we hope will do away with the need for the annual renewal of temporary provisions.

That approach recognises the sad but incontrovertible reality that even a lasting peace in Northern Ireland—something that we all pray and hope will be firmly established soon—would not of itself remove the need for counter-terrorist legislation. Terrorism, and the threat of terrorism from a range of fronts, is likely to continue to exist for the foreseeable future. Although the focus of today's debate is on the renewal of the powers under our current prevention of terrorism legislation, I also intend in closing to say something about our plans for future legislation.

Looking back over the past 12 months, I am struck by what an extraordinary period of highs and lows it has been. Less than six weeks after the House agreed the renewal of the prevention of terrorism Act for a further 12 months, the Good Friday agreement was signed. It was subsequently endorsed by 71 per cent. of the people of Northern Ireland and provides the means to take Northern Ireland on the road to lasting peace.

My right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and many others on both sides of the House continue to work tirelessly with all the parties to achieve the full implementation of the agreement and to see the Executive established by the first anniversary of the Good Friday agreement. I think that the whole House recognises that this is Northern Ireland's best chance for peace in decades and it must not be allowed to slip from our grasp.

By contrast, the interception in July in London of six primed fire-bombs, and the appalling Omagh bombing on 15 August last year—in which 29 people lost their lives, and over 200 were injured—brought home forcefully the residual threat from renegade groups opposed to the Northern Ireland peace process.

Yesterday, we had a further shocking reminder of the depths to which terrorist groups in the north of Ireland will stoop. Rosemary Nelson, the prominent human rights lawyer and mother of three young children, was murdered in cold blood outside her own home. Her death was claimed by the Red Hand Defenders, a loyalist splinter group bitterly opposed to the Belfast agreement. The proscription of the group and—subject to parliamentary approval—its specification was announced less than two weeks ago, and rightly so.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): I join my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary in mourning the loss of Rosemary Nelson in yesterday's terrible events. Is he prepared to examine the question of the security provided to Rosemary Nelson, who clearly was a target of extreme groups, and suffered accordingly?

Mr. Straw: I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland will be happy to look into those matters if representations are made to her by representatives of the family of Rosemary Nelson.

The Royal Ulster Constabulary has invited David Phillips, the chief constable of Kent, to oversee the inquiry into Rosemary Nelson's murder. It has also invited the Federal Bureau of Investigation to provide an input into the investigation. Those measures, which the Government welcome, demonstrate the RUC's commitment to a full and independent inquiry into this terrible crime.

I am sure that the whole House will wish to join me in conveying our sympathy to the family of Rosemary Nelson at this time. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] I am glad that that was reiterated on both sides of the House. We must restate our commitment to see peace established in Northern Ireland, and the actions of those dreadful murderers must not be allowed to succeed.

There is also the threat of international terrorism. The bombings—also in early August last year—of the United States embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, with the loss of more than 250 lives, were a shocking illustration of the scale of indiscriminate violence that international terrorists are prepared to unleash whenever they see their opportunity.

In the past few months, the horrific events in the Yemen, and more recently in Uganda—which resulted in the deaths of four and eight tourists respectively, including seven British citizens—have further emphasised the global reach of international terror.

Our response to all this is twofold. We will do all that we can in the international and domestic context to help to establish peace and stability, and, alongside that, we will do all that we can with the police and security agencies to counter terrorism directly.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Will my right hon. Friend—a senior member of the Cabinet—reflect on the fact that, however terrible the events in east Africa were, we endorsed the American bombing of the Al Shifa factory in Khartoum without any evidence—and, it now transpires, almost certainly no grounds whatever—for doing so? Day by day, Tornados and American aircraft are raining down mayhem on Iraq, and we are threatening to bomb the Serbs. Ought there not to be some reflection on the fact that violence begets violence?

Mr. Straw: I have great affection for my hon. Friend, with whom I dislike disagreeing—but, I am afraid, I do disagree on this occasion. There has been enormous

[Mr. Straw]

reflection on any military action that the Government have supported, as was the case with the American action over the Sudanese so-called pharmaceutical factory, and in terms of Iraq and Serbia. Before such action can be taken, there is a huge degree of careful reflection in the Cabinet by the Prime Minister, the Secretary of State for Defence and all those involved in those decisions.

I am not a pacifist, and I do not think that my hon. Friend is. There are occasions when military action has to be taken. There is a world of difference between action endorsed by the United Nations and/or NATO for a specific, lawful and legitimate purpose and the wholly indiscriminate violence against the United States embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, in which 250 lives were lost and many more were injured. As far as I recall, nobody was killed in the action against the alleged pharmaceutical factory in Sudan. The action was proportionate to the problem that the United States and we had identified.

The twin approach of which I was speaking was well illustrated by the recall of Parliament in early September to enact the Criminal Justice (Terrorism and Conspiracy) Act 1998, to strengthen our anti-terrorist laws against dissident Irish terrorist groups and our conspiracy laws in relation to terrorism and other crimes.

Mr. John D. Taylor (Strangford): The Secretary of State spoke about possible sources of terrorism, such as Iraq. What is the potential for extreme Islamist terrorism within the United Kingdom? There are links with the United Kingdom in the case in Yemen. Is there a growing threat within our own territory?

Mr. Straw: There is some threat within our territory. I must first make it clear that, although the phrase "Islamist terrorism" is used in common parlance, we ought to avoid it. We do not use the phrase "Christian terrorism", or indeed "Catholic terrorism" or "Protestant terrorism", to categorise some of the terrible events that have taken place in Northern Ireland. We avoid implying that the religions followed entirely lawfully by the vast majority of people are somehow a cause of terrorist activities. The overwhelming majority of followers of Islam here, as in every other country, are wholly law abiding.

The problem is middle eastern terrorism based on territorial challenges and on tribalism, which seeks to justify itself by reference to Islam. The lawful Islamic groups in this country are very sensitive on the matter. I make that point at some length because it is a real issue of sensitivity for the British Muslim community, which is entirely lawful. Middle eastern terrorism is an acknowledged threat, and the security and intelligence agencies and the police take it very seriously and monitor it carefully.

The key to the prevention of terrorism is to ensure that the police and others have all the powers that they need to deter, disrupt and investigate. I pay tribute to the diligence, the immense hard work and the bravery of the police and the security forces in their daily efforts on our behalf.

Informing our debate today is the report prepared by John Rowe QC. I am very grateful to Mr. Rowe for the work that he has undertaken in the past 12 months, as he has in previous years. He advises that the powers in the Act, including the powers of arrest, detention and stop and search, and the terrorist investigation powers, were all used appropriately and proportionately in 1998 and should remain in force for 1999. As exclusion order powers were not included in last year's order, Mr. Rowe has not considered those powers in his report.

The order does not contain exclusion powers. It has been the Government's long-standing view that exclusion orders are wrong on policy grounds—in that they may be used to exclude British citizens by Executive order from part of the national territory—and that they have in any case proved to be of limited utility.

As long as the powers remain on the statute book, as they will have to until there is primary legislation, they could of course be reactivated on security grounds, but I find it hard to conceive of the circumstances in which I would decide that that would be expedient, and our consultation paper on our proposals for future legislation makes it clear that we do not envisage carrying them across into our new permanent anti-terrorist laws. Of course our ability, under the Immigration Act 1971, to deport, or deny entry to, suspected international terrorists will remain unchanged.

Returning to the issues raised in Mr. Rowe's report, I was especially pleased to read of the care that he found was taken in respect of all the relatively small number of complaints received about the operation of the powers under the prevention of terrorism Act. We must never lose sight of the fact that the powers available under this legislation are exceptional and must be exercised with the utmost integrity and diligence. It is absolutely right that any complaints are treated seriously. Therefore, it is pleasing and reassuring to learn that there were relatively few complaints in 1998 and that Mr. Rowe considers that all those were dealt with conscientiously.

The specific anti-terrorist provisions in the Criminal Justice (Terrorism and Conspiracy) Act 1998, which amended sections of the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1989, also fall to be renewed for the first time in the order before the House. I shall remind the House what those measures mean. First, they mean that the opinion of a senior police officer is admissible in court as evidence of membership of proscribed and specified terrorist organisations. That includes the Real IRA and the Continuity IRA but, subject to parliamentary approval, not the Irish National Liberation Army. Secondly, courts may draw inferences from a suspect's refusal to answer questions during an investigation into membership of a proscribed and specified terrorist group. As hon. Members may remember, it is not possible, under the legislation, for a suspect to be convicted solely on the basis of inferences allowed under the Act or on the statement of a police officer alone.

As Mr. Rowe points out in his report, there have not so far been any convictions in connection with the new provisions, but that cannot be the sole criterion for judging their effectiveness. The measures were introduced as a targeted response to the small, but very dangerous, renegade groups who are bent on destroying the Northern Ireland peace process, and have no regard for the human life that they would destroy at the same time. The fact that similar action was also taken in September in the Irish

Parliament sent a powerful signal of the total repudiation from people both sides of the border of those renegade groups and all that they stand for.

However, the provisions are more than a symbolic gesture. They are there so that it is possible to take robust action against any who, in the face of the express wishes of the people of the island of Ireland, choose to support groups not observing total and unequivocal ceasefires. All of us hope that the support for those groups withers away, but, if it does not, the strengthened provisions are there to assist in bringing those people to book.

That leads me to touch on the observations that Mr. Rowe offers in his report about the provisions of the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act and the European convention on human rights. In his report, Mr. Rowe concludes that most of the measures in the Act do not raise issues of possible incompatibility. Indeed, he points out that, although it has been possible for individuals to bring cases to the European Court of Human Rights since 1966, only two cases have been dealt with by the court in all that time, and a violation was found in only one of those. It is fair to say, therefore, that our ECHR record, vis-a-vis the prevention of terrorism Act, is good.

However, Mr. Rowe does raise concerns about the compatibility of the new membership provisions, enacted last September, with article 6 of the European convention on human rights, which provides for a right to a fair trial. It may not surprise the House to learn that I part company with him on that point. I can assure the House, as I made clear when the emergency legislation was introduced in September, that the whole issue of compatibility with the ECHR was looked at extremely closely before the Bill was published and that I was, and remain, satisfied that the provisions are compatible with the convention. We would not have introduced the legislation in that form if we had believed that it was incompatible with our obligations under the convention.

We have, of course, looked again at the provisions in the light of the specific points made by Mr. Rowe in his report, and I do not lightly take issue with his conclusions, but his arguments—which we have studied with great care—have not caused us to change our position. That is something on which we will have to agree to differ, unless and until these questions are settled in the courts. As Mr. Rowe himself has pointed out, his conclusions are very provisional indeed, and the matter will ultimately be decided by the courts.

I shall make a few remarks about our proposals for new counter-terrorist legislation. The House will be aware that the Government issued a consultation paper, "Legislation Against Terrorism", just before Christmas, inviting, as it happens, responses by 16 March, which is today. In it, we argued that, because of the range of terrorist threats that the United Kingdom faces, there will be a need for continuous United Kingdom-wide anti-terrorist powers, even when lasting peace is established in Northern Ireland.

Mr. James Gray (North Wiltshire): Will the Home Secretary take this opportunity to feel the slightest twinge of embarrassment at the fact that, from 1983 to 1995, the Labour party consistently opposed renewal of the prevention of terrorism Act? Will he apologise to the nation for getting it wrong for 12 years? His remarks tonight make it quite clear that we were right to renew the Act on every occasion.

Mr. Straw: I am not remotely going to apologise, and I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman chooses to mix it in what ought to be a bipartisan debate. If he cares to read the debates over the years—I have studied every one of them—he will find that there was never an argument about the need for anti-terrorist legislation. We never made that argument, as my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister made clear during his first debate as shadow Home Secretary in 1993, and again in 1994.

Our arguments were about proportionality in the use of the powers, which was on a different scale during the 1980s. We also argued over the question of a judicial element in extensions of detention and, in particular, over the use of exclusion powers. We have made it clear that there will in future be a judicial element to extensions of detention. As for exclusion powers, I have done exactly what I told the House we would do when I spoke in the final two PTA debates before the general election. I said that we would not use the exclusion orders, and they were wound down quickly after the election. They have since been suspended from the face of the Bill.

As is widely recognised, the time has come to put anti-terrorist legislation on a permanent footing. We envisage legislation that is flexible enough to be able to respond to the ever-changing nature of terrorism, that is effective and proportionate to the threat that the UK faces, that protects the rights of individuals and that complies with our international commitments.

We hope and expect that, by the time new legislation is introduced, the threat from Irish terrorism should have diminished to the point at which no additional special powers are necessary to combat it. If the security situation suggests that some particular measure is needed, it will be included in a temporary additional section of the Act, subject, as the prevention of terrorism Act is at present, to annual independent review and to Parliament's annual approval to its staying in force. Whatever the circumstances in Northern Ireland, we shall ensure that powers necessary to the security forces in Northern Ireland and in the rest of the UK will be on the statute book and will be available to the security forces and the police.

This is not the place to detail the measures that we propose to take. I hope that right hon. and hon. Members have had the opportunity to read our paper. We are determined to strike the right balance between giving the police and other agencies the powers that they need to fight terrorism and guarding the civil liberties of people affected by the exercise of those powers. We recognise that it will not be an easy task, and we will carefully consider all the responses that we receive to our consultation document.

Let me turn again to the focus of today's debate. The question before us is whether the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act should remain in force for a further 12 months. I judge that it is vital that those engaged in the fight against terrorism should have the powers that they need. The Act must therefore be renewed.

10.49 pm

Sir Norman Fowler (Sutton Coldfield): I shall be brief. I join the Home Secretary in paying tribute to Mr. Rowe for his report. The report argues—to my mind, utterly convincingly—that the Act is needed for a further year, and we support that continuance absolutely. If any extra argument were needed, that was provided by the appalling murder of Rosemary Nelson this week—something that the whole House deplores as yet another example of the sickening use of the car bomb by a terrorist group. I applaud the action of the Chief Constable of the RUC in emphasising the independence of the investigation into that murder.

Such terrorist atrocities have continued for more than 30 years. When I was a journalist on *The Times*, I was sent to cover some of the earliest violence in the late 1960s, and that violence has continued throughout the time that I have been a Member of Parliament. During my days as a journalist, I spent some time with the RUC and the then Chief Constable; a lasting result of that experience is a great admiration for the men and women of the RUC, who have suffered terrible casualties in the battles and actions in which they have taken part, year after year.

What is significant about Mr. Rowe's report is that it demonstrates that, even in 1998, the level of violence was enormous and the terrorist challenge immense. Chapter 4 succinctly describes the situation in Northern Ireland:

"Paramilitary organisations are still in being, and some of them have not announced a ceasefire. There are dissident elements who are intent upon causing injury and damage, and they have the capacity to do so. All in all there is a real threat that some terrorist activity will continue in Northern Ireland and there is no reason to think that it will not extend to Great Britain."

Mr. Rowe continues:

"There have been explosions of bombs, and attempts to carry our bombing attacks . . . There have been hundreds of beatings carried out for a paramilitary purpose, many of them in circumstances of great brutality, and some of them ending in death."

He adds that, in 1998:

"In Northern Ireland there have been 55 deaths, caused by terrorist attacks."

He ends:

"My conclusion is this: criminals with a terrorist or paramilitary disposition have the means to carry out attacks with explosives and firearms at any time; furthermore, some of them have maintained an organisation which has structure and influence. Therefore there is a need for the PTA so far as concerns terrorism connected with the affairs of Northern Ireland."

I entirely agree with him, and accept his conclusion.

The Conservatives' position is that the Belfast agreement offers the prospect of a genuine and lasting peace underpinned by stable political institutions. There is now a real chance that the terrorist events that have characterised the past 30 years might be brought to an end, but no one should doubt that difficulties still lie ahead. The peace in Northern Ireland is in many respects imperfect. The main terrorist organisations, with their command and control structures, remain firmly intact; they are continuing to target potential victims and recruit and train members. Far from making a start on decommissioning their illegally held arms and explosives as they are required to do under the Belfast agreement, the evidence suggests that, at times, they are even seeking new and more sophisticated weaponry.

Even in the event of the agreement succeeding, the terrorist threat is likely to remain at a high level, perhaps for some time. As the Home Secretary said, the Omagh bombing in 1998—the single worst atrocity of the past 30 years—was carried out by a republican splinter group; and the murder of Rosemary Nelson is the work of another splinter group. The terrorist threat remains, but it is by no means confined to Northern Ireland: there are other forms of domestic terrorism and the problems of international terrorism, to which the Home Secretary has referred. The Government's consultation paper rightly points out that, not only has the threat from such groups increased in recent years, but they have access to increasingly sophisticated weapons and methods. That was recognised by the previous Conservative Government, who extended the powers of the Prevention of Terrorism Act to cover that development.

Faced with the continuing threat from all forms of terrorism, Conservative Members support unequivocally renewing the legislation for a further year. We have always taken the strongest stance against terrorism and backed measures designed to deal effectively with it.

Mr. Steve McCabe (Birmingham, Hall Green): Does the right hon. Gentleman believe that the persistent, and perhaps tedious, interventions by his hon. Friend the Member for North Wiltshire (Mr. Gray) of the kind that we have witnessed most recently—suggesting repeatedly that the Labour party is opposed to this approach—undermine the sincerity of his bipartisan case? Does the right hon. Gentleman regret his hon. Friend's interventions?

Sir Norman Fowler: I do not regret my hon. Friend's interventions. I add, in passing, that our backing for the Government on the Prevention of Terrorism Act contrasts with the actions of the then Labour Opposition. From 1983 to 1995, Labour opposed the Act's annual renewal. In 1995, Labour took the decision to abstain from the vote—the Home Secretary appears to find this rather amusing, but he abstained in 1995. I do not intend to mix it in any shape or form, but I must point out that Labour has changed its position. We welcome that, and we will support that position in a bipartisan manner—which is exactly what we are doing.

We also believe that the improvements in the security situation made possible by the progress in Northern Ireland make this an opportune time to examine the future requirements of the United Kingdom in respect of counter-terrorist legislation. We are examining the Government's consultation paper. The Government's recommendations build, in large part, upon the work of Lord Lloyd, and make practical sense. Like Lloyd, they are predicated on the establishment of lasting peace in Northern Ireland. While we agree that it is right to move forward in this area, nothing should be contemplated that diminishes our ability to deal with the existing threat and any threat that might occur in the future.

Therefore, I add one point about the position in Northern Ireland. We know the difficulties and the dangers. Successive Governments have worked for peace, and the position is more hopeful now than it has been for the past 30 years. As the Chief Constable of the Royal Ulster Constabulary, Sir Ronnie Flanagan, put it:

"Despite all of these barriers to the ultimate elimination of violence, there remains a solid basis for optimism and hope for the future. Of course, there will be setbacks. Of course there will be

attempted attacks by those desperate to resist peace and reconciliation but the overwhelming trend of movement is clearly in the positive direction. Things have changed dramatically for the good and all those of influence must continue to positively exert that influence".

They are wise words, and it is very much in that spirit that we support the order.

10.59 pm

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): I am concerned about one thing: misdirected vengeance. For example, nearly two years ago, with the Home Secretary's agreement, I went to Scotland Yard to see Assistant Commissioner David Veness about the brutal murder of Woman Police Constable Yvonne Fletcher. That case has repeatedly been given as a reason for our maintaining support for rather brutal sanctions against Libya. If there were no doubt whatever about that case, that position would at least be understandable, but Scotland Yard continues to press for a decision—I am told that one is just around the corner—on an investigation that I do not doubt they take extremely seriously.

David Veness said to me, "We have about half a dozen cases that, above all, we really want to solve. Yvonne Fletcher was one of our own. You can take it, Mr. Dalyell, that we really want to solve that case." I do not doubt that Scotland Yard is working extremely hard on it. Will the Home Secretary therefore tell the House when that case is likely to be concluded? If there is a degree of uncertainty about that case, how in heaven's name can it be a basis for international policy?

Reference was made earlier to the Al Shifa factory. I have been to see R. J. P. Williams, who has been a fellow of Wadham college at Oxford for some 40 years and is professor of inorganic chemistry at that university, a Royal Society professor and the greatest European expert on EMTA, or O ethyl methyl phosphonoic acid. In long letters which make up part of a huge correspondence with the Prime Minister, Professor Williams says that he is now certain that the Al Shifa factory had nothing whatever to do with the VX precursors that apparently caused all the trouble. He said also that anyone would have to be out of their mind to make VX precursors in a factory that did not even have airtight doors in a built-up area in a capital city. No one would do that.

There comes a time when we say that the vengeance that has been wreaked is ill-directed and wrong. This is not the occasion, in such a short debate, to take up time discussing Iraq, but I plead with a senior member of the Cabinet to imagine what it must be like for traumatised kids and old people to face the threat of bombing night after night. I say gently to the Home Secretary that those of us who are of a generation that has done national service or have experience of Northern Ireland—a subject on which I speak with great humility—know what horror is being unleashed. Is there a moral justification for that? What justifies it?

A brutal fact must be faced: in whole swathes of Africa and Asia, let alone the Arab world, President Clinton and the British Prime Minister, Defence Secretary and Foreign Secretary are regarded as terrorists. That is very disagreeable for us, but it is nevertheless a fact. Once we start unleashing such bombs, God help us if we try to take on the Slavs, with all that that entails. We are tarred with that which we deprecate. I shall leave it at that, but I should like the Home Secretary to comment on the Fletcher situation.

11.3 pm

Mr. Andrew Hunter (Basingstoke): In previous debates on our annual review of the Prevention of Terrorism Act, hon. Members may sometimes have felt a sense of deja vu as seasoned participants recited their well-known and well-rehearsed positions. This year, the debate is different. For the first time in our review of anti-terrorism legislation, we may consider aspects of the Criminal Justice (Terrorism and Conspiracy) Act 1998 and take into account the implications for the PTA of the Human Rights Act 1998. Also for the first time, we can take into account the Government's wider thinking on anti-terrorism legislation, as outlined in the Home Office consultation paper. Each of those factors is novel to this debate.

As Mr. Rowe makes clear in his report, the provisions of the Human Rights Act 1998 will affect the implementation of the Prevention of Terrorism Act, not least where the PTA gives effect to the Criminal Justice (Terrorism and Conspiracy) Act 1998. Mr. Rowe's report does not make entirely encouraging reading. It opens the Government to the accusation that what they are trying to do with one Act, the renewal of the PTA, they undermine with another, the Human Rights Act 1998.

Under the Human Rights Act, the courts will be required to interpret the PTA to uphold the European convention on human rights. The fact that they will be required to take into account any relevant judgment of the European Court of Human Rights and the fact that case law of the European Court will be part of the jurisprudence of the United Kingdom may, as Mr. Rowe acknowledges, affect the implementation of the PTA—some parts more than others. From now on, to a far greater extent, the important matter will be how the powers of the PTA have been exercised in an individual case.

The Criminal Justice (Terrorism and Conspiracy) Act—I make this point in relation to what has been said earlier in this debate—has not had any effect on the pursuit of the Omagh bombers.

Section 2A of the PTA, which was introduced under the terrorism and conspiracy Act, provides that on a charge of membership of a proscribed organisation, a police officer may give evidence that in his opinion the defendant belongs to a specified organisation. There is legitimate cause for concern here. Paragraph 58 of Mr. Rowe's report states:

"In my view there may, in the use and application of this section, be a breach of the European Convention on Human Rights, where the police officer speaks of what another person . . . told him, or what sensitive information tells him."

On inference from silence, Mr. Rowe comments in paragraph 62 in respect of the Human Rights Act:

"Whether there will be a breach of the European Convention will depend upon the circumstances of the particular case."

Mr. Dominic Grieve (Beaconsfield): Does my hon. Friend agree that the matter goes beyond simply a possible breach of the European convention? We were certainly led to believe in debates on incorporating the convention that it was the bottom line. Does he therefore agree that simply as a departure from normal legal practice in this country, the two provisions to which he has referred ought to give cause for considerable concern?

Mr. Hunter: Yes, I do. My hon. Friend makes the point that I am trying to make more succinctly. If he bears with me, I will continue to develop it. Another section in Mr. Rowe's report substantiates his argument.

[Mr. Hunter]

In paragraph 63, Mr. Rowe points out that because "PACE inference" is different from "PTA inference", there is a danger of confusion where several charges are brought against a defendant, and that could constitute unfairness, as defined by the European convention on human rights. Mr. Rowe also suggests, as no doubt my hon. Friend is aware, that in some circumstances the same can be said of sections 14 and 16A. To put it mildly, it is profoundly unsatisfactory that the Government have created what, at the very least, is a grey area, and may prove to be much worse. That and the fact that the powers of the new section 2A have not been used since they were enacted goes a considerable way towards justify the cynicism that some of us feel about the interaction of the PTA and the Human Rights Act 1998.

As for the order in the wider context of the Government's review of legislation against terrorism, I do not object in principle to the proposition that the PTA and the Emergency Provisions Act should be replaced with one piece of permanent legislation, provided some flexibility is retained to enable the Government to respond to exceptionally serious or unforeseen circumstances.

With regard to the consultation paper and the order, to be ultra-selective, first, on balance, I believe that the Government are probably right to think in terms of introducing a judicial element into the extension of detention—section 14 of the Act. I changed my thinking on that issue towards the end of the previous Parliament. However, I still maintain that the case for judicial involvement is not so overwhelming as some of its advocates maintain. There are dangers and there are difficulties, not least the risk of compromising the judiciary by widening its role from being only and strictly judicial, and involving it in the process of prosecution.

Secondly, I hope that the Government will take very serious note indeed of Mr. Rowe's emphasis on the key role of port and border controls in detecting and deterring terrorism. He especially stresses the importance of adequate manpower. He reports in paragraph 114 that

"there is as much need as ever for the presence of port officers, from the point of view of both terrorism connected with the affairs of Northern Ireland, and terrorism in the international field."

Thirdly, with regard to the consultation paper and this order, there remain two areas where, without apology, I continue to quarrel with the Government. I shall not repeat the arguments in detail—they are well rehearsed—but merely refer to them. It remains my belief that the Government are making a monumental error in dispensing with the power to intern and the power to exclude. I note with interest, however, that the Government are retaining the power to exclude from the United Kingdom to the Republic of Ireland; I approve of that.

In my judgment, the powers to intern and to exclude, when used on a basis of sound intelligence, can be an effective means of severing the chain of command and communication without which terrorists cannot commit acts of terror. I am convinced that both powers should be available for use, and I remain convinced that the Government's ability to deter and detect terrorism is weakened by abandoning them.

Notwithstanding my objections in those respects, and unlike Labour Members when they were in opposition, if there is a Division, I shall vote in support of the order.

To conclude, as far as the order goes, I support the Government. Mr. Rowe has concluded that the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1989 has been used properly in the past year and that, in respect of both terrorism related to the affairs of Northern Ireland and international terrorism, its powers are still needed. Continuing terrorist activity in Northern Ireland and on the mainland in relation to the affairs of Northern Ireland, and the escalating reality of international terrorism confirm that. I do not believe that the House has good reason to disagree with Mr. Rowe.

11.15 pm

Mr. Lembit Öpik (Montgomeryshire): Here we are again—same old story. Rosemary Nelson happens to be the latest victim of the long, sad catalogue of violence that caused us to implement the Prevention of Terrorism Act in the first place. Responsibility for that attack seems to rest on the Red Hand Defenders. What does that name mean? What are they defending—the right to violence, the right to kill? Such events hold no promise of hope for those involved, and call for no half-hearted response from us, any more than the legislation lends itself to compromise. It is all or nothing.

If we vote against the continuance of the order tonight, we would not be voting against any one part of it, but throwing out the whole thing, leaving Northern Ireland and Britain less protected than experience has shown we need to be at present. Therefore it will not come as a surprise for me to reveal that the Liberal Democrats will support the continuance order tonight.

It is a case of balancing the rights of the public, a[illegible] civil liberties, with the rights of people rightly or wrongly accused of heinous terrorist crimes. If those crimes are committed, some members of the public will lose their lives. However, as civil democrats, none of us in the Chamber can support the removal of some fairly fundamental rights from an individual for less than fundamental reasons.

The questions that we need to ask when deciding whether to support the order are whether it has saved lives, whether it will continue to save lives, and whether it helps the terrorists to perpetrate their crimes by offering some perverse justification on the grounds that their rights have been limited. The considerable evidence in the Rowe report and elsewhere suggests that the answers are respectively yes, yes and clearly no. There is no justification for the terrorists to perpetrate their crimes on the basis of the PTA.

The legislation is, in our view, a regrettable necessity, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) said last year. That is the world in which we live, unfortunately.

We look forward to the Government's proposals to bring together all security legislation under one Act. That is rather overdue. Clearly, the potential for further well-planned and co-ordinated terrorist violence in Northern Ireland is a significant factor in our decision tonight whether to support the continuance of the PTA. In a few weeks, it will be an extremely significant factor in our consideration of the Emergency Provisions Act. There are other pieces of legislation justified by the threat of terrorism in Northern Ireland. We will save our comments for the proposals, when they are announced.

I hope for three things above all—first, that all security measures are combined in a single piece of legislation. Secondly, I hope that when that legislation comes before

both Houses for renewal in future years, it can be amended, so that we are not faced with the all-or-nothing choice before us tonight. Thirdly, I hope that the legislation is not introduced on a wave of hysteria, following widespread revulsion aroused by a particular atrocity. We need to be sober when such serious legislation is introduced, and not act on impulse.

The Rowe report has called at least twice and possibly three times for more staff to be on duty at ports. Although we commend the valiant people who are in the front line against terrorism, we should never imagine that terrorists are not cunning enough to go round the back way. Ports are the back door that needs to be kept locked. I would welcome some comment from the Minister, as it seems to be a recurring failure. I am sure that he would agree that if reductions were motivated purely by Treasury cuts and financial considerations in the short term, those savings could prove to be false economies in the matter of terrorism.

We are concerned about apparent breaches, which have already been mentioned, of the European convention on human rights, to which the Government have laudably committed themselves. Mr. Rowe's annual report this year raises the question whether the new powers incorporated into the PTA as a result of the Criminal Justice (Terrorism and Conspiracy) Act 1998 breach the European convention on human rights. Whereas the report concludes that other powers are not considered to breach that convention, Mr. Rowe concludes that the new provisions in relation to a police officer's evidence and drawing inferences from silence may lead to breaches—but, admittedly, only in certain circumstances.

On page 11 of the report, Mr. Rowe states:

"In my view there is a potential breach of Article 6.3.d, which establishes the right to examine witnesses against him"—

that is, the defendant.Taken at face value, those words appear to prohibit hearsay evidence. The witness giving adverse evidence should be in court and available for cross-examination.

I was slightly concerned when the Home Secretary said that he was comfortable with a different interpretation from that provided by Mr. Rowe. I am not convinced that he has satisfied those of us who are unhappy about the decisions that have been made in the past on the matter.

For the future, the implication is that a key concern will be to ensure that the process of replacing the existing temporary legislation with permanent legislation does not result in unnecessary powers remaining in operation, and that the proper means for scrutiny of the operation of the powers are in place.

In fairness, we welcome the Government's stated aim for complete normalisation, whereby exceptional powers that do not apply in the rest of the United Kingdom will not apply to Northern Ireland. That will, of course, depend on developments within the Province, but maintaining a consensus among UK parties must be a key element of that.

In that context, I again highlight our continuing concerns about provisions on international elements which were introduced, in a rather Machiavellian fashion, last September when the House was suddenly recalled. We were opposed then, as we are now, to some of the additional powers, and still maintain that the powers that have been introduced to try to control international terrorism go beyond in their reach what may be regarded as liberal.

I am concerned once again that individuals with whom I worked in the past when the Soviet Union was still an entity could have been arrested in the United Kingdom and found guilty of a crime simply for supporting the justifiable aspirations of the emerging democracies, such as Estonia, the Baltic states and others, and trying to stand up to the tyranny under which they lived. It is easy to be tough, but it is important to be fair.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): I am genuinely perplexed by the example that the hon. Gentleman has just given. I simply ask him to elaborate on it and to try to justify it to those of us who are deeply sceptical about the validity of the analogy.

Mr. Öpik: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the extensive 16-hour debate last September on the matter. I do not want to digress too far from the issue at hand. I merely add one additional sentence. I am saying nothing new. We have had this debate in the past when we highlighted the importance of balancing the requirement to be seen to be just and fair with the reasonable need, which we all support, to tackle international terrorism. I am happy to discuss the matter further, but I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will agree that in these matters, we have to be scrupulously clear and careful not to undermine the very values that we are attempting to uphold with legislation. In that sense, replacing terrorism with injustice is not an equitable trade. I hope that the Home Secretary will take that seriously when we seek to replace the temporary provisions with more permanent legislation in the future.

Notwithstanding that point, we recognise that this Act is necessary and will continue to be so in the current environment. The best prevention of terrorism act is the act of laying down one's arms for good. It is what we all hope for and what the agreement in Northern Ireland expects. I hope that in 12 months' time, we shall look back at this debate as the last time that the House felt the need to uphold legislation that, when all is said and done, applies to exceptional circumstances in Northern Ireland, which there is some hope that we can now resolve for good.

The Act is no more perfect than human nature and simply serves to remind us that, in the resolution of conflict, our species has some way to go.

11.24 pm

Mr. Ken Maginnis (Fermanagh and South Tyrone): When the Home Secretary spoke tonight he alluded to the death of Rosemary Nelson and very properly condemned it without reservation. I share that sentiment and believe that all decent people in Northern Ireland do likewise. Whoever Rosemary Nelson was, or whoever any other victim of violence is in Northern Ireland, there is no justification within a western democracy for anyone taking a life to promote a political aspiration.

The society that we live in should not be barbarous, but one in which there is respect for other traditions and for individuals—even those with whom we might strongly disagree. Although I would have disagreed with many of the things with which Rosemary Nelson was associated, she was doing her job as a solicitor and whatever associations she would have had in connection with that job cannot be used, as some people whisper behind their hands, in relation to the sort of life that she led.

[Mr. Ken Maginnis]

On the other hand, the media and those who do not have the courage to address the reality of the situation in Northern Ireland will attempt to lionise Rosemary Nelson, but all that I do on behalf of my party is express my sincere sympathy with her husband, her children and her family. I do so as I would for any other victim of violence in Northern Ireland, whether it be a single victim or a member of a group—one of about 30, depending on whether we count the unborn children who died in the Omagh bomb.

I hope that this is the last time that the PTA is continued. It is intended that new legislation, incorporating the PTA and the emergency provisions Act, will replace it. If that is so, it is appropriate to look forward to the nature of the society for which the new Act will cater. I believe that the one thing that is missing from our approach to emergency legislation is the education of society about the nature of terrorism. So many myths surround the terrorism that we have in the United Kingdom at present that it is difficult to understand what we are trying to achieve. So much is talked about the rights of the individual—by the very people who would deny individuals the right to life—that the rights of society as a whole are often neglected within that debate.

The Home Secretary and this House can legislate as much as they like to prevent terrorism, but, after reading some of today's press and participating in some of the television and radio programmes examining the death of Rosemary Nelson, I believe that terrorism is treated almost as an entertainment. I worry about what we will achieve; old legislation or new legislation, it will not matter.

We have to understand that international terrorism is not a three-stage rocket from North Korea, which the Americans are taking steps to prevent. They are talking about putting in place anti-missile defences. For the next 20 or 30 years, terrorism will mean the nuclear device that is loaded on to a ship and sailed up the Thames and into London docks, or into Boston, or the nuclear device that is placed in the back of a container lorry and driven from eastern Europe to this country, or somewhere else. Unless people appreciate that concept of what terrorism brings to society, all the legislation that we can produce here, and all the debate that can take place, will be for nothing.

I saw a Labour Member shake his head when I spoke of terrorism being a subject of entertainment in the press and on television. We need only examine the propaganda that has been peddled by terrorists in my community—loyalist and republican terrorists—and assess the validity of their terrorism. We need only look at the way in which the exponents and advocates of that terrorism have been welcomed by some Members of this House, and have been supported and buoyed up by them over the past 30 years. They are being buoyed up by Congressmen like Chris Smith and Ben Gillman, chairman of the House international relations committee in Congress.

Ben Gillman is now suggesting that he should conduct an inquiry into the RUC—an inquiry that will coincide with the winding up of the Patten commission, which is looking at the future of the RUC. I have not heard him suggest that he might examine the activities of the Israelis on the Gaza strip. I have heard no Member who is present consider the motivation of Congressman Peter King—a member of the committee—who supported and endorsed the mortaring of Newry police station in which policemen and policewomen, Protestant and Catholic, died. He endorsed that, yet we are prepared to be, as we would say, bird-mouthed about the activities of people who act as advocates for terrorists. It is time that the House, our Government and those with responsibility educated the public about the real threat, and the nature of that threat.

The RUC, which has had to withstand the scourge of terrorism in Northern Ireland for 30 years, is now the organisation against which the most venom and negative propaganda is being launched. There have been scandalous arguments in our weekend papers. *The Sunday Times*, for instance, carried an allegation by a convicted murderer that one man, dead at the hands of terrorists—Superintendent Harry Breen—had been involved in the promotion of terrorism. I mention that case in particular because I knew Harry Breen. I also knew his brother, the late Winston Breen, who was headmaster of Banbridge academy. I know his family, who live in my constituency, and a better, more Christian family—I am talking about the way in which they lead their lives, not the way in which they preach to others—I have yet to meet. Yet some scoundrel who murdered Catholics can come out, sell, I presume, his story to a paper and demean the memory of someone such as Superintendent Harry Breen. It is a disgrace. It is something that Government after Government have ignored when they have spoken about terrorism and the scourge of terrorism: the rights of those who have the responsibility to stand between the law-abiding community and the terrorist.

The RUC is being accused of collusion. A total of 12,000 men and women serve in the RUC. I am not naive enough to believe that every one of them is the most upright citizen one could meet. Many of them are. Inquiry after inquiry has vindicated them with regard to collusion, yet where are we today? We still hear the allegations and who do they come from?—those who, within minutes of poor Rosemary Nelson's death, were able to come out on to the streets holding their anti-RUC posters; people who are organised to demean the RUC.

It appears to us quite often that no one is prepared to stand up and to defend those in the RUC. If we look at the record, we find that they brought 48 per cent. of loyalist terrorists who committed murder through the courts in my constituency, but were able to bring only 8 per cent. of republican terrorists through the courts for a similar offence. That had to do with the co-operation that those in the RUC received and with the way in which they exercised their responsibilities.

Who colluded in the deaths of 2,200 people who were killed by the IRA? Who colluded in the attacks on my colleagues and me over the years? No one needed to collude in a society where we live together and where the IRA can move freely and attack us. In the same way, there is no—

Mr. Hunter: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Maginnis: No. I am over my time. I am not giving way.

No one needs to collude with loyalist terrorists who have exactly the same opportunity as republican terrorists to wreak havoc in our society, so it is time that each and every one of us fulfilled our responsibility to educate our

society as to what terrorism can do to our society if we let it go unchecked. That is where we have to look when we introduce not only the legislation that is to be renewed tonight, but new legislation that will incorporate both the PTA and EPA.

11.38 pm

Mr. Dominic Grieve (Beaconsfield): I do not intend to trouble the House at any length, but I would not be taking my opportunity if I did not say a few words about the Criminal Justice (Terrorism and Conspiracy) Act 1998, which was introduced last September.

I support the broad thrust of the PTA and the order. It is clear that society needs to be protected from the activities of terrorists. It is equally clear that, in seeking to provide such protection, we sometimes have to introduce, and keep going, orders and legislation which may at times offend against our view of what we would like in an ideal society.

I am bound to say, however, that, last September, when the House considered the Criminal Justice (Terrorism and Conspiracy) Act, I had the very gravest reservations. I was not able to develop my arguments then—perhaps fortunately for my own conscience—because, as I had to organise my father's funeral the following day, I had been released by the Whips. I left the House only after hearing what the Home Secretary had to say about that Bill, and there was enough in what he said to cause me considerable disquiet. Once the House had re-assembled after the recess, I spoke to many colleagues, including plenty of Labour Members, and found that my disquiet was shared.

I simply want to say this about the 1998 Act. It has been suggested that the two provisions with which we are particularly concerned today—a police officer's statement of opinion being sufficient as evidence of membership of a proscribed organisation, and the inferences to be drawn from an accused's failure to mention any material fact that he could reasonably have been expected to mention at the time of his arrest in connection with that—do not offend against the Human Rights Act 1998. I do not know the answer to that. All I can say is that it is a matter which is, fortunately, untested. I also have some rather serious doubts about whether it would pass that test.

Even if that were not the case, it is difficult to imagine—it always seemed to me to be the most extraordinary feature of the two provisions—that anyone could ever be convicted in a case that is brought based on them. If such a prosecution were to be brought, I should be very surprised if a judge, exercising the discretion open to him in the interests of justice, were to allow a conviction to be entered on that basis.

If that is the case—I should say that that is the view of the matter that I took when I considered it last September—I regret very much that, in the immediate aftermath of the atrocity at Omagh, we should have passed legislation which I believe to be hasty and ill-considered.

Let me simply tell the Home Secretary that I am mindful of the fact that, at this stage, it may not be possible to do anything about it. I am equally mindful of the fact that we all have real hopes that, in 12 months' time, we may be able to bury everything connected with this order and with the whole Prevention of Terrorism Act, because the situation will have improved so much. That is certainly my hope. I share the Government's hopes on the issue.

In 12 months' time, if that happy state of affairs has not yet arrived, and if, as I believe will be the case, the two provisions have never been used in the interim—I have very serious doubts that anyone would risk using them—I hope that the Home Secretary will think long and hard about whether they should be renewed. They offend very deeply against fundamental principles of law, fairness and the way in which we deal with evidence in our courts.

I should certainly have had great difficulty—if, as I said, it had not been for my perhaps fortunate absence—in supporting the legislation when it was first passed. I do not believe that it is well directed to serve its purpose, and hope that it will be kept under close review. In 12 months' time, if the provisions of the 1998 Act are found to be unnecessary, but it is necessary to renew the Prevention of Terrorism Act, I hope very much that we shall consider dropping those provisions from it.

11.43 pm

Mr. Straw: With the permission of the House, I should like briefly to respond to the points that have been made in the debate.

I tell the hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Grieve) that, although I do not share his rather apocalyptic view of the provisions that we passed in part I of the Criminal Justice (Terrorism and Conspiracy) Act 1998, I have always accepted that they were exceptional measures which I happen to think are proportionate. We shall, of course, keep the matters under review regardless of whether the powers are used in the intervening 12 months. Powers such as those should not be on the statute book and available for use unless they are clearly necessary.

The right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler) expressed his support for renewal of the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1989, as he and other Conservative Members have done consistently since 1974. I am grateful to him for his support. He also referred generously to the Royal Ulster Constabulary. It is worth remembering that since the troubles began in Northern Ireland in the late 1960s, more than 300 RUC officers have been killed, and many hundreds more have been injured.

My hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) asked about the investigation into the murder of Yvonne Fletcher. I am aware that I have used the same adverb to my hon. Friend several times, but I am afraid that I am going to have to use it again. The inquiries have taken a great deal longer than anticipated, but I understand from the Metropolitan police that they will be concluded shortly. I am afraid that I cannot give an exact time scale.

The hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Mr. Öpik) asked about staffing levels at ports. Paragraph 114 of Mr. Rowe's report says:

"staffing levels of port officers should not be allowed to fall."

However, Mr. Rowe goes on to say:

"I do not in any fashion assert that staffing levels are too low at any particular place".

There has not been a suggestion that staffing levels have been reduced. I understand that the number of port police officers has not reduced in recent years.

The hon. Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone (Mr. Maginnis) said that to do justice to the memory of Rosemary Nelson, we should express our sincere sympathy for her husband, children and family—and her friends, I might add. I agree with him on that.

[Mr. Straw]

I hope that the renewal order will be passed without a Division. It is widely accepted that the renewal is justified in the circumstances and I commend the order to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That the draft Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1989 (Continuance) Order 1999, which was laid before this House on 4th March, be approved.

NORTHERN IRELAND GRAND COMMITTEE

Ordered,

That—

(1) the matter of the draft Report of the Department of Economic Development's Economic Strategy Review, being a matter relating exclusively to Northern Ireland, be referred to the Northern Ireland Grand Committee; and

(2) at its sitting on Thursday 25th March—

(i) the Committee shall consider the matter referred to it under paragraph (1) above;

(ii) the Chairman shall interrupt proceedings thereon at Five o'clock; and

(iii) at the conclusion of those proceedings a Motion for the adjournment of the Committee may be made by a Minister of the Crown, pursuant to Standing Order No. 116(5).—*[Mr. Jamieson.]*

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Libraries

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

That the draft Public Lending Right (Increase of Limit) Order 1999, which was laid before this House on 16th February, be approved.—*[Mr. Jamieson.]*

Question agreed to.

Local Government Finance (Wales)

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

That the Special Grant Report (Wales) 1999 (No. 2): Special Grant for Asylum Seekers (HC 250), which was laid before this House on 24th February, be approved.—*[Mr. Jamieson.]*

The House divided: Ayes 281, Noes 24.

Division No. 108] **[11.48 pm**

AYES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Allen, Graham
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Stuart *(Middlesbrough)*
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Butler, Mrs Christine
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Cabom, Richard
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Caplin, Ivor
Caton, Martin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Dalyell, Tam
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, John
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Edwards, Huw
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Etherington, Bill
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, John
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith
Hoey, Kate
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Ms Jenny *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kingham, Ms Tess
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Laxton, Bob
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Linton, Martin
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Lock, David
Love, Andrew
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Mrs Rosemary
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert

Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'ld Heeley)*
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morgan, Rhodri *(Cardiff W)*
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Mountford, Kali
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Eddie
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Mrs Diana
Osborne, Ms Sandra
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Ms Linda
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Rt Hon Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Salter, Martin
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Miss Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stoate, Dr Howard
Stott, Roger
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Straw, Rt Hon Jack
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Vaz, Keith
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Clive Betts and
Mr. Robert Ainsworth.

NOES

Beggs, Roy
Bercow, John
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Donaldson, Jeffrey
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gray, James
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jenkin, Bernard
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Livsey, Richard
Maclean, Rt Hon David
Moore, Michael
Öpik, Lembit
Randall, John
Ross, William *(E Lond'y)*
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
St Aubyn, Nick
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Taylor, Rt Hon John D *(Strangford)*
Thompson, William
Wallace, James

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Andrew Lansley and
Mr. Dominic Grieve.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Local Government Finance (Scotland)

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

That the Special Grant Report for Scotland (No. 1 1999): Special Grant for Asylum Seeker Assistance (HC 228), which was laid before this House on 24th February, be approved.—[*Mr. Jamieson.*]

The House divided: Ayes 275, Noes 24.

Division No. 109] **[12.1 am**

AYES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Stuart *(Middlesbrough)*
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Butler, Mrs Christine
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Cabom, Richard
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Caplin, Ivor
Caton, Martin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Dalyell, Tam
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, John
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Edwards, Huw
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Etherington, Bill
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, John
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith
Hoey, Kate
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim

Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Ms Jenny *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kingham, Ms Tess
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Laxton, Bob
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Linton, Martin
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Lock, David
Love, Andrew
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Mrs Rosemary
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall–Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'ld Heeley)*
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morgan, Rhodri *(Cardiff W)*
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Mountford, Kali
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
O'Hara, Eddie
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Mrs Diana
Osborne, Ms Sandra
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Ms Linda
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Rt Hon Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Salter, Martin
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Miss Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stoate, Dr Howard
Stott, Roger
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Temple–Morris, Peter
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Vaz, Keith
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Robert Ainsworth and
Mr. Clive Betts.

NOES

Beggs, Roy
Bercow, John
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Donaldson, Jeffrey
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gray, James
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jenkin, Bernard
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Livsey, Richard
Maclean, Rt Hon David
Moore, Michael
Öpik, Lembit
Randall, John
Rendel, David
Ross, William *(E Lond'y)*
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
St Aubyn, Nick
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Taylor, Rt Hon John D *(Strangford)*
Wallace, James

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Andrew Lansley and
Mr. Dominic Grieve.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Local Government Finance

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

That the Local Government Finance (England) Special Grant Report (No. 38): Special Grant for Asylum Seekers (HC 230), which was laid before this House on 24th February, be approved.—*[Mr. Kevin Hughes.]*

The House divided: Ayes 278, Noes 9.

Division No. 110] **[12.12 am**

AYES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Butler, Mrs Christine
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Cabom, Richard
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Caplin, Ivor
Caton, Martin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*

Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Curtis–Thomas, Mrs Claire
Dalyell, Tam
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, John
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Edwards, Huw
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Etherington, Bill
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Lorna
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, John
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith
Hoey, Kate
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Ms Jenny *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Kidney, David
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kingham, Ms Tess
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Laxton, Bob
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Linton, Martin
Livingstone, Ken
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Lock, David
Love, Andrew
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Mrs Rosemary
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall–Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'ld Heeley)*
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Moore, Michael
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morgan, Rhodri *(Cardiff W)*
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Mountford, Kali
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbec'k)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
O'Hara, Eddie
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Öpik, Lembit
Organ, Mrs Diana
Osborne, Ms Sandra
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Ms Linda
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Rt Hon Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Rendel, David
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Salter, Martin
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Miss Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stoate, Dr Howard
Stott, Roger
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Temple–Morris, Peter
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Vaz, Keith
Vis, Dr Rudi
Wallace, James
Walley, Ms Joan
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Robert Ainsworth and
Mr. Clive Betts.

NOES

Bercow, John
Gray, James
Hunter, Andrew
Jenkin, Bernard
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Maclean, Rt Hon David
St Aubyn, Nick
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Andrew Lansley and
Mr. Dominic Grieve.

Question accordingly agreed to.

EUROPEAN COMMUNITY DOCUMENTS

Transport Infrastructure Charging

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 119(9) (European Standing Committees),

That this House takes note of European Union Document No. 10778/98, the Commission White Paper: Fair Payment for Infrastructure Use: A phased approach to a common transport infrastructure charging framework in the EU; and endorses the Government's approach to discussions on the document.—*[Mr. Kevin Hughes.]*

The House divided: Ayes 274, Noes 12.

Division No. 111] **[12.22 am**

AYES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Butler, Mrs Christine
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Cabom, Richard
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Caplin, Ivor
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Dalyell, Tam
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dean, Mrs Janet
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Edwards, Huw
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Etherington, Bill
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Lorna
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, John
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith
Hoey, Kate
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Ms Jenny *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Kidney, David
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kingham, Ms Tess
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Laxton, Bob
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Linton, Martin
Livingstone, Ken
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Lock, David
Love, Andrew
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Mrs Rosemary
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'ld Heeley)*
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Moore, Michael
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morgan, Rhodri *(Cardiff W)*
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Mountford, Kali
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
O'Hara, Eddie
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Öpik, Lembit
Organ, Mrs Diana
Osborne, Ms Sandra
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Ms Linda
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Rt Hon Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Rendel, David
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Salter, Martin
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Miss Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Vaz, Keith
Vis, Dr Rudi
Wallace, James
Walley, Ms Joan
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Robert Ainsworth and Mr. Clive Betts.

NOES

Beggs, Roy	St Aubyn, Nick
Bercow, John	Swayne, Desmond
Donaldson, Jeffrey	Syms, Robert
Gray, James	Taylor, Rt Hon John D *(Strangford)*
Hunter, Andrew	
Jenkin, Bernard	**Tellers for the Noes:**
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*	**Mr. Andrew Lansley and**
Ross, William *(E Lond'y)*	**Mr. Dominic Grieve.**

Question accordingly agreed to.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

CRIMINAL LEGAL AID (FIXED PAYMENTS) (SCOTLAND) REGULATIONS 1999

Ordered,

That the Criminal Legal Aid (Fixed Payments)(Scotland) Regulations 1999 be referred to a Standing Committee on Delegated Legislation.—*[Mr. Clelland.]*

National Stadium (Northern Ireland)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Clelland.]*

12.32 am

Mr. John Grogan (Selby): St. Patrick's day has begun and I am delighted to begin this national day of celebration by advocating the creation of a new national stadium in Northern Ireland to host great sporting occasions, pop concerts and other large events.

I start by outlining the role of sport in Northern Ireland society. During the past 30 years, sport has provided, throughout the troubles, moments of relief and joy for all, such as in the triumphs of Mary Peters in the Olympics or Barry McGuigan in the boxing ring. Northern Ireland still apparently claims to hold the home nations football championship, because it won the last championship to be held before England stopped playing. England had previously claimed that it would no longer play in the championships because it always won.

At the best of times, playing and watching sport have provided a common currency between the different communities—at times, perhaps the only common currency. The power of sport to transcend boundaries was demonstrated to the world recently in the rugby European cup triumph of Ulster against French opposition at Lansdowne Road, Dublin. The capacity crowd attracted the widest possible range of Unionist and nationalist politicians. More important perhaps, 60,000 ordinary people from Northern Ireland wanted tickets when only 28,000 tickets were available. As the Deputy First Minister commented,

"The Ulster players have done the impossible. They have created the situation where the entire island of Ireland, North and South, is behind them. People want to be part of it, people want to be there and what they do not want in any shape or form are these labels of religion or anything else being put on the game."

Sport has also managed to help the economy going through difficult years, employing 12,500 people. According to opinion poll evidence, 80 per cent. of people in Northern Ireland believe that sport can help to build positive links between people of different communities.

At a grassroots level, the Sports Council for Northern Ireland has pioneered programmes such as Youth Sport, which has been widely copied elsewhere. Youth Sport seeks to integrate the school, the club and the community, keeping school sports facilities open until late at night. It aims to get more people to play the sport of their choice, regardless whether that is the traditional choice of their school or community. The Sports Council recently launched a public awareness campaign under the slogan "Participate, celebrate and tolerate".

It is worth noting that Northern Irish sport at a local level has benefited from the fact that, unlike England, Scotland or Wales, sport is a statutory responsibility of local councils, and has been since Stormont days.

Sport led the way on creating all-Ireland bodies long before the Good Friday agreement. There are 35 sports organised on an all-Ireland basis, of which perhaps rugby is the most notable. In a move underscoring the case for all-Ireland sports bodies, the Northern Ireland Athletics Federation recently ruled that its athletes would compete for Northern Ireland in the Commonwealth games, and, if they chose, for the Irish Republic in the Olympics.

[Mr. John Grogan]

The Irish and Northern Ireland Sports Councils co-operate closely. Recently at the Omagh leisure centre a Sport for All programme which covers the border counties of Ireland between the north and the south was introduced.

At the worst of times, sport has emphasised the most bitter sectarian divisions in Northern Ireland. Nelson Mandela observed that normal sport is impossible in an abnormal society. Even today, members of the security forces are not allowed to participate in Gaelic sports. A change in rules is as long overdue in that case as it was in regard to the admission of women to the pavilion at Lord's cricket ground.

The beautiful game, the world game of soccer has faced many problems in Northern Ireland, perhaps because, uniquely, it has been loved in equal measure by both communities. Soccer has perhaps never fully recovered from the bitterness left by the sectarian violence that occurred after the Boxing day derby match in 1948 between Linfield and Belfast Celtic in front of 33,000 spectators at Windsor Park. A post-match riot led to a horrific mob attack on 20-year-old Belfast Celtic centre forward Jimmy Jones, who had accidentally earlier fouled an opposing player. Jones survived, but the club folded in the aftermath of the incident.

Jimmy Jones was saved by a goalkeeper from Ballymena, Sean McCann, who single-handedly fought off scores of attackers. Jones recently told *The Daily Telegraph*:

"The irony of it all is that I am a Protestant, the people who were trying to kill me were Protestant and Sean is a Roman Catholic."

Almost exactly 50 years later, there are renewed signs of hope in soccer. Glentoran and Linfield played a match around Christmas time 1998 watched by a crowd of 13,000, compared with about 4,000 in recent years at the same fixture. That is the sort of difference that the peace process can make to life for ordinary people, who can simply feel more confident about doing the normal things in life, such as going to watch a soccer match over Christmas.

In 11 days—or probably 10 days now—Northern Ireland play Germany in a European championship qualifying match at Windsor Park. The capacity, I understand, is only about 13,000. The chairman of the Sports Council, Mr. Allen, recently commented:

"If we had a stadium in a neutral venue and Northern Ireland were playing Germany, then the minimum I expect would be around about 30,000. If we had a stadium in a neutral venue, it would encourage people to go into a peaceful and enjoyable atmosphere to support a team whether they win or lose, and that would be very significant in peace and reconciliation terms."

That is one argument for creating a new national stadium. It would symbolise a new beginning for Northern Ireland by creating a venue at which everyone would feel comfortable.

Northern Ireland lacks top-quality international facilities to complement its network of leisure centres at grassroots level. The rugby ground Ravenhill seats only 2,500 people, with space for another 5,000 or 6,000 people standing. The state of the soccer grounds, which were not covered by the legislation following the Taylor report, is a disgrace, which will be highlighted by the hon. Member for East Londonderry (Mr. Ross) in an Adjournment debate tomorrow.

Northern Ireland is in danger of being left out. London will soon boast the revamped Wembley and Twickenham; Cardiff Arms Park will host the rugby union cup final; Scotland has Hampden, Ibrox, Murrayfield and Meadowbank; Manchester will soon have an array of indoor and outdoor facilities to host the Commonwealth games; and in Dublin the new Croke Park will soon sport an estimated capacity of 81,000, ready to host the all-Ireland senior football and hurling finals of 2001.

With regard to the national lottery and the pools, more money is spent per head of the population in Northern Ireland than anywhere else; yet the Football Trust spends almost nothing in Northern Ireland. Money from the national lottery for sport is distributed on a population basis. In Northern Ireland, that figure is 2.8 per cent. of the national total. That will never provide enough capital to help fund a large one-off expenditure, such as a national stadium, which would cost at least £50 million.

The vision of a national stadium is the subject of discussion between Whitehall, the Department of Education in Northern Ireland, the Sports Council, and some of the potential users. A high political priority needs to be given to assembling a financial package, perhaps including money from the lottery, the Government, the European Union and the private sector. If ever there was a special case, it is Northern Ireland.

Football, rugby and athletics are perhaps the most obvious potential users of a national stadium. The possibility of including Gaelic sports must be further examined. The dimensions of the pitch would need to be enhanced and the cost would inevitably increase. But the prize of regularly hosting an all-Ireland Gaelic football final or a hurling semi-final would be well worth aiming for if the sporting politics could be overcome.

The potential for other events is boundless. Last year, 40,000 young people turned up for an outdoor concert in the Botanic gardens. The right event can generate tourists from far and wide. On the same weekend as the Germany versus Northern Ireland football match, the world cross-country championships will bring athletes and enthusiasts from many countries to Belfast. Cheap, frequent and quick transportation is opening up the island of Ireland, and already the two-hour catchment area includes parts of England and Scotland and most of the population of Ireland.

There are various possible sites for the new stadium. One is in Belfast, adjacent to the Waterfront hall and the new arena, within a few hundred yards of the railway station, with a boat stopping outside and City airport minutes away. I understand that there are other possible venues as well.

In opinion polls, 94 per cent. of people rarely agree on anything, but that is the level of support in the telephone poll on a national stadium conducted by the *Belfast Telegraph* earlier this year. That poll generated far more calls than any other that the newspaper has previously undertaken.

I referred earlier to Jimmy Jones, the Belfast Celtic striker. Now a grandfather of four, he concluded his recent interview in *The Daily Telegraph* by referring to the site of the old club's stadium. He said:

"It's nice when people remember me, but I can never stand on this spot and not see Celtic Park in my mind's eye. It's not a shopping mall to me, it's still paradise, as everyone called it. Looking back, I couldn't have told you whether most of my team-mates were Catholic or Protestant. We didn't give a damn about that sort of thing."

Jimmy Jones's grandchildren, and all the children of Northern Ireland, need a new stadium, a stadium where they will all feel safe, a stadium that will inspire them and make them proud to come from where they come from, a stadium that will give them a stage in their own backyard where they can witness the excellence of the world's greatest entertainers and sportsmen and sportswomen, a stadium that will give them memories to last a lifetime.

12.44 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. John McFall): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Selby (Mr. Grogan) on securing this Adjournment debate, and I wish him and every other hon. Member present a happy St. Patrick's day. I did not expect to be replying to this debate on St. Patrick's day, but it is appropriate that I am. The hon. Member for East Londonderry (Mr. Ross) will be following this up with another Adjournment debate within 12 hours.

My hon. Friend the Member for Selby mentioned the sporting heroes, Mary Peters and Barry McGuigan. In my short time at the Northern Ireland Office, I have been privileged to meet both of them. He also mentioned the religious divide and the sectarianism. I remember when Bertie Peacock played left half at Glasgow Celtic, and I think that he still has an executive role at Coleraine. He was a tremendous player, gracing the field at Parkhead in Glasgow. He was a Protestant, playing for a club which was recognised as Catholic, but he crossed that divide and he was a fine servant. Before him, I remember Charlie Tully, who came from Belfast and was a real character, and we all know the inestimable George Best who danced his way around the world and gave people many hours of enjoyment. Northern Ireland sportsmen have played their part in the past and my hon. Friend the Member for Selby is right to ensure that a national stadium for Northern Ireland is very much on the agenda.

Mr. Roy Beggs (East Antrim): Although others have been mentioned, does the Minister agree that we should not overlook the fact that Dave "Boy" McAuley, who comes from East Antrim, was five times world boxing champion?

Mr. McFall: The hon. Gentleman has graced the debate with his presence and his contribution and I thank him very much for that. He will obviously be interested in this debate in respect of Larne football club and Ballyclare, which are in his constituency.

The Government are fully aware of the level of interest in the provision of a national sports stadium in Northern Ireland. As my hon. Friend has mentioned, that has been an aspiration of the Sports Council for Northern Ireland for some time, in order to bring the Province into line with England, Scotland and Wales, and I have had a number of discussions with its chairman, Don Allen, on that very matter. My hon. Friend is right to say that the people of Northern Ireland are aware of the major developments for upgrading the national stadiums in the other home countries and of proposals for a national stadium in the Republic of Ireland.

The success of the Ulster rugby team in winning the European Cup has also renewed interest in the matter. I was privileged to be at the match at Ravenhill, and I think that 20,000 spectators were present. As my hon. Friend said, the official attendance was supposed to be 2,000, but special seats were installed for that fantastic day. I followed that visit up with a trip to Lansdowne Road in Dublin. The cross-community support for the Ulster rugby team was fantastic.

I made my way into the ground with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, from Dublin airport. There was not a pub that we passed that did not have people standing outside in the street, waving and enjoying themselves. The only sad thing for me was that, after the victory, we had to leave straight away and could not share in the celebration. It was a day of festivity and of celebration for everyone and that pride in the Ulster rugby team lives on in Northern Ireland.

Many of those who are interested in sport felt that it would have been appropriate for Ulster to have been able to play the semi-final fixture in a national stadium, which would have offered enhanced spectator opportunities. The facilities at Ravenhill show us how far we have to go in that regard and the demand is present for the Northern Ireland community to have facilities at least on a par with those in the other regions of these islands.

Northern Ireland should have the best possible facilities. A national stadium would provide a whole range of benefits and new opportunities, as well as helping to secure a more positive image of the Province. That goes hand in hand with the Belfast agreement and with the political developments which we hope will take place shortly.

Since I have assumed responsibilities for sport under my responsibility for the Department of Education, the Sports Council for Northern Ireland has taken every opportunity to point out that Northern Ireland has few facilities which could be classified as suitable for national competition or national training. There are no Wembleys or Hampden Parks and no Celtic Parks, Ibrox Parks or Old Traffords in Northern Ireland. Although I recognise that, I have also to recognise that a national stadium would require significant investment of funds and that assurances about the long-term need for and sustainability of such a development would therefore be essential.

I do not want to give the impression that Northern Ireland is devoid of facilities and that progress is not being made. I want to affirm that the Government attach great importance to the improvement of the quality of life for all the people of Northern Ireland. That is clearly shown by the fact that the Government have committed significant investment in the Millennium Odyssey project, which includes an indoor, multi-functional sports arena with seating for 10,000.

I am also pleased that Northern Ireland is being locked into the development of sport at a United Kingdom level, through the development of a network centre as part of the UK Sports Institute. I attended a sports cabinet meeting last week with a number of my ministerial colleagues, at which the issues of sporting facilities in Northern Ireland and the establishment of a national stadium arose.

The Sports Council is managing the setting up of a network centre, and I hope to be able to announce progress in the near future. Following the establishment of the UK Sports Institute, sports people in Northern Ireland will have the same opportunity to reach the optimum level of performance as their counterparts

[Mr. McFall]

throughout the United Kingdom. I am sure that hon. Members will agree that significant progress is being made.

Mr. John D. Taylor (Strangford): The hon. Member for Selby (Mr. Grogan) spoke of the great interest in having a national stadium in Northern Ireland—something that I have wanted for many years. Incidentally, in our last game with Germany—in Nuremberg—we drew with them, and we shall beat them on Saturday week. What about private investment? It is all very well to talk about the need for a stadium, and the interest in having a stadium—everyone agrees on that—but is any encouragement being given to private investment, in an effort to make that a reality?

Mr. McFall: If the right hon. Member will bear with me, I shall explain about the working party that has been set up by the Department of Education.

Of course a new national sports stadium, on top of the other developments, would be a huge bonus for Northern Ireland but it would be foolish to embark on such a significant and costly project without proper research into need, resource implications and long-term sustainability. We need to be convinced about all those issues. If we fail to address them, there is a danger that we could end up with an arrangement that would be out of step with real need, and would result in a serious misuse of resources.

I have been looking carefully at what can be done. I am pleased to announce a process that will allow the key issues to be addressed and, hopefully, map out a plan for progress. I have arranged for a working group to be set up, led by the Sports Council, to examine thoroughly all aspects of the establishment of a national stadium, including the private and public finance aspects.

Mr. Jeffrey Donaldson (Lagan Valley): I congratulate the hon. Member for Selby (Mr. Grogan) on raising this issue.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Strangford (Mr. Taylor) referred to private finance. The Minister may know of the Royal Ulster Agricultural Society's proposal to move from its present site at Balmoral to a new green-field site at Blaris, where it hopes to create facilities for show grounds and so on. It has been suggested that an integrated facility could be developed at Blaris that might include a national stadium, and that private finance might be available for such a facility. I hope that proposal will be included in the working party's deliberations.

Mr. McFall: It is important for the working party to consider such matters, and I find the integrated element referred to by the hon. Gentleman very attractive. I should be happy if the working party engaged in such discussions.

The working party will explore the need for, and feasibility of, a national stadium. Specifically, its job will be to consult relevant sporting interests to determine their willingness to participate in the promotion and operation of such a stadium. That is relevant to the hon. Gentleman's question. It will also hope to identify potential promoters, owners and operators. It will be expected to examine the capital and recurrent funding implications, and associated locational issues; to examine the potential relationships and links with relevant public and private-sector organisations; to construct an outline business case; and to determine what further steps should be taken.

The working group has an important contribution to make in taking forward the concept of a national stadium. It is an important issue in the development of sport in Northern Ireland. Such a stadium has been missing. It is certainly an issue that I take seriously.

I do not want to break into the Adjournment debate that will take place later in the day, but I have had a meeting with the Football Trust on its contribution; I think that it took place on 21 January. It was a positive meeting. The trust told me that it was keen to become involved in a programme for Northern Ireland, so such a group could give us advice on the way forward and be one of the organisations that help to pan out the future.

The working party's report and its preliminary findings should be available by the end of June. I do not anticipate being in post to receive that report, but I am sure that my successor will do so. That will be an important element of the Assembly's agenda. If the Assembly tackled the matter at an early stage and ensured that we had a national stadium for Northern Ireland, it would instil pride in the entire community. That was in evidence after the Ulster rugby team's European win. If the stadium matched the quality of the participants, there would be a good future for Northern Ireland.

I have been delighted to take forward the measures to date and am pleased that my hon. Friend the Member for Selby has secured the debate, so that the issue can be discussed. It is an aspect of the political agenda in Northern Ireland. I hope that it will remain on the agenda until we see a spanking new stadium that is fit for a new Northern Ireland.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at three minutes to One o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 17 March 1999

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Greening Government Initiative

[Relevant document: The Second Report from the Environmental Audit Committee, Session 1997–98, on the Greening Government Initiative (HC 517).]

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Betts.]*

9.34 am

Mr. John Horam (Orpington): I am delighted to introduce this debate on the Environmental Audit Committee's report on the greening government initiative. I wish to express my gratitude to my colleagues on the Liaison Committee for recommending it for consideration today. The report was published on 30 June last year and the Government's reply was received in November. This is, of course, the first report from the Environmental Audit Committee to be debated in the House of Commons, because the Committee was set up as a result of a manifesto commitment by the incoming Labour Government—one pledge that I am glad that they honoured. I shall not comment on any other pledges, because that would be outside the remit of this debate.

I congratulate my colleagues on the Committee on the way in which they have pursued our remit. We have worked hard and produced eight reports in 15 months, which is a considerable strike rate—one with which even Yorke and Cole of Manchester United would be pleased. Our thanks are due to our excellent Clerk and his team and I also wish to thank the Comptroller and Auditor General for seconding one of his best people to our team.

In some Committees, it is traditional to produce a majority report that Government Members support wholeheartedly and a minority report that is supported by the Opposition. All our reports have been unanimous. I am glad of that, and I hope that it will continue.

Our remit is to consider to what extent the policies and programmes of Government Departments and non-departmental public bodies contribute to sustainable development and environmental protection, to audit their performance against such targets as shall be set for them by Ministers from time to time, and to report thereon to the House. Therefore, the report that we are considering today is central to our remit, because it is about the integration of the environment into Government decision making.

Our starting point is the Prime Minister's statement to the United Nations in New York in June 1997. He said:

"We must make the process of government green. Environmental considerations must be integrated into all our decisions, regardless of sector. They must be in at the start, not bolted on later."

I have often thought that the Committee should have that statement put on an illuminated manuscript and sent to the Prime Minister to hang in the rooms occupied by the policy unit at No. 10. Perhaps we should also put it on the internet, as one does with everything these days, to ensure that no one is unaware of it. It is a bold statement and, to address it properly, the Government first need to establish proper machinery. Sensibly, they have based the machinery that they have set up on what was done by the previous Government. The Committee makes various criticisms of that machinery in our report, and I am glad to say that the Government have responded and improved it. Those improvements are elaborated in the Government's response to the report. The Government have not done as much as we would like, because there are still some holes, but our conclusion is that the machinery is adequate for the task. At the very least, it is not an impediment to doing what we all wish to be done in terms of sustainable development and environmental protection.

The Committee has also made the point consistently in all its reports, and especially in this one, that the machinery can be the best in the world but, if political leadership is absent, nothing will be achieved. That was very evident in our report on the multilateral agreement on investment—the MAI—which collapsed totally because of a lack of political agreement. Governments cannot leave civil servants to take decisions that must be taken by politicians. It is unfair, and it does not work.

We have made it clear in all our reports that, on balance, leadership is coming from the Deputy Prime Minister, and the Minister for the Environment can also take some credit. However, we have been scathing about the lack of leadership and commitment from the Treasury. Hon. Members will know that the Chancellor got the booby prize in the green awards this year. However, since the Budget, we have seen evidence of some change in the Treasury's approach. It has been pointed out that the Budget implemented or reinforced 14 of the 18 measures mentioned in the pre-Budget report, which is a good record. Also, at long last, the Government have introduced a new measure of their own and not one that they have inherited from the previous Government and elaborated. I refer of course to the climate change levy. We must hope that their conversion is deep and long-lasting.

So, leadership is evolving, and should lead to a clear strategy. However, here we have yet to see the colour of the Government's money. They have said that their sustainable development strategy will be a catch-all document, but, although it was promised last autumn, it will not now be available until 7 May, at the earliest.

The strategy has been substantially delayed, although, as the Select Committee has repeatedly pointed out, we are nearly two years into this Government, and crucial environmental decisions have already been taken. There have been a review of energy sources and a moratorium on the building of gas-fired stations. We have had the Marshall report and the comprehensive spending review, which fixed spending for three years. There have been public service agreements for every Department, the climate change consultation document, decisions on green-field and brown-field sites, and the roads review. All those decisions have been taken without the benefit of an overarching view from the Government of their role in sustainable development, and that is a great pity.

[Mr. John Horam]

The up side is that the Government have given themselves time. It is imperative that they produce the goods when they publish their sustainable development strategy. It is particularly important, in the Committee's view, that the strategy should be capable of being audited. Responsibilities for particular areas must be clearly allocated and targets must be attached. The Government are, of course, extremely keen on targets. There are targets for hospital waiting lists, for class sizes, for teachers and for everyone else. It is time that the Government set some targets for themselves in a central area of policy.

We look forward to receiving the new document. Far be it from me to advise the Government on spin, but I would advocate that the Prime Minister should launch the strategy himself. That would provide evidence of commitment at the highest level, both to the Prime Minister's own words and to a proper policy for sustainable development.

I must continue to criticise two glaring omissions in the Government's approach to environmental protection and sustainable development. First, we asked for a day's debate each year on the annual sustainable development review. The Government rejected that idea, arguing in their response to our report that

> "The broad scope of sustainable development means that there are likely to be a number of occasions each year when it can be debated in Parliament, for example in considering legislative proposals and the Budget."

The choice of the Budget as an example was rather unfortunate; the Minister for the Environment was not in his place for any of the Budget debate, and his boss, the Secretary of State, was scuba-diving in the Maldives. That is a clear example of how environmental protection and sustainable development are simply sidelined.

Mr. Dominic Grieve (Beaconsfield): One advantage of setting aside a day each year is that it would enable minds to focus on what had been achieved over the previous year and on what difficulties had been experienced. Everyone appreciates that the agenda is difficult, and, if we do not have a day for such a debate, there may be a tendency for people to suggest that the issue is being brushed under the carpet.

Mr. Horam: My hon. Friend is quite right. We are very glad to have an hour and a half for debate today, but that does not stand comparison, particularly after four days of debate on technicalities of the Budget—important though they are—with focusing the mind of Parliament on the complex issues involved in sustainable development. It is vital that a day each year should be attached to the Government's report on progress on sustainable development so that we may examine policies and programmes in their entirety across the whole landscape of the environment, including wildlife, green fields, pollution and climate change. That debate is essential if the Government are to enter into the spirit of what the Select Committee is proposing. Failure to provide it is one black mark against them.

Even worse is the gaping black hole in the Government's position. We have no evidence that new or substantially revised policies are being subjected to any environmental appraisal. In our report on the comprehensive spending review, we asked three Departments to come up with such appraisals, but answer came there none.

It is particularly bad that the housing division of the Minister's own Department failed to respond with an environmental appraisal of its housing spending. We all know that the United Kingdom's housing stock is not good on warmth or insulation. It compares unfavourably with housing in Denmark—as we found on our trip to Copenhagen—and in other continental countries. Lack of environmental appraisals is jamming up policy on the domestic side of fuel and energy conservation. That is a further bad mark.

Quite apart from the Minister's own Department, the failure of others to provide environmental appraisals to the Select Committee fundamentally suggests that the bread and butter job of environmentally appraising all new policies, Bills and programmes simply is not being done across the range of Departments.

Mr. Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham): Was it not particularly disappointing that the comprehensive spending review attached no environmental requirements to a rolling spending programme? The CSR was sold to us on the basis that Departments that did not come up to scratch would not receive additional money for each of the three years. It provided an ideal opportunity to attach an environmental requirement, but was it not a lost opportunity?

Mr. Horam: My hon. Friend will recall that the public service agreements that followed the CSR did not include an adequate reference to the environment in their objectives and aims. The Minister may wish to recall his own words to the Select Committee, where we are always glad to see him. Page 109 of the report states:

> "Mr. Meacher told the Committee that the Green Ministers are committed to doing regular collective reviews of the quality and scope of environmental appraisals in their departments. He explained that he would expect departments to draw up a list, revised every six months or so, of important new policies which have significant environmental impacts where environmental appraisals have been done. The Green Ministers Committee would then discuss them and share experience.
>
> The Committee welcomes the intention of the Green Ministers Committee to review experience of policy appraisal in the departments and to spread best practice and experience of appraisals that have not gone so well and we look forward to receiving copies of these reviews in accordance with the Minister's undertaking to this Committee."

The Minister will recall that he suggested that the reviews would be made available to the Committee. There are three meetings a year of the Green Ministers Committee and the next is due next week. We look forward to receiving the review of environmental appraisals, which are a central area of environmental policy.

I can warn the Minister that our annual review of the greening of Government process will be set in train shortly. We have sent out letters calling for evidence, including a letter to the Minister that sets out the remit of this year's analysis. We shall concentrate heavily on the performance of the Green Ministers Committee and on environmental appraisal.

The Select Committee has made a successful start and has made an impact. The Government have responded, although there remain large and unsatisfactory gaps. I look forward to further robust and creative exchanges as we pursue a better environment.

9.49 am

Ms Joan Walley (Stoke-on-Trent, North): I congratulate the hon. Member for Orpington (Mr. Horam) on securing a debate on the Select Committee on Environmental Audit. The Committee is cross-departmental, and its scrutiny of the Government's work will be important. I pay tribute to the members of the Committee, who have turned out in force today. I remind the House of the context of this debate. At our meeting only yesterday, we discussed the living planet index—compiled by the World Wide Fund for Nature—which reminded us that, in the past 25 years, the world has lost 30 per cent. of its natural resources.

We have just heard that my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister was not here during the Budget debate last week, but exploring a coral reef was equally important as it gave him the opportunity to see at first hand just how fragile our planet is—if we need reminding of that fact. It is crucial that we take account of all those issues and that we do not rely on emergency crisis talks after the event to ensure that degradation is put right.

As the hon. Member for Orpington said, sustainable development cannot be a bolt-on extra. I also think that that message should be framed as the overarching theme of our Committee. We need to put that at the heart of government. As the House heard, that is what the Prime Minister said that we would do when he addressed the United Nations and it is what the Government are doing. The real question for Governments and for the House is whether we are doing that as well and as quickly as we can, and in time to prevent further degradation of our planet. That is why this morning's debate is so important. It concerns the nuts and bolts—the institutional mechanisms and systems and the appraisals of what we need. Much of our debate will be technical, but, if we do not get those mechanisms and the framework right, we simple will not be able to put the environment at the heart of our Budget, of policy making and of green government.

The nature of the issue means that we can take only one step at a time—we can only make so much progress—but what may seem impossible one day can suddenly become possible the next. In our last pre-Budget report, we thought that the Government had failed. One week after the latest Budget, we feel that they have made huge steps forward, with 22 new measures to assist the environment.

The fact that the Select Committee on Environmental Audit has been on the heels of the Government has helped us to advance the whole procedure. We have done that with the Budget and, through this debate, we need to do it for the entire machinery of government. That is why this debate is so important. We should have an annual debate on sustainable development. We need a formal parliamentary occasion when we can scrutinise what the Government are doing through the Environment Committee at Cabinet level and the Committee of Green Ministers. I expected all the members of the Environmental Audit Committee to be present for this debate, but I also expected to see the Green Minister from each Department on the Front Bench. If they were here, it would send a message to the House and to the nation that they are taking the agenda forward.

Even though the Government have temporarily rejected the idea of an annual formal debate in Parliament, I hope that we will have such debates so that we can have accountability and can measure whether the targets that have been set are the right ones and are being achieved.

Our most important task now is to set out how we can achieve sustainable development and ensure that the Committee of Green Ministers takes collective responsibility for the environmental appraisal system rather than the substance of individual policies. I am pleased that the Government agreed with that approach in their response to our report and said that new and revised policies should include an assessment of implications for the environment. Will my right hon. Friend the Minister tell us how that is being done, where the system is and how Parliament is to be made aware of the substance of it—for example, within specific Departments?

The Local Government Bill is going through Parliament. What has been done by way of an environmental appraisal of that Bill? The Energy Efficiency Bill, which would require environmental and energy efficiency advice to be provided for someone purchasing a home, has been introduced, enabling us to focus on energy efficiency. Conservative Members blocked the Energy Conservation (Housing) Bill, which would have followed up other home energy conservation legislation, and increased the energy efficiency of homes owned by housing associations. I understand that parliamentary counsel has drawn up amendments to that effect, for the Association for the Conservation of Energy, which could have been put at the heart of the Local Government Bill. Have we had an environmental appraisal of that Bill? If so, could the measures in the two energy efficiency Bills be included? That would demonstrate that the Government are ensuring at every opportunity that they take account of the need to put environmental concerns at the heart of government and not to treat them as a bolt-on extra.

Major constitutional changes are about to take place, and they will have clear implications for environmental policy in Scotland and Wales and the policy of the new regional development agencies. Again, there has been concern that sustainable development has not been put at the heart of those agencies and that somehow or other, despite the guidance issued, economic arguments are at the heart. Those issues are important.

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas (Harrow, West): Before my hon. Friend moves too far from the local government argument, may I remind her that we stood for Parliament on a manifesto that talked of the need for a new duty for local authorities to promote the economic, social and—crucially—the environmental well-being of their areas to be part of local government reform? Does she agree that it would be useful if our right hon. Friend the Minister would confirm that that new duty is to be a part of the draft legislation on local government which we understand is due to be published shortly?

Ms Walley: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising that issue. I hope that my right hon. Friend the Minister will refer to it. I understand that there will shortly be an announcement in the House on future local government legislation. It is imperative that a duty to take account of sustainable development is set at the heart of such a Bill. Perhaps my right hon. Friend would deal also with Local

[Ms Walley]

Agenda 21 and what the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions feels about whether we rely on local authorities to produce voluntary arrangements to implement it or whether we should require them to put the ethos behind it at the heart of policies. Perhaps he would even say whether he intends to name and shame those authorities that have not yet adopted Local Agenda 21, which was conceived at the United Nations conference in Rio de Janeiro some years ago.

There is a fear and suspicion that environmental appraisals are not carried out within and across Departments as we would wish. That was evident six weeks ago, when I initiated a debate in the House on genetically modified foods. During that debate and the public debate that followed, it became clear that the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food is involved in the issue because of its labelling policy and that the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions is involved in planting and trials and deciding whether it is safe—on environmental grounds—to plant genetically modified crops commercially or experimentally. There are also implications in terms of Government scientific advice on health matters and in terms of scrutiny of European policy. There has to be some mechanism at the heart of government to square all those issues and strike the proper balance between them in the course of decision making.

On the issue of working across Departments and getting environmental concerns at the heart of government, when we questioned the Department for Education and Employment on its comprehensive spending review plans, we were concerned to learn that there had been no proper environmental appraisal of how the money for the new-build programme for school buildings would be spent, or of whether it would give at local level all the benefits that we would want to flow from spending such sums of money.

I am conscious of the time, so I shall merely add that we are all singing from the same hymn sheet. A tremendous amount of progress can and will be made, and we are determined to ensure that it is made. However, to achieve that, we have to have the institutional framework in place and be clear about the targets set. For example, if we have a 20 per cent. target on climate change, it is important that the Budget statement contains that 20 per cent. overall target, rather than the 12 per cent. target agreed by European Ministers. Those are all crucial issues, on which we have to make progress, and I am grateful for this brief opportunity to discuss them.

10.1 am

Mr. Norman Baker (Lewes): I thank the Government for establishing the Select Committee on Environmental Audit, a move that showed foresight. The Committee has worked well, as its Chairman, the hon. Member for Orpington (Mr. Horam), said. It has worked across parties and has produced some good reports; I even saw it referred to in the Treasury's Budget commentary, so we are clearly making some inroads into thinking by the Government.

The Government have said that they will put the environment at the heart of government, and that is becoming something of a cliché, over-used by all of us: there is so much at the heart of government that there can be little else in the body; nevertheless, it is encouraging to hear that statement repeated time and again. I do not underestimate the difficulties facing the Government in achieving that aim. We have a traditional structure of government that is based on individual Departments pointing in different directions and dealing with their own problems in a rather self-contained manner. The idea of joined-up government—another cliché—cuts across that traditional way of running the country, but it is not necessarily easy to get everyone facing in the same direction. A start has been made, but there is some way to go.

I shall not be over-critical of the Government's environmental record. The Minister for the Environment is present and he is aware that I wrote an article for the *Daily Express* some time ago, so I should say that I painted a balanced picture, but my words of praise for the Government were cut out before the article appeared in the newspaper—I shall be happy to show the Minister the original if he wants proof of that. On balance, my overall tone was clearly critical, but there were elements of praise, which disappeared.

I share the view of the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North (Ms Walley) that it is a shame that the only Minister present is the Minister for the Environment: that makes this debate an exercise in preaching to the converted. After all, the right hon. Gentleman won one of the green ribbon awards at a recent ceremony, whereas those who won grey ribbon awards and were not congratulated are not present in the Chamber. I hope that he will take the message from this debate to his colleagues and encourage them to attend the next time that a report of the Environmental Audit Committee is debated on the Floor of the House. It would be good to see them. I am sure that the right hon. Gentleman will agree with almost everything said in the debate, but his departmental colleagues might not necessarily do so. The hon. Member for Stoke–on–Trent, North suggested that we should name and shame local authorities that fall down on the job, but perhaps we should also name and shame Departments that fall down on the job—a task that I would happily hand to the Minister for the Environment, as part of his remit.

A Green Ministers team was established by the previous Conservative Government; it has met four times since the general election and is due to meet again this month. Although it is fortunate that it is continuing to meet, I wonder whether its remit is quite right: it appears to me to be, if not moribund, then dealing with minor issues rather than tackling major issues. There is continuing uncertainty about the role of the Green Ministers team compared with that of the ENV Cabinet Committee, to which our report refers. Clarification of those roles is required and both bodies need to take a more proactive role, rather than firefighting, which is what they have been doing hitherto.

It is a shame that the Green Ministers team is not chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister. As the Minister for the Environment will be aware, that was a recommendation of the Environmental Audit Committee. The Deputy Prime Minister does a good job on the environment and we would like to have his weight behind environmental measures to bring the rest of the Government on board.

It is also a pity that officials, rather than Ministers, are sent to many of the meetings of the Green Ministers team. There is no excuse for officials being sent; they cannot command the support from others at the meeting that a Minister would command. That downgrades the officials' views, no matter how eloquent they are, and therefore downgrades their Departments' views. With such a huge team—there are more than 100 members of the Government—I see no reason why another Minister should not attend the Committee if the designated Green Minister cannot. I would like to see that practised from now on.

There is a lack of co-ordination across government, but that is the way in which government works, so I shall not be over-critical. The Government are trying to do something new and I congratulate them on that; however, the situation is by no means perfect yet. The hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North referred to the subject of genetically modified organisms which, as the Minister will know, is a particular interest of mine. There has been a lack of co-ordination across government with regard to that issue, although they have tried to address it by setting up a biotechnology committee.

When the public concern blew up a month or so ago, it was clear that elements of the Government were taken completely by surprise and did not know what to expect. It was also plain that they were speaking from different hymn sheets—or whatever the metaphor might be. The Prime Minister, rather unwisely, said that GMOs were the best thing since sliced bread, or some such phrase—I am not a great fan of sliced bread, but that is the line that he took. The Minister for the Cabinet Office said that GMOs were products of Harold Wilson's "white heat of technology", that we should all be grateful for them and that we have a great biotechnology industry. That went down with the public like the proverbial lead balloon; those Ministers were quickly wheeled off-stage and the Minister for the Environment and the Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, who has responsibility for food safety, were wheeled on later in the week to reassure the public. They did so, but they said different things and adopted different approaches.

That goes to the heart of government. How serious are the Government about the precautionary principle? How serious are they about co-ordinating their views on the environment and the role that such considerations should play in government? How far is the environment to be sacrificed for the achievement of other policy objectives? Sustainable development assessments were referred to earlier, but to what extent does the environment have the first bite in terms of assessment?

Different Ministers are saying different things; the Government have not yet produced a unified voice. It is clear from what he says that the Minister for the Environment applies the precautionary principle, but some of his colleagues do not. There is a lack of co-ordination on that basic point. It is clear that the right hon. Gentleman wants a moratorium on the commercial planting of genetically modified crops, but it is also clear that others in the Government think that that is not necessary and that it would slow down the biotechnology industry.

I use that as an example, but my argument goes beyond that—for example, to our relations with the World Trade Organisation and its agreement on trade-related aspects of intellectual property rights, the so-called TRIPS clauses. I have asked several parliamentary questions on that subject in the past few days, but the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions laid an emphasis in its replies that was wholly at variance with that of the Department of Trade and Industry.

The Treasury is a great player in the Government and has achieved a great deal over many decades. It was responsible for producing the form of national accounts that has become an international standard. I should like the Treasury to take a similar lead in producing a new form of national accounts that takes the environment into account. I have not yet seen evidence that such a co-ordinated approach will be produced to cover the whole of the Treasury's work, but I hope that it will be adopted, as it could mean that the Treasury again gave a lead internationally.

The Treasury seems still to regard the environment as a bolt-on; its thinking is still somewhere in the 1950s. Hooray and three cheers for the energy tax that was announced in last week's Budget. I welcome that measure and am grateful to all those—in the Treasury and elsewhere—who were instrumental in bringing it forward. However, I am not sure—I hope that the Minister can reassure me—that the energy tax is not simply a very big bolt-on to Treasury thinking that is self-contained and works quite well in itself. Is that a sign of a new thinking permeating the Department? Has the Treasury signed up to the idea that taxes should be shifted from good things, such as employment, to bad things, such as pollution? Will the Treasury approach all of its decision making in that way or does it view the energy tax simply as one environmental tax that happens to work in a self-contained box? In other words, will we see further steps in that direction, or is the measure a one-off?

The Budget figures that support the Government's environmental measures are a bit thin on the ground. The Budget is a bit finger in the air when it comes to working out and justifying the carbon dioxide emission savings. I hope that there will be greater justification in future—perhaps in the Green Book, which we were promised originally but has not appeared.

I will not speak for too long as I am aware that other hon. Members wish to participate in the debate. However, I echo the call that has long been my party's policy—it was articulated by the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North—for an annual state of the environment report, which hon. Members can debate. With due respect to the Minister, I think that report should be handled by the Deputy Prime Minister or the Prime Minister. If the environment is at the heart of government, it is important for the Deputy Prime Minister and the Prime Minister to demonstrate that by being in the Chamber for debates such as this.

10.12 am

Mr. Paul Truswell (Pudsey): I am aware of the time pressures, so I shall try to truncate my remarks accordingly. The report of the Environmental Audit Select Committee is obviously a snapshot of past events. I hope that the greening government inquiry will reveal that considerably more progress has been made. However, the signs are not particularly good.

That is not a criticism of my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment. I hope that all my colleagues on the Environmental Audit Committee share

[Mr. Paul Truswell]

my view that his appearances before us are never less than impressive. As almost a resident turn, he takes some beating. However, I sometimes fear that he is cast in a role similar to that of the sheriff played by Gary Cooper in "High Noon". He is courageous, dedicated and committed, yet, like the good sheriff, the Minister is not getting the backing of his posse—which is primarily the Green Ministers Committee.

During our deliberations, it was easy to conclude that the Green Ministers Committee did not necessarily know precisely what its role was—and no one appeared to be monitoring what it was doing. We were told that the Committee would submit its first report to the Ministerial Committee on the Environment, ENV, at the end of last year. Did it do so? If the Committee has reported, has the ENV met to discuss it? Did the report include departmental aims and objectives? If the report has slipped, what are the new time scales?

We were also told that the Green Ministers Committee is to report to Parliament this summer. It will be helpful if it reports in time for the House to consider the document before the summer recess. As the hon. Member for Orpington (Mr. Horam) pointed out, we are also awaiting the publication of the sustainable development strategy, which was trailed for autumn last year. However, there is still no sign of it. Can my right hon. Friend give some indication of its publication date? Will the strategy contain clear statements about direction, process, responsibility and how progress will be measured?

I also echo the comments of other Committee members who have spoken this morning about holding an annual debate on sustainable development. Will the Government reconsider their decision not to allow such a debate?

On the question of environmental policy appraisal, the posse seems not to have even put on its boots. The Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions guidance states that Departments should consider making their policy appraisals public. The guidance should be tightened so that there is a presumption that appraisals will be published and should place an onus on Departments to justify not doing so.

At present, any tightening of the guidance would be academic as there is little evidence that such appraisals are carried out, let alone published. One of the best examples of that came from the Department for Education and Employment. We asked the Department whether it had conducted an environmental appraisal of school and college building plans. It had not. Yet the guidance produced by DETR gives the building of schools and colleges as an example of a policy that should be appraised. Such policies have clear transport, green-field and housekeeping implications. We were also told that the Green Ministers Committee was appraising the appraisals. What progress has been made in that direction and is it at a trot, a canter or a gallop?

We often talk—it has been mentioned in the debate today—about the need to integrate environmental considerations in policy making to avoid bolting on policies. It is clear to the Committee that some policies do not even enjoy the luxury of a bolt; they are falling off departmental agendas.

I am sorry that my right hon. Friend has been cast in the role of whipping boy for those criticisms. I am sure that his response will be characteristically eloquent, robust and persuasive. No Minister deserves more than he to ride off in triumph with his best gal by his side. However, unlike Gary Cooper, I doubt that he will do so without much better, more energetic backing from his green posse. Unfortunately, many members of that posse appear not to have saddled their horses.

10.16 am

Mr. Dominic Grieve (Beaconsfield): It is a pleasure to participate briefly in this debate. I shall keep my comments short, as I am aware that other hon. Members wish to contribute.

It has been said that the Environmental Audit Committee was appointed as a terrier to bite at the heels of Government. I hope that we have succeeded in doing that. I am mindful of the fact that some of my remarks about the report may have been superseded by events. For example, the establishment of the Green Ministers Committee excited considerable concern on our part. We discovered that the initial meeting of the Committee, which had been set up with a fanfare of publicity, was attended by 15 out of a possible 17 Ministers so that they could all be part of the photo opportunity. However, when the Committee next met—it was only its second meeting in the first 12 months of this Government—the number of Ministers had reduced considerably. They had been replaced by officials.

After we noted that trend, it appeared that numbers increased again for the last meeting. However, that example is symptomatic of the difficulties that the Green Ministers Committee and the Ministerial Committee on the Environment face when grappling with policy issues. There is always a tendency for Governments to have pious aspirations. Although they say that they are trying to do their best, inertia sets in. I think inertia started to set in fairly badly in the first 12 months of this Government. As has been said during the debate, we will achieve the goals of sustainable development and green government through structures. Committee members often kick themselves in an effort to remember that and to keep themselves from discussing tangential issues. Without the structure, we will not get the results.

It is all very well to establish a Green Ministers Committee, but I am not clear whether it is a formulating or an executive and reporting Committee. It is the nature of Government that most decisions are taken at Cabinet Committee level. If that is so, the role of the Green Ministers Committee is probably more limited than was trumpeted at the time of its establishment. All the evidence suggests that that is what has happened.

I confess that, when I read the Government's response to our report, I was anxious about the structures, because, although it was acknowledged that ENV had to be upgraded and that its remit had to change to put sustainable development at the top of the agenda, the relationship between ENV and the Green Ministers Committee remains far from clear. I accept that one reason is that the Green Ministers meet only three times a year, so it may be difficult, until the next meeting, to start to take a snapshot of how matters are progressing. I should be particularly interested to hear from the Minister how that aspect is developing.

Unless there is input from Cabinet Committee level—and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Orpington (Mr. Horam) said, with the Prime Minister ultimately

providing a lead—the inertia that inevitably exists in Government will get the better of progress, and progress is what we want. Tentative steps have been taken. The Budget was undoubtedly a massive improvement in that respect on last year's Budget, but its proposals are tentative. There is, above all, a lack of willingness to engage in open discussion about the issues.

That brings me to my second and last point, which I made in my intervention, about an annual debate. Sustainable development is not about buzz words or easy options and may sometimes require an acceptance that measures that people find superficially attractive and necessary cannot, for good reasons, be taken. That requires open debate.

The Minister knows that there is complete cross-party consensus on that matter, certainly on the Select Committee. We have never fallen out among ourselves in examining the Government's problems and role. We are also fairly sympathetic to those problems. We accept, as do Labour Members, that the first initiatives and tentative steps were taken by the previous Government—and all credit to them—and are being built on by this Government, but we need discussion.

Having one day a year set aside for that and turning it into a Commons event with the opportunity for Ministers to answer for their Departments is central to that discussion; otherwise, in three years, we will still be having these occasional days attended by interested Members and the Minister, who I know is dedicated to these issues, but nobody else will be getting the message. People who do not have as much information about what is going on will not be informed. I urge the Minister to recognise that there should be greater opportunities for an exchange of views, and this is a good place for that to happen, at least on a yearly basis.

10.22 am

Mr. Malcolm Savidge (Aberdeen, North): The Environmental Audit Committee was unanimous in its support for the Government's basic sustainable development and environmental strategies. We felt, therefore, that our duty was to consider whether their future planning, administrative structures and policies would deliver those strategies.

Four basic principles need to be observed when we consider environmental matters. First, long-term vision is necessary. Secondly, environmental strategies have to be integral, pervasive and co-ordinated throughout government. Thirdly, they must be applied at every level from global down to local. Finally, they need the maximum cross-party consensus.

It has presumably been true throughout the millennia that mankind has been able to affect future environments, but it is undoubtedly true that scientific and technical progress accelerates and that we have a greater ability to affect, more extensively and enduringly, our environment, for good or ill. We must be wary of the possibility that we can now have a greater effect on our tiny, fragile planet, and even more so on the tiny, fragile species, including our own, that inhabit it.

It is therefore vital that we have long-term vision; if we are honest, we must acknowledge that that is difficult for all politicians. If a week is a long time in politics, and looking beyond annual Budgets to three-year comprehensive spending reviews seems long term, how much more true is that for environmental strategies? Most of us find it difficult to focus beyond the next election. How much more difficult is it for us to focus on the next generation or the next centuries?

With environmental matters, we are often discussing intangibles. There is a difficulty in persuading people to appreciate the importance of long-term intangible effects as against short-term tangible ones—for example, the benefits of climate change compared to the convenience of a car—or immediate effects. We want newspapers to recognise that more people may die in their area from the effects of the invisible traffic accidents of air pollution than die in car accidents. It is important that we get the support of journalists so that they stop concentrating on ill-founded fears and realistically consider, rather than deride, the serious scientific bases for our concern about our environment.

We need to think like statesmen, not merely politicians. To do so, and to overcome the inevitable temptations, it is important that we built robust administrative structures that provide added incentives to give the environment its correct place in our concerns.

My second point, therefore, is that the environment must be absolutely integral and co-ordinated throughout government. There is a correct comparison to be drawn with the position that finance has traditionally had. It is encouraging that our Committee has been viewed almost as an equivalent to the Public Accounts Committee. It is important to mirror that in the ministerial structure, which is why we applaud the idea that the environment should be a prime ministerial or deputy prime ministerial responsibility. Traditionally, the Prime Minister has been the First Lord of the Treasury, and it is encouraging that we have a Deputy Prime Minister as first lord of the environment. Those issues must have clout within government if they are to have sufficient influence.

In global and local affairs, it is now almost commonplace to say that the environment must be an international matter because pollution and climate change do not recognise national boundaries. It is therefore important that someone with clout—the Deputy Prime Minister—conducted the international negotiations in Kyoto. We all praise him and my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment for their statesmanlike position at Kyoto.

At Rio, local government matters were recognised by Agenda 21, and environmental matters are therefore appropriate for devolution. It is good that they are being devolved to the Scottish Parliament, the Northern Ireland Assembly and the Welsh Assembly. It is important that this country has the structures to co-ordinate strategies between those Parliaments after devolution. Our Select Committee would hope to co-ordinate with their Select Committees.

Environmental concern must transcend party divides. In times of war, we have been able to find common cause against human enemies who were threatening us. In the future, we must increasingly be able to make common cause against the abstract forces that can threaten humanity. It is encouraging that our Select Committee has had no divisions, as our Chairman, the hon. Member for Orpington (Mr. Horam), has said. I pay tribute to him for his part in that consensus. We should try to avoid short-term political advantage and look to the long term.

[Mr. Malcolm Savidge]

I said that, to overcome the difficulties inherent in environmental matters, it is important to have strong administrative structures. We are pleased that the Government have responded so positively to some of our suggestions. We are pleased that ENV will play a strong co-ordinating role on sustainable development; that, in future, departmental reports to Cabinet Committees will contain an environmental cost-benefit analysis; that the number of meetings of the Green Ministers Committee and ENV is rising from two to three a year; and that the GMC will report annually to ENV.

I stress the point, however, which was made so cogently by the hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Grieve) and other hon. Members, that an annual report to Parliament should include a Budget-style debate. It would obviously not take up as many days, but the report needs such a debate so that the environment can receive the necessary focus. As my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke–on–Trent, North (Ms Walley) said, rather than some Back Benchers being present, the Front Benches would be full for such a debate.

I shall move rapidly to a conclusion on a positive note. I am aware of the pressure of time. We have said that we need administrative structures, and the idea is that they should produce practical results. It is commonly said, even by those who have previously been critical of the Treasury, that it is encouraging that the Budget will provide for the taking of positive steps towards a stronger environmental emphasis in government. We look forward enthusiastically to the statement on sustainable development strategy.

10.30 am

Mr. Simon Burns (West Chelmsford): I pay warm tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Orpington (Mr. Horam) and to the other members of the Environmental Audit Committee for producing an extremely interesting and important report which will move the debate forward significantly in enhancing the green agenda both inside government, and by its example, beyond government.

By the comments of hon. Members during the debate and by the very nature of the debate, it is clear that the environment is, fortunately, not a partisan, party political issue. Certainly there may be differences of opinion on how to achieve objectives, but it is a subject too important to be despoiled by narrow party political point scoring. We have been fortunate both today and in the work of the Committee, during its short existence, that the issue has not been marred by such point scoring.

I agreed very much with the hon. Member for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Savidge) when he said that he would like the Committee to evolve into something similar to the Public Accounts Committee—a respected Committee to which people listen because of its impartiality and its work towards the common aim and the common good, a Committee that attracts a significantly greater audience in the Chamber than at present when it is the subject of debates.

I add my voice to those of the many hon. Members who have rightly said this morning that they believe that there should be an annual debate on the Floor of the House to highlight environmental issues, including the progress that is being made and the problems that have been encountered. I hope that the Minister for the Environment, who, above all Ministers, has a strong commitment to the environment, will take that message, loud and clear, back to the Government Whips Office and to the Government, to try to establish such a precedent.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Orpington rightly said, the Labour party had a manifesto commitment to put the environment at the heart of policy making. I make no bones about it: I welcome that commitment. However, it would be churlish of me not to mention the work that, first, Chris Patten and then my right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer) undertook while in office to put environmental considerations at the heart of government. They set the example that the Labour Government have rightly chosen to follow and emulate.

By their very nature, environmental considerations do not respect national boundaries. That being so, there must be a global approach to green issues and problems. At a national level, environmental issues cannot be isolated and dealt with on an ad hoc basis by individual Departments. There must be an holistic approach across the broad range of Departments. Even if there is a lead Department such as the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, it will have simply a co-ordinating role to ensure that other Departments pull their full weight in advancing solutions to the problems that face us.

In its report, the Select Committee has rightly drawn attention to that approach. It comments on the progress being made by the setting up of the Cabinet Committee on the Environment and the role that Green Ministers can have in a Government's pursuit of sustainable development. I believe, however, that the Government should pay special attention to the Committee's recommendations in paragraph (f). First, it recommends:

"the authority and status of the Green Ministers Committee should be further underpinned by a clearer statement of its relationship to the Cabinet Committee".

Secondly, it adds:

"the Green Ministers Committee should report to the Cabinet Committee on progress on an annual basis and that this report should be published".

As I said earlier, and as the debate has clearly shown, these matters should be debated annually on the Floor of the House. Thirdly, and possibly most important, the Committee recommends:

"the Green Ministers Committee's forthcoming programme of action should contain concrete objectives and targets for advancing of the take-up of best practise with regard to greening operations, environmental appraisal and policy integration".

It adds:

"the Committee should make full reports . . . on its meetings and its progress"

to Parliament.

I welcome the Government's response to those recommendations in paragraph 11 of their document. I hope that, in the spirit of the Select Committee's recommendations, their reporting of progress will be a genuine way of advancing the debate and the Government's actions, rather than a glossing over if the going gets tough. It is in no one's interest or advantage simply to produce an air-brushed report. It must be positive, coherent and accurate. The Government, whether the current Administration, a future Conservative

Government or whatever, must have the maturity to accept the difficulties facing government and the problems that they have in achieving their aims and aspirations.

The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, in a very good brief that it provided to hon. Members before the debate, made a valid point on this subject, when it said:

"The Comprehensive Spending Review was a test of the departmental commitment of their"—

the Government's—

"policies."

The RSPB was therefore

"disappointed that the review showed little evidence that an environmental appraisal had been carried out."

I suspect that few would disagree with that analysis.

I urge the Government to give serious thought to a suggestion made by the RSPB, which I believe is worthy of further consideration and involves the use of strategic environmental assessment policies. As the RSPB said,

"carrying out such an assessment during the preparation of policies ensures that environmental objectives are included at the stage when all the policy options are being considered, rather than when the final option has already been chosen."

In many ways, that dovetails with the point made in June 1997 by the Prime Minister, when he was saying that the environment must not be a bolt-on, added extra. I hope that Ministers will see the merits of such a proposal and give serious consideration to moving towards that aim.

Similarly, I hope that Ministers will pay particular attention to recommendation (mm), which suggests that the Government

"should require all departments to have begun introducing an environmental management system by the end of the Parliament with a view to all having extended them across their estate by the earliest practical date."

That is an important recommendation. I know that the Government have responded by saying that they accept the recommendation in general, but with the crucial proviso that they

"would limit this to cases where that would be efficient and cost-effective."

That suggests that the Government might be seeking to avoid their responsibilities if the going gets tough. I would appreciate it if the Minister would elaborate on what exactly the Government mean and what they really intend to do. There is a danger that that response could become a cop-out for any Government if they wished so to exercise the proviso.

Similarly, the Committee recommends that the Government

"should adopt for itself the challenge it has thrown down for the top 100 FTSE companies, namely that at least 75 per cent of government departments should have at least one site registered to ISO14001 by 2001."

That seems to have been sidestepped by the Government in their response. Logically, whatever the Government expect of industry should be followed by the Government. They should lead by example. I hope that they will think further about these matters. The impression given in their response—it may be only an impression—is that they are brushing the idea aside.

The Government, to their credit, have carried forward the environmental agenda left to them by my right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal, as I have said, but there is a view abroad that the Government are sometimes not living up to their rhetoric in their actions. There are two areas where the Government have moved on from the agenda that they inherited. First, as hon. Members have said, the recent Budget was certainly a step forward in this context, and I recognise that. I do not criticise the Budget in that respect. A second step forward was the Government's response to the Marshall report.

On the Budget and the introduction of green taxes on industry, I share the view of my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition that green taxes to deal with environmental problems must be met by a corresponding tax cut elsewhere, to ensure that the overall impact of the taxation is neutral. That view was outlined by my right hon. Friend in a speech on the environment that he gave in Oxford a few months ago.

To be fair, the Chancellor accepted that in principle by making the point in his Budget. However, I draw to the Minister's attention one concern arising out of the Chancellor's Budget statement. He has counter-balanced his green taxes on industry by introducing cuts in national insurance contributions, but he has created a potential problem that underlies the good intentions that he announced.

The tax will have the greatest impact on companies that are high-energy users, but may have few or relatively few employees. If that is the case, as it certainly will be in a number of industries, how will the taxation be neutral for those businesses? That is an important point, and I hope that the Minister will give serious consideration to the potential problem, which could cause hardship and—more worryingly—bitterness, and undermine the concept of fiscally responsible and fiscally neutral green taxes.

Mr. Loughton: Is my hon. Friend not disappointed that the energy tax is a downstream tax, and is not a carbon tax, whereby the more heavily polluting producers of electricity would be hit, rather than industrial users?

Mr. Burns: My hon. Friend goes to the heart of the matter and raises another important issue relating to green taxes. I hope that the Minister will use his influence in Government to redress any imbalances and problems. I understand that he was at the forefront in advising and influencing the Chancellor on the measures announced in the Budget statement.

I expect that all hon. Members present could speak far longer on such an important report. Although this short debate is welcome, it would have been better if we could have had a longer debate, reinforcing—I say this for a third time—the importance of an annual environment debate.

I reiterate the point that the report is a major step towards establishing a green environmental mentality at the heart of government. I look forward to further reports from the Committee.

10.43 am

Mrs. Helen Brinton (Peterborough): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in the debate. I congratulate the Chairman of the Environmental Audit Committee on securing it.

The debate and the existence of the Committee, of which I am a member, testify to how far we have come. Twenty years ago, the consideration of the environment

[Mrs. Helen Brinton]

at the heart of government would have been inconceivable. That we now debate how to address environmental concerns, not whether they should be addressed, is no small achievement.

I take this opportunity to welcome the Government's commitment to high-level political leadership on sustainable development. The process of greening government stretches from putting the Government's house in order to integrating environmental consideration into every area of policy. That is so small task, and it will not be possible unless it is led from the very top, as my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister is doing. I look forward to seeing my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister attaching the same importance to the issue.

The Cabinet Committee—the Ministerial Committee on the Environment—should be central to such high-level lead taking; yet, as we noted in our report, we were disappointed to find that it has no proactive role. The Government's action to rectify that, by expanding the remit of the Committee to

"consider environmental policies and co-ordinate those on sustainable development",

fails to address the problem. The Committee still has no explicit commitment to examine the impact of non-environmental policies. The shortcomings of that approach were underlined when the Committee did not even meet to consider the multilateral agreement on investment, an issue which, as we are all aware, had far-reaching environmental consequences.

The Committee still meets only to resolve disputes between Departments that disagree on the need for or method of greening government measures. My right hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment told us that the fact that the Committee had met so rarely should be seen as evidence of the consensus in Whitehall on the need for environmental considerations to be at the heart of policy formation. Perhaps I am a cynic, but I am of the opinion that a lack of disagreement between Departments means that little is being changed. Complete agreement in Whitehall means business as usual.

With those points in mind, I urge my right hon. Friend the Minister to consider again the need for the Committee to be more proactive in championing the greening government initiative.

The continuation of the Green Ministers by the present Administration, and the formation of the Green Ministers Committee was a welcome example of the Government's commitment to strong leadership on the issue. The Government's response to our recommendations was encouraging, and clarified and enhanced the role of that Committee.

However, I was disappointed to note that meetings of the GMC were often attended by officials, not Ministers. Although we all understand the pressure of time on Ministers, Green Ministers must prioritise that important role. Equally, it was a great disappointment that the Government rejected our recommendation that the GMC be chaired sometimes by the Deputy Prime Minister. That seemed to be an excellent opportunity for the Government to reinforce their pledge of strong leadership, and at the same time, dare I say, to boost attendance.

By making Green Ministers report twice a year to the Ministerial Committee on the Environment, the Government have exceeded our recommendation of an annual report, but that will be significant only if the reports are considered by the Cabinet Committee. The first report from the Green Ministers was due at the end of last year. Will my right hon. Friend tell the House whether the report was submitted and whether the Cabinet Committee met to consider it?

I shall draw my remarks to a close, as I know that we are all eager to hear my right hon. Friend's response to the debate. Our report was intended to be an in-depth and positive look at progress in the greening government initiative, and to serve as a catalyst to further action where that was needed. It is encouraging that the Government response accepted many of our points, and many of our recommendations had already been actioned. However, there is still a long way to go.

When the Environmental Audit Committee was set up, the Deputy Prime Minister said, as we have heard again today, that he intended it to be

"a terrier to snap at the heels of Government or bite".

My colleagues and I on the Committee have made admirable terriers, and the House can be assured that we will continue to snap and bite. We know that the Deputy Prime Minister and the House have no interest in poodles.

10.48 am

The Minister for the Environment (Mr. Michael Meacher): We have had an excellent debate in the best House of Commons style—pretty critical, but in a positive and cross-party manner, which I welcome. I, like others, warmly thank the hon. Member for Orpington (Mr. Horam) as the Chair of the Environmental Audit Committee and other members of that Committee, and all those who have spoken, for a lively debate on greening government.

I recognise that the Committee has already produced eight reports—which, as the hon. Gentleman said, is a pretty good hit rate—and a valuable report on the greening government initiative. I look forward to the Committee's next report on the subject, which is due later in the year. If it is anything like the first, it will be full of genuinely constructive proposals, many of which the Government have acted on.

The hon. Gentleman had the good grace to recognise that the Budget was a turning point. It would not be an exaggeration to say that there has been a significant change, with the Budget underpinning the Red Book. There are 22 measures on the environment and they certainly are not bolted on, as the hon. Member for Lewes (Mr. Baker) opined. The Budget is clearly about taxing bads and benefiting goods, and it is revenue neutral because of the offset on employers' national insurance contributions, which is as green taxes should be.

In answer to the point made from the Opposition Front Bench by the hon. Member for West Chelmsford (Mr. Burns), high-energy users are in a special category and, inevitably, are likely to be penalised by the tax. That is why my right hon. Friend the Chancellor said specifically that they could be given a lower rate to take account of their special requirement—the inevitable use of carbon for many of their processes—provided they could produce an adequate energy-efficiency package, to the satisfaction of my Department.

The Budget is not just about the climate change levy, which will raise nearly £2 billion and save 1.5 million tonnes of carbon a year—about 5 per cent. of our target

under the Kyoto protocol. It concerns the landfill tax escalator, quarrying taxes, pesticides tax and transport measures, which will lead to major environmental sensitivity in that important area.

The second point made by the hon. Member for Orpington concerned the sustainable development strategy, and I can assure him that we intend to publish it shortly, perhaps in May. He said that the strategy should be capable of being audited. We absolutely agree, which is precisely why we have introduced 13 headline indicators. If my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister can talk about the Environmental Audit Committee being a terrier to bite the Government's ankles, I can regard the indicators as a rod to beat our own back. We will have to keep the trend line moving in the right direction or we will be heavily criticised. I welcome the fact that the strategy will be very capable of being audited.

Thirdly, the hon. Gentleman raised a number of specific points, which were endorsed by almost every speaker, and said that there should be a sustainable development debate. The Government have given a response, but the loud and clear message from this debate, on both sides—

Mr. Baker: Three sides.

Mr. Meacher: The message from all three sides is that the Government should reconsider their response, and I certainly undertake to raise that issue with the business managers.

The hon. Member for Orpington said that there had been a failure to provide sufficient environmental appraisals, and that point was repeated a number of times, but, as my hon. Friends the Members for Stoke-on-Trent, North (Ms Walley) and for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Savidge) correctly said, all Cabinet papers now have to set out whether new policies would have any significant costs or benefits to the environment. That applies to the Local Government Bill, which was mentioned, and to the question of a duty to meet social and environmental objectives in a local area, which we looked at extremely closely during preparation of the report.

The hon. Gentleman's last point was about the comprehensive spending review. I take his point; as he said, public service agreements—including, among other things, an element of environmental appraisal—are associated with the CSR. I accept that that element is not as strong as it should be, but I want to make it considerably stronger and we have a foot in the door.

The hon. Member for Lewes encouraged me to name and shame other Departments. That is not the normal practice in British Government—not publicly, at least; the practice is to persuade, to cajole and to press other Departments. As I have made clear, I welcome the work of the Environmental Audit Committee in assisting me with that process as I work with my colleagues.

The hon. Gentleman also made the perfectly fair point that my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister, given his weight and importance within the Government, could, very helpfully, be more closely associated with Green Ministers. My right hon. Friend will be attending the debate next week, as will my right hon. Friend the Chancellor, so it is perfectly clear that he is keeping a careful eye not only on Green Ministers, but on other Departments and their commitment to our overriding objective.

I say to my hon. Friend the Member for Pudsey (Mr. Truswell) that the Green Ministers' report will go to the Cabinet Committee on the Environment and Green Ministers will have a full debate next week on the sustainable development strategy. I thank him for what he said about the posse and my putative role and I hope, as I am sure he does, that my colleagues will read his strictures.

I have tried to deal with what the hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Grieve) said about structures and machinery. He also mentioned an annual debate. My hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen, North made the point, with which we all agree, that policies on the environment should be integral to and co-ordinated throughout government. He also said that the involvement of my right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister in the sustainable development strategy was important in sending that message. All I can say at this moment is that I note the strong views that have been expressed in the Chamber, particularly by my hon. Friends.

The hon. Member for West Chelmsford raised a couple of points, and I shall deal with them briefly. First, he mentioned a strategic environmental appraisal, but, of course, we already carry one out. We discussed such an appraisal and whether to regard it as one of the main issues on which to make progress in our presidency of the European Union, but we decided against that on the ground of priorities. However, we accept that an appraisal has an important role to play, so long as it does not further bureaucratise and elongate a planning process that is sometimes too lengthy.

Secondly, there is no question of there being a cop-out on environmental management systems for all Departments—quite the reverse. The sustainable development unit in my Department has provided a help desk and a call-off consultancy contract for Departments and their agencies and for non-departmental public bodies.

My hon. Friend the Member for Peterborough (Mrs. Brinton) said that the Government did not get their cross-departmental act together adequately on the multilateral agreement on investment. That is a charge to which I would plead guilty. The whole process was undertaken rather secretively, internationally and in other ways, but that is a lesson that we have learned. I would never accuse her of being a cynic—perish the thought—but she underestimates the effectiveness of Green Ministers. We meet only three times a year, but there are other ways of getting that message across.

The Government have tried to listen to the Environmental Audit Committee, which we believe to be extremely worth while, and we have taken action in a number of areas specifically as a result of its recommendations. The remit of the Cabinet Committee on the Environment has been extended to include the co-ordination of policies on sustainable development. Green Ministers meet three times a year, but I emphasise that they report directly to the Cabinet Committe on the Environment twice a year—a point queried by the hon. Member for West Chelmsford.

The Committee's first published report is due this summer, and it will not be air-brushed. I would never be involved in the air-brushing of that or of any report. It will concentrate not only on some of the good things that

[Mr. Meacher]

we have done—I am not complacent and would be the first to say that they are not enough—but on the weaknesses. I shall be looking for support, around the Chamber and around the Government, to deal with those issues.

Thirdly, Departments are reviewing the scope for including sustainable development in their objectives and those of the public bodies that they sponsor. That is exactly what we will be discussing next week.

The Environmental Audit Committee is unquestionably an important part of that framework.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. I am afraid that we must move on to the debate on the Maritime and Coastguard Agency.

Maritime and Coastguard Agency

[Relevant document: The Sixth Report from the Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs Committee, Session 1998-99, on the Maritime and Coastguard Agency (HC 31).]

11 am

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): The work of a Select Committee is at its best when it is able to inquire, in considerable detail, into a problem that is not only vital to this country, but needs careful elucidation. In 1994, the Select Committee on Transport looked at the work of the coastguard service and made a number of recommendations, which it suggested should be looked at closely by the Government. It said that it believed that the coastguard service at that time would benefit from a period of stability. Unfortunately, the service immediately instigated a review of how it worked and produced a five-year strategy.

As a result of considerable worries about both closures and changes, the new Transport Sub-Committee then decided that it was more than time that it looked at what had happened in the interim and what was going to happen in the immediate future. We are deeply disturbed about some of what we found, not least because the service is absolutely vital.

The Maritime and Coastguard Agency is a co-ordinating service, responsible for many emergency services. It not only co-ordinates the work of people such as lifeguards and other emergency services, but plays a direct role itself. Through its local knowledge and its ability to respond rapidly and efficiently, it saves lives and constitutes an essential way of safeguarding the lives of our people.

Although as a nation we own fewer and fewer ships, an increasing number of people are going to sea in little boats. Some 90 per cent. of coastguard calls are to just-on-the-coast or just-off-the-coast incidents, and those are largely—apart from the occasional hoax call—from people who have gone to sea for recreational and leisure purposes.

The Committee's report is very important and I should like to go through some of the conclusions. We have said that we are concerned about the state of the Maritime and Coastguard Agency. The merger of the two previous agencies was supposed to save money on administrative functions. Anybody would say that that was sensible. Indeed, if more agencies cut some of their top administrators and spent the money on the people who actually do the work at the sharp end, they might find a tremendous improvement in the quality of their services. However, we saw no clear evidence that the merger had resulted in improved safety. Indeed, the Committee was extremely concerned about some of the evidence given to us by the agency. Let me take our concerns in a sensible order.

The Maritime and Coastguard Agency seemed to believe that it would be able to concentrate more services in fewer stations and still provide the same level of care. It discounted the need for local knowledge and said that, in effect, coastguards no longer had a visual role—in spite of the lady who rang up a coastguard station and said, "Can you see me?" Coastguards no longer have a window out of which they can see boats from the shore. What they need is high-quality communications. We not only understood that, but supported it.

Clearly, it is the combination of the local knowledge of the auxiliaries who give their time for small sums, many of them working long extra hours that are unpaid, and the professional work of the coastguards that produces such good results. It is important to protect that mix.

The Committee was told that the agency had asked for reassessment and reorganisation. I looked—in a personal capacity, and not as Committee Chairman—at the places selected for closure because I wanted to find out whether there was a common denominator. The only one that I could find—I hope that this was not correct—was that the stations marked out for closure were those furthest away from the offices of the sector in charge. I hope that that is not the rationale, because it would make nonsense of sensible decisions and show that we are not talking about soundly based organisational decisions.

The Committee decided, however, that it would not only take evidence from everyone concerned—from those who work in the service and those who use the service—but ask why aspects such as local knowledge were so important. I ask the House to address the evidence that we took from, for example, the Scottish Fishermen's Federation. It instanced a particular case in which a canoeist went adrift off the north-west coast of Scotland. It was only because of the local Oban coastguard's knowledge of the strange tidal configurations that the helicopter was able to go in darkness to the correct point and pluck the canoeist out of the water.

We took evidence from the Cruising Association and from people who were professionally involved at sea. They all said that it was the combination of local knowledge and the ability to respond quickly that saved lives. That is the point that we want to emphasise time and again.

Mr. Ian Bruce (South Dorset): May I congratulate the hon. Lady on chairing the Committee that came up with this excellent and sensible report? I wonder whether she gets the same impression as I do—that the only motivation for the Maritime and Coastguard Agency proposing this set of closures and mergers was that the proposal was so ridiculous that it expected the Minister to reject it? It could then go to the Minister and say, "By the way, we cannot make the savings that you ask us to make." Is that not the only logical conclusion?

Mrs. Dunwoody: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman thinks that there is some logic in the conclusion. If I thought that such Machiavellian intelligence was involved in those decisions, I might feel a bit happier than I do.

What actually happened was that a consultation was launched even while the House of Commons was asking for the whole organisation to be kept stable for a while to see how it worked. That consultation was not terribly impressive. It did not give the impression of wanting to know the opinions of people concerned or of wanting to know what the staff felt about how the system could be improved. Mr. Maurice Storey, who gave evidence to the Committee, sent out an e-mail when two of his coastguard officers dared to bring their views to the public and described them as "miscreants". As industrial relations go, that is not terribly impressive. We asked him about it, but received no clear or satisfying response.

Thus, we were worried about all aspects of the consultation exercise. We accepted that new communications technology was needed. No one suggested that the service should not move on, but there were considerable doubts about the system being suggested. Indeed, after the Committee hearing had been broadcast on one of the television channels, I was approached by somebody with evidence about a similar service, which had been put in for the Cambridgeshire police and had occasioned considerable difficulty, to the extent that it slowed down responses to emergency calls. I therefore trust that my hon. Friend the Minister will not simply say that the Committee was taking a luddite view in saying that the agency should not have new telephones or new communications systems. That is not the case, but we remain extremely worried about the system being suggested for the changeover. While I was in one operations room, I heard the sort of incident about which I had been warned by the coastguards. Some systems will override others simply because they are more powerful. All those aspects were not satisfactorily discussed by the Maritime and Coastguard Agency when it gave us evidence.

I have said that local knowledge is fundamental. When we look at the closure programme, we realise why so many people are worried. Let us take Liverpool coastguard station; I make no excuse for mentioning a coastguard station in my region because it was one that I had the opportunity to visit. If it is closed, its work will be covered from Holyhead, which is already the seventh busiest coastguard station. It will cover a stretch almost halfway into Scotland.

Although they will take more and more work, those coastguards may be able to deal with problems highly efficiently. However, no one can pretend that they will have the detailed knowledge of the Liverpool area, of the Morecambe bay area, or of the developments that are taking place there both in industry and in leisure, or that we can discount the fact that Blackpool, which is in the Liverpool coastguard station area, is one of the largest tourist towns in the United Kingdom. It is important that we realise that we are talking about not a minor problem, but something of major importance to the working of the coastguard service which can have an immediate and direct impact.

The Committee was not impressed by the arguments. It did not believe even that the money to be saved by the closures could be justified in any way. We did not believe that, in terms of the overall budget, the savings were significant, or that there was any sensible reason to suggest that they had been forced on the agency by changes in work loads.

I would have liked to go into some aspects of the report in greater detail, but I see that many hon. Members want to speak. The suggestion that the coastguard service, particularly coastguard watch officers, can be used to do the work of marine surveyors is not intelligent and will lead to considerable difficulty. I hope that other hon. Members will make it clear why that is so.

The Prime Minister wrote to my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Mr. Wareing) on the matter and said at Prime Minister's Question Time that the plan would go ahead because of the amount of money involved and because of changes in the service. Those arguments will not wash any more. Simply repeating the same mantra over and again is not the way in which to deal with the House of Commons.

[Mrs. Dunwoody]

It seemed to the Select Committee that the agency had gone through an exercise that was fairly artificial. It had not carried it out properly. It certainly was not justified in closing the stations and sub-stations that it looked at. It could not demonstrate that the work of coastguard services would be improved by the closure programme. Indeed, it was clear that the opposite would happen.

If all those things are true—the argument about technology is almost a side issue, because all the emergency agencies have to improve their technology; that is not in dispute—Ministers have a responsibility to do something. A previous Government introduced the closure programme, not the present Government. We do not have to do everything that the previous Government decided to do. They may have tried to justify the plan, but the Committee does not believe that it is justified.

I do not think that Ministers in the previous Government asked for the plan to be introduced; it was generated by the Chief Coastguard. Therefore, we do not believe that there will be any loss of face if the Government say, "All right. We have looked at the plan again. We think that it is not a good idea. We will not go ahead with it. We do not believe that it can be justified."

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (North Essex): I am grateful for the hon. Lady's generosity of spirit towards us in the debate. I was Parliamentary Private Secretary at the Scottish Office when the proposals first emerged. I can assure her that Ministers were by no means convinced that they were the right way forward. I make no bones about the fact that we did not think the pre-election period would be a sensible time to conduct a debate about the proposals—someone said that we might lose more seats in Scotland. In all sincerity, we can approach the matter in a non-partisan way. In that respect, I fully share her sentiments.

Mrs. Dunwoody: That is a useful confirmation of what worried me. The Government do not need to feel that they have to defend anything. It was a suggestion that was put forward; it was looked at; it cannot be justified. It is not particularly intelligent; it does not improve safety; it does not save money. Why we are going ahead with it? Why do we not just say that it was a mistake? People do make mistakes—even in government, impossible though it may seem.

The Government should for once have sufficient ability to say, "All right. It is wrong." They should hold their hands up and say that it is not their intention to go ahead with the reorganisation and closure programme. It is not necessary and it will not contribute to the future happiness of the people of the United Kingdom. I say only one more thing to the Minister. She should say with Voltaire:

"I am very fond of truth, but not at all of martyrdom."

11.16 am

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): I congratulate the Chairman and members of the Transport Sub-Committee on producing a robust report and on the way in which the Chairman has introduced it. Those of us who have constituencies where stations are under threat of closure particularly welcome both the report and the early opportunity that the debate provides to discuss it.

What struck us most about the report was that it appeared to echo the concerns and underline the arguments that many of us who oppose the closures have been advancing all along. We advanced them in a debate in the Chamber on 26 November 1997, and my hon. Friend the Member for Argyll and Bute (Mrs. Michie) put them to the Minister and officials from the Coastguard Agency at a meeting in December 1997. Those concerns were reflected in the many responses to the so-called consultation document. Having examined the arguments and come to conclusions, the Committee's report gives great weight to the case for maintaining the present structure of 21 co-ordinating centres.

I share the concern of the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) and the Committee about the apparent lack of proper consultation during the whole exercise. The Committee was unhappy with all aspects of the exercise, and I reached the same conclusion. I got the clear impression that there was never really any intention to consult. It was only because of the furore that was created, not least in the debate in November 1997, that, at the last moment, a consultation document was put together.

My clear impression of the document was that it was issued more to justify a decision that had already been taken than to examine properly all the different options. The lack of consultation was instanced by my constituent Dr. Jonathan Wills in a submission to the Committee. He sits on the Shetland sub-committee of the Northern Ireland and Scotland district marine safety committee. Shetland coastguard station was to inherit responsibilities from Pentland, yet no one ever discussed the matter with or consulted the committee, which was set up by the Government to examine issues of shipping and maritime safety.

The original timetable in the document was for the Coastguard Agency, as it then was, to receive, analyse and assess all responses and to report to the Minister within one week. After protest, the time span of the consultation was extended, but other aspects of the document show a lack of genuine consultation. It said, for example, that there would be no reduction in the lifeboat service. No one had ever suggested that there would be. For that matter, the service is not the responsibility of the Maritime and Coastguard Agency.

When analysing the work load of different stations, the document used the loaded term "false alarms". I think that the phrase "false alarms" is intended to make people believe that the service is a waste of time and money. The term is not used by the agency itself, however. A written answer from the Minister uses the proper expression "assistance not rendered". That could refer to, for instance, a fire on a fishing vessel that was put out by the time the emergency services arrived. No one in their right mind would consider that to be a false alarm.

In the case of Pentland, "false alarms" involved seven helicopter call-outs, 12 lifeboat launches and 37 call-outs of rescue teams. It turned out that assistance was not required, but those were potential emergencies. Account must be taken of so-called false alarms, as well as occasions on which services have been rendered, if we are to see the full picture of the responsibilities and work load of a station.

The consultation document suggested that, to be properly effective, a coastal station would have to deal with two or three incidents each day. Where in the world

did that come from? In a written answer on 18 February 1998, the Minister told me that in 1996, only five co-ordinating centres in the United Kingdom would have met that criterion, and only six in 1997. The implication is that many employees lack experience, which I do not believe.

Mr. Ian Bruce: Is the hon. and learned Gentleman not taken by the strange dichotomy whereby it is decided that the Scottish coastguard stations should be closed because they are not busy enough and that, because the two busiest stations, Portland and Solent, are so busy, they ought to be located in the same building? Is it not odd that the same report should contain both those arguments?

Mr. Wallace: We should also take into account what the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich said about Liverpool—which is already a very busy station—transferring some of its functions to Holyhead, which I believe is the seventh busiest station in the United Kingdom. As the hon. Lady said, there is not much logic in that.

I find it rather suspicious that there appears to be one closure or co-location in each of the regional areas. It may be just coincidence, but some of us need to be persuaded of that.

The results of the consultation seem to have been largely ignored. Of those who expressed a view on the Pentland closure, 84 per cent. were against it; 79 per cent. opposed the closure of Oban, 71 per cent. opposed the closure of Tyne Tees and 88 per cent. opposed that of Liverpool. I believe that only 8 per cent. of respondents supported the collocation of Portland and Solent. Despite that overwhelming opposition, however, the proposals went ahead. The only alteration related to timing: the closures of Pentland and Oban were delayed by a year, to 2000.

I do not believe that any member of the Committee—or, indeed, any hon. Member—has denied that there is a constant need for improvement and upgrading of technology. What has never been established is why that should require closures. There does not seem to be any link, except, perhaps, one related to cost. The 1998 National Audit Office report stated:

"Financial savings generated by the proposed reduction in the number of co-ordinating centres would be used to fund the introduction of new communications technology."

Proposals should not be cost-driven when health and safety at sea are involved. In any case, as the Committee pointed out, the cost is very small, and the position could be reversed at no real additional expense. Surely the answer is to link all 21 centres to the new technology, rather than proceeding with the closures.

Local knowledge is another important factor. The consultation document referred to what it described as an apparent disbenefit. The hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich mentioned the example given by the Scottish Fishermen's Federation, and those of us who represent areas in the north of Scotland know that the same names crop up in different parts of the country. Sandwick is an example: goodness knows how many Sandwicks there are in Shetland, Orkney and the north-west. According to the consultation document, however, what is required is a "general familiarity". Justifying the use of that term, it referred to a report on staff inspection of marine divisions in 1978–79—blithely ignoring the coastguard search and rescue operational, planning and procedures manual, which states that "thorough local knowledge" is required.

It is not simply a question of knowing headlands, tides and place names, although that is important. Local knowledge also means

"regular face to face contact with the other emergency services . . . well established contacts with the fishing industry and other marine users; having a recognised presence in the community, and bringing a coastguard perspective to . . . local issues."

Both in the report and in meetings that I have had with the Minister, the importance of coastguards' getting rid of the bunker mentality and getting out into the community has been stressed. Either the former chief executive of the Coastguard Agency or the Chief Coastguard—I cannot remember which—regretted that there had been so few opportunities recently for coastguards to get out and about, and that accident prevention had not been given the profile that it deserved. In stations such as Pentland, however, there is good practice: coastguards are getting out into the community, and there are good working relationships with the other emergency services. But what is the response? In the name of improvement, a station that could provide a good example is being closed.

There is considerable scepticism in the coastguard service. At a time when resources are under restraint, it is not possible for coastguards to travel more widely along the coast, even in the quieter months.

There is a big problem with morale. As the hon. Lady pointed out, the 1994 Select Committee report called for a period of organisational stability, but that did not happen. In April 1997, the former chief executive of the agency sought to reassure me that Pentland station would not be closed, but it was closed six months later.

Those who serve as coastguards will have been buoyed up by the detail in which the hon. Lady's Committee has examined the issue, and the conclusions that it has reached. If our system is to be credible, when a House of Commons Committee has examined all the arguments and has reached so unequivocal a conclusion, the Minister concerned should give that conclusion full consideration. Let me tell this Minister that she will not lose face if she backs down. We shall be delighted; I assure her that we shall not rub her nose in it.

This is not a question of sentiment. I believe that the objective of securing a good, efficient coastguard service would be enhanced by our maintaining the present network of 21 co-ordinating centres, not least because of the importance of local knowledge. I believe that the service would be impaired by the closures, and I therefore ask the Minister—especially in view of the fact that Pentland and Oban are scheduled to close in less than 18 months—to end the uncertainty, and tell us that those and the other stations will remain open.

11.28 am

Mr. Brian H. Donohoe (Cunninghame, South): As a member of the Transport Sub-Committee, I welcome the opportunity to speak. I shall be brief, because I know that a number of my hon. Friends with constituency interests also wish to speak; but I want to make a number of points.

Having been a member of the Committee under the last Administration, and having been party to its full examination of the coastguard service—which reached similar conclusions to those reached on this occasion—

[Mr. Brian H. Donohoe]

I do not want it to be thought that I am a hypocrite, and have changed my mind just because I am now a member of the party that is in government. I want the Minister to give closer attention to this issue, to heed what is said both this morning and in the report and to exercise more common sense than has been exercised so far. I believe that the Committee has made the case, and has made it very well.

I want to reinforce what has been said about two matters. Local knowledge has been mentioned. In preparing our report, we took evidence from a number of sources, including two former Chief Coastguards. We were told:

"'Local knowledge' is vital to the officers controlling an incident especially in the first few minutes. No computer can replace knowledge and instinct. A computer simply provides facts for use. Local knowledge often saves vital time in effecting a rescue. The suggestion that an officer on receipt of a distress call or 999 call should consult a database or telephone for advice from Section Managers or coastal auxiliaries is totally unacceptable."

Two previous Chief Coastguards gave us that information, which most precisely explains the importance of local knowledge.

Only those who have local knowledge, especially in my own constituency, are able to understand peculiar local tides. The tide at the bar of the mouth of my part of the River Irvine, for example, could take any one of five possible directions. On many occasions, people get into difficulty on the river, and the only ones who are able to save the situation are those with local knowledge of the tides. Local knowledge is so important.

The report also deals with the presumed savings to be made by closing stations. If it is correct that closures will create savings of £500,000, that is but a mere pittance in overall Government expenditure. A possible consequence of the Department's desire to save £500,000 is loss of life. I should not like to have that on my conscience, and I imagine that my hon. Friend the Minister shares that feeling.

Last week, in his Budget statement, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor dealt with the need to support Customs and Excise in combating smuggling and more closely safeguarding our borders. When we consider allocating resources to achieve that objective, we should appreciate the importance of local knowledge. I should, therefore, think that—in the light of the stations' value in stopping the smuggling of goods—Transport Ministers will have the Chancellor's support when reconsidering the value of the savings to be made by making closures.

I ask Ministers to reconsider the matter, and to give the House a positive reply.

11.33 am

Mrs. Ray Michie (Argyll and Bute): Like everyone else, I congratulate the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) on securing this debate, and congratulate the Transport Sub-Committee on its excellent report. I should also like to express my appreciation, and that of the people of Oban, for the effort that the hon. Lady made in visiting the town. I should stress that she visited in a personal capacity, not as the Committee Chairman. She spoke with many of those working in search and rescue, and with many who could, at any time, be the subject of such a rescue. Her initiative was greatly welcomed and lifted spirits, as everyone felt that, at last, someone was listening. I should add that Oban is not the easiest place to get to from London. She made a sterling effort.

I do not want, in the short time available to me, to rehearse all the arguments against closure of the Oban coastguard station. The Minister knows the arguments well enough—particularly those on the increase in maritime activity along the lengthy Argyll coastline, and the dangerous waters round all the islands and many sea lochs. Involved now in the area are ferries, fishing trawlers, yachts and year-round diving. Salmon fishing is intruding ever more into the sea. Liners are coming to dock in Oban bay, as are bulk carriers from the Glen Sanda quarry. It is a very busy area, and all parts of it require a co-ordinated rescue service. It is inconceivable that the Oban coastguard station might no longer be there to give that service.

Hon. Members have mentioned the work done by coastguard station personnel. In Oban, they have fostered and developed an excellent relationship with the other emergency services—they know one another, and they trust one another's knowledge and expertise. There are seven lifeboat stations in the area—at Oban, Portree, Mallaig, Kyle, Tobermory, Barra and Islay—and the Oban lifeboat is one of the busiest in the whole country. Last year, it recorded more than 100 call-outs, whereas the coastguard station itself recorded a 22 per cent. increase in operational work.

It is a treacherous and often very stormy part of the country, and the situation is likely to get worse. In a letter to the Committee, the North Argyll Development Agency said:

"Global warming, meteorologists inform us, is responsible for the deeper areas of low pressure which sweep across the Atlantic and most are hitting the West Coast of Scotland. Rainfall is greater and wind speeds are higher. Forecasters say they will get progressively worse and this means increased levels of danger at sea. The Coastguard agency is going to need all its present resources and more in the future, not less."

I can vouch for that. This has been one of the stormiest winters that we have had in the west, certainly for over 20 years. Moreover, as the North Argyll Development Agency said, it will get worse.

I should like to highlight two specific points, which have already been highlighted today by other hon. Members. Time and again, the report returns to the matter of local knowledge: it is invaluable. It is invaluable in deciding what resources to deploy and, most importantly, where to deploy them—particularly in an area such as the west coast of Scotland, which is similar to the area of my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) in having Gaelic place names scattered throughout the many islands and indented coastline. We have been told that the similarity of the names often leads to confusion.

As the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich said, the overwhelming majority of incidents dealt with by rescue co-ordination centres are either on the coast or just offshore, exactly where local knowledge is so valuable. We all accept that, whereas local knowledge is not the only source of information for coastguards, it is, as the report said, a fundamental tool in watch officers' armouries.

Although new technology is very welcome and necessary, I am concerned that too much reliance has been placed on it. I have a map—which hon. Members probably cannot see—showing all the current communication black spots, which are shown in yellow. There are very many such spots, and there is no evidence that new technology will overcome them.

I also have a note from Seawork International, a company of marine consultants and contractors, on bad weather communication failures. It states:

"Power sources for Telecommunications, Radio microwave links, and landlines are notoriously prone to failure on the West Coast, and due to the mountainous terrain, and sparse population, their swift repair is usually impossible. They regularly fail when the Winds and weather are at their worst, in other words, exactly when the Coastguards are likely to need them most!"

It is not at all clear who—other than the Minister, her officials and the hierarchy in the agency itself—is in favour of the strategy. Those who believe that it is wrong can be counted in their thousands. They include experienced seafarers and mariners from throughout the United Kingdom. I have letters to substantiate that claim.

My constituents are dismayed. They knew that they had the support of Labour in opposition, led by the now Deputy Prime Minister. They thought that the Labour party would continue that support in government. In the light of the report, I hope that the Minister will reconsider the closure programme, particularly the closure of the Oban coastguard station.

11.40 am

Mrs. Claire Curtis-Thomas (Crosby): I extend my thanks to the Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs Committee for undertaking the inquiry. My constituency contains the Crosby coastguard station, which was signalled for closure in the Government's recommendations. The people at the station did not anticipate such a great response from the community. We have recently submitted a petition with 53,000 signatures to the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions. It was not organised by the staff of the Crosby coastguard station, but came as confetti through the door one day, the result of a voluntary reaction from the people of Merseyside, who intuitively understood the value of the coastguard service and did not want it to be amalgamated or removed.

Since then, many of my colleagues from Merseyside and I have written countless letters on the closure programme, questioning the need for it. I am grateful to them for their support. We have received very little positive response other than a repetition of the mantra of the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions. However, that has not stopped us. We were delighted when the Select Committee decided to undertake an inquiry, because we felt that it would provide an impartial, objective review of the arguments. I made it known to those who supported the retention of the Crosby station that we should accept the recommendations of the Committee. If the Committee felt that the closures were necessary and that there was no argument against them, we would concede. We recognised the value of the Committee's contribution and decided to uphold its recommendations.

It was with mixed feelings that I saw that the recommendations came out so resoundingly in our favour, calling for the retention of all the coastguard stations. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will concede that there have been oversights, omissions, misunderstandings and a lack of appreciation of many of the points that have been raised this morning, and accept that we should retain the coastguard stations that are considered imperative for safety not just by us, but by hundreds of thousands of seafarers, sea users and coastal shore users.

The arguments for the closure of the Crosby coastguard station included the suggestion that staff would be more effectively used by being stationed at Holyhead. It was envisaged that during quiet periods they would be required to carry out accident prevention and district liaison work. Figures quoted in the five-year strategy group document reviewing the work load for Liverpool appeared to show that Liverpool was not as busy as Holyhead and that the variety of incidents dealt with at Liverpool was not as great. The variety of incidents was stated as being an important factor in the training of officers.

It was also said that the Liverpool building was too old to be adapted for the new technology and that it could not be adapted for the expected increase in the number of staff required to cover the proposed new district. Local knowledge was alleged to be less important with the advent of new technology and it was said that that technology would mean that fewer, not more, marine rescue sub-centres would be required to monitor distress frequencies.

There are many valid, coherent arguments against those reasons for closure. The proposal to base the staff at the new enlarged district at Holyhead is not an effective use of taxpayers' money. Holyhead is at the end of the district. With the greatest respect to hon. Members from that area, it is at the end of a large cul de sac. The notion of staff going into the community and liaising with the other services, who are 60 miles away, is nonsense. That would not be an effective use of the services of coastguard agents.

The figures for incidents quoted on page 20 of the consultative document are seriously misleading. Other hon. Members have already pointed out that they do not accurately reflect the work load at Liverpool. The total figures quoted for Liverpool do not include hoax calls and false alarms. That is a serious omission. The same criteria have not been applied to the figures for other stations. We cannot compare like with like.

It is implied that hoax and false calls need no co-ordinating action. That is not true. At the outset of such incidents, life is believed to be at risk. Many such incidents require extensive co-ordination. Hoax calls often necessitate more work due to their nature: details of incidents are misleading and confused and investigations need to be conducted to find out who the culprits are. A call is regarded as a false alarm when resources are deployed but no assistance is rendered, such as when a large-scale search is conducted for an overdue boat that subsequently returns safely.

It has also been stated that there is a greater variety of incidents at Holyhead, giving officers wider experience and more job satisfaction. That is not true, as an examination of the real statistics shows. The argument that the building is too old to be adapted does not stand examination. We are not talking about a derelict building in the middle of a sand dune. It is a 16-year-old,

[Mrs. Claire Curtis-Thomas]

single-storey building. We have no reason to believe that there would be any serious opposition to plans to extend it to take on board new technology.

I warmly support the comments made about local knowledge. I do not want to repeat the arguments, but local knowledge is vital. It is farcical to suggest that it can be replaced or dealt with by a computer or that it is possible to ring around when there is an emergency. Anyone working in an emergency needs expertise at hand. If local knowledge is so irrelevant, why is there an examination for it? It is one of the requirements. Does the move to a more amalgamated service come with an assumption that the local knowledge that can be retained by an individual can be stretched and stretched? I question the ability of an ordinary human being to retain the amount of information that the people at Holyhead will be expected to retain. It is not possible without compromising safety.

The current radio technology is analogue. As an engineer, I am pleased that it is going to be replaced by more modern technology. That will allow considerable savings in the cost of private wires, which will carry signals from the aerials to the MCS. However, the true benefits of a digital system will not be realised until a great majority of the seafaring public also have digital equipment, which is prohibitively expensive. I understand that it costs £2,000. It could be many years before the benefits of the system are realised to all. Those who call on the maritime rescue and co-ordination service do not necessarily have a radio. The new digital system will make no difference to those in dinghies, sailors, sailboarders, swimmers and walkers—90 per cent. of those who currently access the service. The new technology has yet to be tested. I believe that no provision has been made to ensure that an adequate safety system will be in place to protect the owners of small boats, leisure sailors and fishermen. There is no guarantee that we shall meet the specified safety standards.

There is a continued significant expansion in the Liverpool basin of North sea work, with the erection of new platforms, and of the number of people using the area.

The new development scheme includes new leisure facilities and water sports centres, and the number of visitors to the area will rise. The area already has a number of marinas, diving schools, yacht clubs and windsurfing clubs. It is unlikely that the new digital technology will be of benefit to the majority of people using the area for those activities. It is therefore important that the MRCS remains in the centre of this busy area, where the staff—with their local knowledge—are best placed to be of greater service to the community that they serve.

The analysis of the proposed closure states that, in the present circumstances, it would be wrong to close the Liverpool station. Liverpool is situated in a major port and city—with all the infrastructure that that entails—and is ideally situated for liaison with other emergency services and planners. To transfer its responsibilities to Holyhead would not be cost-effective. Holyhead is at one end of the proposed new district, and liaison with other emergency services in the event of a major incident would be, at best, difficult and, in some cases, totally impractical. Staff visiting the district would have greater distances to cover, with all the expense and the loss of expertise at the station that that would entail.

The new digital technology—which we welcome—merely replaces the present analogue system. There is no evidence for the premise that stations can be closed as a result of its installation. No risk assessment has been undertaken of what will happen to those stations when the technology is introduced. The new technology cannot replace the local knowledge of watch officers. The newly enlarged Holyhead district will be the busiest in the UK, and one of the largest, with approximately 1,000 miles of coastline; every nuance of which, I understand, is supposed to be retained by watch officers. Overseeing such a large district will mean a loss of knowledge and, as the number of incidents rise, stress on staff will increase.

No satisfactory explanation has been given for why the Liverpool station has been chosen for closure; or for why three stations are to remain in Wales, but not one on the west coast of England. The arguments for the closure of the Liverpool station do not stand close examination.

The Committee has recommended that all 21 maritime rescue co-ordination centres and sub-centres be retained, and that the new communications technology—which is so necessary—be installed in all of them. I would support that recommendation, as would the 53,000 people who signed that petition in the north-west. We understand the value of Crosby coastguard station, and we urge the Minister to reconsider the decision and allow us to keep all our coastguard stations open.

11.53 am

Mr. Alan Campbell (Tynemouth): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in the debate, not least because Tyne-Tees coastguard station—due for closure—is in my constituency. I am grateful for the work of the Select Committee, and I welcome the broad conclusions in its report.

I wish to refer to two matters that have been covered in detail this morning: first, the importance of local knowledge in local stations; and, secondly, whether "Focus For Change" and the consultation exercise has given the agency a more stable future. I am a member of the Public Accounts Committee which produced a report last year on the new agency in which we expressed similar reservations about the loss of local knowledge.

I welcome the new investment in the integrated coastguard communication system—I am not a luddite in terms of new technology. I welcome also the assurances, and reassurances, that coastal rescue resources will remain in place. I wish to put on record my appreciation of the work of the coastguard, the helicopter crews and the Royal National Lifeboat Institution, which celebrates its 175th anniversary this month.

The longer the discussion on the future of the agencies concerned went on, the more concern emerged about the loss of local knowledge. Watch officers are tested on their local knowledge, and a previous Chief Coastguard has warned us not to underestimate the importance of local knowledge. We are told, apparently, that thinking that a watch officer can retain detailed local knowledge is somehow misleading; that 1 square nautical mile of sea is much like any other. We are reassured that, in any case, local rescue resources will retain local knowledge. It is dangerous to assume that watch officers are simply there

to answer telephones. That ignores their vital role in co-ordinating rescues, which are much more likely to take place along the coast—in some instances, coast that they know very well—than in open sea. Last year, Tyne-Tees dealt with 442 incidents inshore, and only 18 offshore. Alarm calls are often made by infrequent visitors to the coast, and are often made in the heat of an emergency.

It is important for local coastguards to be able to recognise local place names, to be familiar with the local vessels using that stretch of the coast and to be able to tell the difference between a description of Beacon Point in Newbiggin and Beacon Point in Seaham. The report states that local knowledge is

"a fundamental tool in Watch Officers' armouries".

Concern at the loss of local knowledge has been expressed not only by the Committee, but by the United Kingdom Offshore Operators Association, various fire and civil defence authorities and the National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations—including my own fishermen in North Shields. The Committee used the word "catastrophic" to describe the possible effect of the loss of local knowledge. That is a strong term for a report to use, and I hope that the Minister takes note of it.

It is important to address the concerns in the report about how the Maritime and Coastguard Agency managed to get into this position in the first place. I have the highest regard for my hon. Friend the Minister, but I must remind her that we inherited the review, and the recommendations—they are not binding on the Government. Throughout the process, there has been criticism about how the review and the consultation have been handled.

The Public and Commercial Services Union complained that the agency denied having a plan for station closures. When my local fishermen contacted me in the summer of 1997, they had heard rumours that Tyne-Tees was going to close. I contacted the agency, and I was reassured about the future of the station. Imagine how I felt in November 1997 when the announcement was made that the station was, after all, to close.

There is a strong suspicion that the agency has been dragged into the consultation process which followed the announcement, and that the consultation was really about how and when the closures would take place—not about whether or not they would take place. Despite two reports from major Committees, I am still not sure how stations were actually chosen for closure. We are led to believe that it had something to do with incidents—putting aside the fact that an oil tanker adrift of the Northumberland coast counts as one incident, as does a lone fisherman cut off by the tide.

The year chosen by the Maritime and Coastguard Agency was 1996, which just happened to be a year when incidents appeared to be falling. Last year, Tyne-Tees had its busiest year since 1995, and there is no sign—although I would hope that this is the case—that incidents are tailing off. That has resulted in the loss of an important station at Tyne-Tees, which serves nine river estuaries—where most incidents take place.

There are 6,000 annual movements into the Tyne, and the numbers are rising. There are 12,000 annual movements into the Tees—most of which are tankers entering the biggest industrial chemical complex in Europe; yet we are to lose the station. Is it any wonder that local people are left wondering whether this has been a meaningful consultation exercise at all? Is it any surprise that the Committee says that it is

"unhappy with all aspects of the consultation exercise"?

We are told that stations do not need to close to pay for the new technology, but why can we not retain local stations and local knowledge at the same time? Why, for once, cannot new technology enhance a local service, and not simply replace it?

If my hon. Friend the Minister is looking to save money, she should consider the number of incidents caused by recreational craft not looked after properly by their owners. Why do I have to have MOT, tax and insurance as a car owner, when I doubt whether those would be required if I owned a boat? If local boat owners want to make a contribution to the local coastguard service, we should encourage that.

In the meantime, I share the Committee's concerns and I hope that all the centres can be retained. My hon. Friend is aware of the strong feeling on the issue: 61,000 people in my region petitioned the Maritime and Coastguard Agency to ask it to think again, and I would be failing in my responsibility if I did not highlight their concern in the House.

12 noon

Dr. Alan Whitehead (Southampton, Test): Last summer, representatives from the coastguard station at Lee-on-the-Solent came to see me and my hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth, North (Mr. Rapson) to express a series of concerns about the review then under way. They put the case for the continuation of their centre and the Portland centre as separate entities. They were concerned that the proposal to conjoin the centres would lead, in the not-too-distant future, to one super-centre, and that the principle of effective coastguard operation on the south coast would be undermined.

I was deeply concerned, but I did not want to engage in special pleading, as I recognised that a national review was under way. I was delighted that the Select Committee decided to undertake an inquiry and, like many other hon. Members, I eagerly awaited its report. No one has dissented from the view that the Committee took a long, hard and careful look at the overall picture and concluded that there was not a case for closure, because the projected savings did not outweigh the problems that might be caused.

I felt vindicated, as what would have been special pleading on my part was shown to be part of a wider picture. That wider picture is encapsulated by the proposal to conjoin the Solent and Portland centres, which would effectively mean that along the south coast of England—by far the busiest recreational and commercial stretch of the United Kingdom coast—we would have, between Lyme Regis in the west and Eastbourne in the east, only one centre to respond. There would technically be two centres, but in effect only one.

The two centres were first and third in terms of the number of incidents in both 1996 and 1997, accounting for about 20 per cent. of all incidents recorded by all the coastguard stations in the United Kingdom. The argument that the stations can be conjoined because they are not busy is not borne out by the figures. Studies on the importance of ports and the future of leisure in the south-east of England show that the waters will inevitably become busier still.

[Dr. Alan Whitehead]

I was pleased that, after consultation, the conjoining was put off until after 2003, but that is merely a pause. The Committee has done a good job for the House and for all who are concerned that their lives should not be put in peril when they go to sea. The review and the closures will not necessarily have that outcome, and my hon. Friend the Minister has emphasised the benefits from investment in new technology, but I cannot believe that technology alone could overcome the consequences of the watch officers having to look after new stretches of coast.

I ask the Government to reconsider and to examine carefully the Committee's conclusions and the views that have been expressed today, with virtual unanimity, about the future of the agency.

12.6 pm

Mr. Joe Benton (Bootle): I congratulate the Select Committee on its report, if for no other reason than that it totally vindicates the stance that my hon. Friend the Member for Crosby (Mrs. Curtis-Thomas) and I have taken. She rightly said that we have expressed the fears of the maritime interests on Merseyside. What consultations have been held with the Mersey Docks and Harbour Company and the shipowners of Merseyside?

A snippet of information that my hon. Friend the Minister may like to consider is that the latest indications are that the heavy commercial traffic through the port of Liverpool and Merseyside will increase in this year alone by about 40 per cent. As my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) said, we are not asking for a climbdown, but we want the Government to put to rest the accusations coming from maritime expertise in Merseyside that they have made an arrogant decision that flies in the face of all the best advice.

In a former life, if I may put it that way, I had close associations with maritime work, and I retain contacts at every level. I am in touch with captains of supertankers, with shipowners and with ordinary seamen, but I have not come across one person who has defended the proposed closures in any way. I urge my hon. Friend the Minister, in the interests of good maritime sense, to reconsider the proposals. Let us have proper consultation with maritime expertise and not merely pander to the wishes of vested interests that, for one reason or another, support the disastrous closure of stations all around the coast.

I beg my hon. Friend to listen to the pleas of all those who have spoken today. Not one voice has spoken in favour of the closures, and I appeal to her to take that into consideration.

12.8 pm

Mrs. Louise Ellman (Liverpool, Riverside): I support the detailed points made by my hon. Friends the Members for Crosby (Mrs. Curtis-Thomas) and for Bootle (Mr. Benton) on why the Liverpool station at Crosby should be retained. I find it absolutely incredible that, at a time when port trade, ferry services and the use of leisure craft are expanding, we should even consider closing a station where local knowledge has proved so invaluable in saving lives.

I urge my hon. Friend the Minister to consider the important issue of accountability. When the previous Government set up executive agencies, they tried to dissociate the decisions of those agencies from elected Government. I am glad that this Government have changed that situation and we now have to convince the Minister who is responsible for what happens.

Is my hon. Friend the Minister satisfied, after listening to all the contributions and seeing the evidence received—including the evidence from the Select Committee—that proper consultation has been carried out and proper consideration given to the detailed knowledge and expertise that has been included in the submissions? My hon. Friend is responsible and accountable for what happens. If she is not satisfied that the agency has discharged its duties carefully, with the interests of public safety paramount, I ask her to reconsider. This vital issue involves public safety and human lives, and the retention of expertise and local knowledge, as well as new technology. In the light of this debate and the mountains of expert evidence that have been submitted, I ask my hon. Friend the Minister to reconsider.

12.11 pm

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (North Essex): I congratulate the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) on her report. I hope that it is not too controversial to say that her Select Committee works very well. The Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions has received no leaks from her Committee. She runs a tight ship and this is an excellent report which pulls no punches. We have had an excellent debate, although it may be a bit churlish for the official Opposition to say that it was a good debate when not a single hon. Member, from any party, supported the Government's position.

I speak also for my hon. Friends the Members for Poole (Mr. Syms), for Gosport (Mr. Viggers) and for South Dorset (Mr. Bruce), who have spoken in previous debates on this subject, and others who share the concerns about the situation. The hon. and learned Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) mentioned the importance of local knowledge, and that is included in a recommendation in the report. He mentioned the existence of a number of Sandwicks and Sand Wicks in his constituency, and there are several Tarberts in the constituency of the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute (Mrs. Michie). The hon. and learned Gentleman rightly pointed out the importance of people in the application of local knowledge, and it is the people, mostly volunteers, who put their lives at risk when things go wrong.

The hon. Member for Cunninghame, South (Mr. Donohoe) said that he did not want to be a hypocrite, and I am sure there is no danger of that, but I am reminded of a campaign about 10 years ago with people unfurling banners in front of the House of Commons which read, "Don't sink the coastguard". The Deputy Prime Minister—the Minister for coral reefs—was at the forefront of that campaign and it is not unfair to ask him to be consistent on the issue.

The constituency of the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute contains some of the most dangerous tidal waters in the northern hemisphere, and I have personal experience of those stretches of water. She spoke of the huge increase in demand for Maritime and Coastguard Agency services and the communications black spots in that area. She asked who was in favour of the changes, which is a question that many other hon. Members posed. The hon. Members for Crosby (Mrs. Curtis-Thomas) and for

Liverpool, Riverside (Mrs. Ellman) both questioned the situation in Liverpool, and I have received similar representations. Questions were asked about the meaningfulness of the consultation exercise, by the hon. Members for Tynemouth (Mr. Campbell) and for Bootle (Mr. Benton).

There are several key questions for the Minister. Are the proposals part of a strategy to rely more heavily on volunteers from whom the state is withdrawing its commitment? Who has made representations in favour of the proposals? What is the view of the Scottish Office? It is distressing that no Scottish Office Minister is present, when we are discussing an issue of such importance to Scotland. The tradition that Ministers support each other on important issues for which they have shared responsibilities seems to have died a death under this Government.

How much money will the exercise save and is it worth it? The most important question is whether the Minister will listen and make safety her primary concern. We paid the penalty for not listening at the general election: we will listen now and ensure that safety will be the paramount concern. I urge the Minister to think again about the proposals. That is what everyone who has spoken in the debate wants to hear and, in the interests of Back Benchers whose occasion this is, I shall end my remarks so that the Minister has plenty of time to reply to the points that have been raised.

12.15 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Ms Glenda Jackson): I add my thanks to those already presented to my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody), as Chairman of the Transport Committee, for the work that she and every member of the Committee have put into the report on the Maritime and Coastguard Agency. As is usual, the Government's response to the report will be made within the next month. I congratulate the Committee, which is probably the hardest working of all the Select Committees.

The Government will respond to the report in due course, but I shall respond directly to the contributions from hon. Members on both sides of the House this morning. The hon. Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin) said that party politics should not be involved, but he then proceeded to attempt, in his short contribution, to make empty party political points. All the other contributions this morning have treated the issue with the gravitas that it warrants.

I am the daughter of a fishing family and my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister began his working life as a seaman. It is inconceivable that this Government would contemplate for 30 seconds any strategy that would increase the risks and dangers to those who live and work on the sea. No other considerations will influence our approach to the issue.

The contributions from the hon. and learned Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) and the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute (Mrs. Michie), and from my hon. Friends the Members for Cunninghame, South (Mr. Donohoe), for Crosby (Mrs. Curtis-Thomas), for Tynemouth (Mr. Campbell), for Southampton, Test (Dr. Whitehead), for Bootle (Mr. Benton) and for Liverpool, Riverside (Mrs. Ellman) have contained recurring themes. As well as justifiable constituency concerns, it has emerged from the debate that the coastguard is regarded by the entire population of this United Kingdom as a service that deserves the highest possible respect and is immensely valued. It has a special and particular place in the hearts and minds of all the people of our maritime nations. Therefore, I trust that I can, in this comparatively short contribution, put to rest some of the fears that have been expressed on both sides of the House, including the possible loss of local knowledge; the misperception that the five-year strategy is a cost-cutting exercise; the fear that the new equipment is so technologically difficult that it will be hard for coastguards to operate it; and the belief that the new equipment does not have a safe track record.

I shall deal first with whether the change is a cost-cutting exercise. That is not the case. We propose massive capital investment in the five-year strategy. The Government's clear commitment is to ensure that a search and rescue service regarded as the best in the world should maintain its primacy.

There will be a massive capital investment programme, and the £500,000 mentioned by several hon. Members relates to the savings arrived at by combining the two services into the Maritime and Coastguard Agency, and locating them in one headquarters. There has been no reduction in investment either on the coast or in the proposed strategy. The combined budget for the new Maritime and Coastguard Agency before the merger was £88.8 million; this year, it is £92.1 million, and is expected to rise.

Mr. Jenkin: Will the Minister give way?

Ms Jackson: No, I am sorry, but I have too little time.

Concerns have been expressed that the strategy will lead to a reduction in coastguard numbers. Again, that is not the case. We expect an increase in the number of coastguards by July, because the agency is taking over radio services that have until now been the responsibility of BT. That will lead to an increase of 42 new coastguards, taking the total to 600.

There has also been confusion over watch assistants. In the past, watch assistants were often volunteers, and—I mean no criticism of them—they were not necessarily reliable. Coastguard watch assistants are no longer volunteers; they are trained, they form part of the coastguard service and they are properly paid for the vital duties that they perform.

Proposed new equipment will be bench tested at Highcliffe training centre for at least two months, and the equipment will be mocked up as if it were in an operations room. It is not true that such equipment would be put into place on the stroke of midnight on a particular date. It would be installed at relevant co-ordinating centres and, only when it was clearly doing the job for which it was created, would the switch from the existing equipment take place. Obviously, all relevant coastguards will be trained. This is the third time that there has been a change of equipment, and the present equipment, which is vital for receiving and disseminating information, is coming to the end of its shelf life.

There are two central issues, and I shall deal first with the second. As several hon. Members said, during this debate not a word has been raised in support of the

[Ms Jackson]

five-year strategy, and they would be interested to know who has supported it. The report last year by the National Audit Office into civil search and rescue said:

"The number of centres could be reduced without adversely affecting search and rescue operations, and positive benefits in allowing more flexible and effective use of staff."

In response to our consultation, the Royal National Lifeboat Institution said:

"We have been fully supportive of the rationale behind the closure of the four MRSCs."

It added:

"We fully appreciate that the availability of new digital communications technology will allow a reduction in the existing number of Rescue Centres required, without affecting the radio coverage."

As time is running short, I will send a list of other supporters to the hon. Members who have spoken today.

I should spend the bulk of my time dealing with an issue that rightly concerned every hon. Member who has spoken—what they perceive to be a deleterious loss of local knowledge as a result of the proposed five-year strategy. The informed speeches that I have heard this morning lead me to believe that all Members in the Chamber are aware that each co-ordinating centre deals with a large area of coastline. They average 500 miles and they are typically responsible for many thousands of square sea miles. I visited Holyhead recently and spoke to a coastguard whose most recent rescue co-ordinating duty had been for a vessel in danger off Argentina. That gives some idea of how valuable the coastguard is, not only to vessels in immediate sight of our shores, but to those around the world.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Crosby obliquely said, it would be inconceivable for any person or team of people to retain an absolutely detailed knowledge of such lengths of coastline and areas of sea. Such knowledge is not exclusively held in the brains of the remarkable human beings who are our coastguards. Their undoubted knowledge is supplemented by computer databases and the equally valuable local knowledge of people who carry out the rescues, such as the RNLI, the helicopter services and the other emergency services. Radio direction-finding equipment is of tremendous benefit in providing a positional fix, especially for calls by radio or telephone, which are the overwhelming source of search and rescue calls to co-ordination centres.

There must be, and always will be, a programme of familiarisation wherever the coastguard centre or the co-ordination centre is sited. We are talking about a national service. Each coastguard is a member of that national service, and coastguards expect to move around the country to ensure that the ability of rescue services to protect and save life at sea is fully national.

Part and parcel of that, as my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich said, is the ability proposed in the five-year strategy for coastguards to take part in the vital work of preventing accidents. My hon. Friend mentioned the vast increase in the number of recreational craft around our shores, a point also noted by other hon. Members. Education on prevention of accidents used mostly to be concentrated around our coastline, but the coastguard must now move further inland because people pulled by the sea are going ever-greater distances in the attempt to enjoy such recreational activities both within our shores and around our coastline. Far too frequently, people engage in activities on the sea with little or no knowledge of how dangerous they can be if one is not practised or not educated in the dangers.

There will be no compulsory redundancies. We do not expect to lose any coastguards. I have mentioned the need to increase coastguard numbers when the agency takes over radio marine safety information from BT. The coastguard will deal with weather reports and navigational hazards and will give medical advice. It will be linked to hospitals in Aberdeen and Gosport, and that service will begin on 1 July.

The overriding issue is the maintenance of what is widely recognised as the best search and rescue service in the world. The overall efficiency and effectiveness of the coastguard service can be improved without compromising safety. I have given a personal commitment to ensuring that the search and rescue service retains its primacy. I have been concerned by some remarks on consultation, and should point out that we did consult, and will—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord): Order. We must now turn to the next debate.

Soccer Grounds (Northern Ireland)

12.30 pm

Mr. William Ross (East Londonderry): It is a pleasure to be able to raise this issue today. I hope that the Minister will recognise that, if some of my hon. Friends leave before he finishes speaking, it is not intended as a discourtesy to him. A past leader of our party is preaching at a service in honour of St. Patrick today, and the hon. Gentleman will no doubt appreciate that that, too, is a draw.

I welcome the opportunity to raise the issue of health and safety at Northern Ireland soccer grounds. I do so in an optimistic frame of mind, given the Minister's recognition, during last night's debate on the national stadium for Northern Ireland, that there is now a demand that the Province should have sporting facilities at least on a par with those in other regions of the United Kingdom. That matter concerns a great many people in Northern Ireland—in particular, my constituents in Coleraine, where the showgrounds were recently threatened with closure following the serving on the local football club of three health and safety improvement orders. Those orders were the inevitable consequence of the current legislation. As I am sure that the Minister will appreciate that, if council officials had not acted, they would have been held culpable in the event of a disaster, on the ground that they were not enforcing the necessary health and safety regulations.

Those orders were served last October. At the time, Coleraine football club was given six months to come up with £250,000 to pay for the necessary improvements. That was never a realistic time scale or, indeed, a realistic prospect, given the low attendance and the consequential general lack of finance in the Irish league at present. Thankfully, it appears that the club will now be given a little breathing space to sort itself out, but the problem remains and is certain to spread to other senior soccer clubs in Northern Ireland if the Government do not act soon and come up with a coherent plan and appropriate funding to create a way forward for the Irish league soccer grounds in the Province.

The Minister is well aware of the problems to which I refer. For example, he and my right hon. Friend the Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) have received several hundred postcards from ordinary fans in the Province, who have been supporting the call of the Northern Ireland Football Supporters Association for Government assistance to fund the improvement of spectator and safety facilities at all senior Irish league clubs.

I am also aware that the Minister recently met my hon. Friend the Member for South Antrim (Mr. Forsythe), together with a number of other hon. Members, to discuss many of these problems. My hon. Friend came away from that meeting encouraged by the Minister's helpful attitude. I hope that the Minister departed feeling equally contented, given that he had just been in the company of a man who, to my knowledge, is the only serving Member of Parliament to have won an Irish cup winner's medal—[HON. MEMBERS: "Oh!"] Oh, yes.

It appears that many of the problems that senior football clubs in Northern Ireland now face are a direct result of the imbalance of grant aid that they receive in comparison with their mainland counterparts. As I understand it, the principal source of funding that is currently available to Irish league clubs is the lottery sports fund, administered by the Sports Council for Northern Ireland. That initiative offers up to 50 per cent. of costs, but only up to a maximum award of £50,000 towards safety work at identified spectator venues, including Irish league grounds—but there are other calls on the funds.

According to the Sports Council for Northern Ireland, the lottery sports fund in the Province has an allocation of only £4 million available each year, and applications for that money—mainly from soccer, rugby and Gaelic Athletic Association clubs—are running in excess of £21 million. Clearly, the solution to the problems faced by Irish league clubs will not be found from that source.

In theory, the Football Trust is another potentially useful source. The reality, I fear, is another matter. The trust is empowered to fund ground improvements in both Great Britain and Northern Ireland. However, as the Football Trust money has traditionally been reserved almost exclusively for improvements demanded as a result of the Taylor report, soccer clubs from the Province have not fared well. One exception is our national football stadium, Windsor Park, which has received a reasonable amount because, I am given to understand, it is the sole soccer ground in Northern Ireland that must abide by the Taylor recommendations.

Until recently, the Football Trust also operated an improvement scheme for clubs in the Irish league, which allocated a number of grants for local projects. However, only yesterday I discovered that the trust no longer has any money available for clubs in Northern Ireland; indeed, I am informed that there appears to be no prospect of its having any money for our clubs in the foreseeable future.

I look forward to hearing from the Minister where on earth our clubs are supposed to turn for the necessary funding. We hear rumours that new legislation on the matter is being developed for consideration by the Northern Ireland Assembly. The Minister will be aware that I am somewhat pessimistic that the Assembly will ever be in a position to act on that or any other issue, given the situation that we now have at Stormont and in the Province in general. That being the case, will our local soccer clubs be left swinging in the wind, with the current state of uncertainty continuing indefinitely? I do not think that that would be allowed: owing to the safety regulations, they have to do something to correct matters.

As I explained, Coleraine football club does not appear to have much time left. The situation is made all the more serious by the fact that the Coleraine showgrounds, which belong to an agricultural society, are also home every July to the Northern Ireland Milk cup, which is the largest and most prestigious youth football tournament in Europe. That competition, which involves matches played in various parts of the Province and in the north-west generally, is a vital component of the Northern Ireland tourist industry. The Coleraine triangle is an important tourist area. In the past, the tournament has attracted to the area teams from as far afield as Brazil, Russia, China, Algeria, the United States and Australia. It is a very popular competition. That showpiece tournament also helps the Province to develop its own home-grown players and—most important, as I am sure the Minister will agree—to convey a positive image of itself across the world, even in the most difficult and trying of circumstances. If the showgrounds were to close for any reason, what would happen to the Milk cup? I am

[Mr. William Ross]

sure that the Minister will agree that the repercussions would deal a disastrous blow not only to football but to the image of the Province.

A number of other senior clubs have been watching developments in Coleraine and awaiting with trepidation their own health and safety improvement orders, and the arrival of officials on their doorstep. That is inevitable. I should explain that the Coleraine ground is not the worst football ground in Northern Ireland; it is generally recognised as one of the most finely equipped stadiums in the Irish league—even so, it is not up to standard.

A recent spate of crowd trouble at some high-profile matches in the Province has not helped the overall situation. We all deplore such activities, which do no one any good and do great damage. As well as highlighting the problems caused by the fact that segregation is needed at some grounds, those incidents put the spotlight on the stewarding of matches. Again, it appears that money is the problem.

Mr. Clifford Forsythe (South Antrim): Does my hon. Friend agree that the fact that some clubs are suggesting changes in the Irish league might cause even greater problems in future?

Mr. Ross: My hon. Friend speaks with an intimate knowledge of such matters that I do not possess. He was a professional player for many years, and we can take it for granted that his comments are an accurate reflection of the matter and that he expresses a concern that is current in Northern Ireland football circles.

In the old days, the Royal Ulster Constabulary took the leading role in stewarding Irish league matches, but stewarding is now largely the responsibility of the clubs, and that causes them difficulties. In most cases, the individuals who carry out such tasks are unpaid volunteers, but a far more professional approach is needed for the more high-profile matches and that means employing qualified stewards. Many local clubs survive on gates of barely 100, so where are they supposed to find the money for that?

I sometimes have the impression that people in Northern Ireland prefer to play football than to watch it. That is always healthy. Every young boy in the Province sees himself as a future George Best, and I hope that there are a few such players out there, because that would do us all the world of good.

Funding is obviously required to train club stewards. I am informed that Coleraine football club has pledged that all its stewards will be trained to the required standard, and we all welcome that. The Government should acknowledge such a move by giving some form of subsidy, especially bearing in mind the long-term savings to the public purse through the reduction in policing costs at such matches.

To conclude, I leave the Minister with this thought and a fair length of time in which to reply. I know that he is a keen follower of Celtic football club in Glasgow and hon. Members might be aware that that club has a link with Coleraine—[HON. MEMBERS: "Oh."] Oh, yes. That link is Bertie Peacock, who wore the Celtic shirt with such flair in the 1950s. I recall Bertie telling me that he successfully captained the club for some time. He returned to the Coleraine showgrounds where he managed Coleraine to their sole Irish league championship two decades later. Just as a man of his ability was able to return home and give of his talents, I hope that the Government will be able to give the club some of the cash necessary to upgrade its facilities.

When the Minister next visits Parkhead—which in recent years has been rebuilt at no little cost—I want him to reflect on the fact that my constituents in Coleraine want the opportunity to watch their team in similar comfort. The crowds might not be as large, but there is at least as much enthusiasm. Football fans in Northern Ireland are rightly no less passionate about their local clubs than those in other parts of the United Kingdom. They also pay their taxes, and it appears that they buy more lottery tickets and fill in more pools coupons per head than people in any other part of the United Kingdom. Surely, they, too, should be allowed to watch their teams in a safe and pleasurable environment. For the good of a sport to which the Minister has given his attention and support for many years, I sincerely hope that he will be able to give us good news—if not today, in the near future—about the upgrading of the safety facilities.

12.44 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. John McFall): I congratulate the hon. Member for East Londonderry (Mr. Ross) on securing this debate and, for the second time today from the Dispatch Box, I wish him and his right hon. and hon. Friends a very good St. Patrick's day. At the moment, I should be on my knees at the service at which Lord Molyneaux is giving the sermon. Although it might have been better for my soul if I had attended the service, there are urgent temporal matters to which we must attend.

I congratulate hon. Members who have turned up for the debate this morning. The hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Mr. Donaldson) was in the Chamber last night; his local club is the Distillery football club. The right hon. Member for Strangford (Mr. Taylor) has concerns about Ards football club. The hon. Member for East Antrim (Mr. Beggs) is concerned about Larne and Ballyclare football clubs and, I think, Carrick Rangers.

The hon. Member for South Antrim (Mr. Forsythe) was a distinguished footballer and is a personal friend of Bertie Peacock. I remember being taken to Parkhead when I was a tiny tot and seeing Bertie Peacock in his distinguished role as left-half for Celtic. He did himself and the club tremendous credit and he also did Northern Ireland great credit. I must not forget the hon. Member for Belfast, North (Mr. Walker), who is concerned with the Crusaders and Cliftonville clubs. We have a full turnout today and, if we wanted to, we could distinguish ourselves on the football ground as well as in the Chamber.

Let me turn to serious business. The hon. Member for East Londonderry is aware that I wrote to him on 4 January about issues arising from the comprehensive spending review and about safety at football grounds. I have received a number of representations from right hon. and hon. Members since then, and shall mention them later in my speech.

The Government acknowledge the important contribution made by sport to the enhancement of the quality of life of the people of Northern Ireland. As I said

in last night's Adjournment debate, the Ulster victories in rugby's European cup and the staging, in two weeks' time, of the world cross-country championships, have brought the significance of sport to the fore in Northern Ireland. I am the first to accept that we have fallen behind and that something needs to be done. In the short time for which I have an influence in such matters, I want to ensure that sport is a live item on the agenda of the Northern Ireland Assembly so that the issue can be tackled, both nationally—the national stadium is extremely important—and locally. That would be positive and good, not only for sport, but for the whole community.

As the hon. Gentleman pointed out, another key consideration is safety at sports grounds. I give an assurance that the Government are fully aware of the need to strengthen health and safety at major sports venues in Northern Ireland. Those venues extend not only to soccer, but to rugby and Gaelic sports. We are aware of the potential of more welcoming grounds to attract increased numbers of spectators and, in so doing, to contribute to the well-being of sport and its development.

I was at Ravenhill for the European rugby semi-final; the official seating figure is 2,000, but temporary seating was installed so total attendance was about 20,000. After the game, we were told that there was to be a match at Lansdowne Road in Dublin, where the capacity is about 60,000. We thought that the ground might be half full but, as right hon. and hon. Members know, on the day, not only was the ground full, but attendance could easily have been doubled. Interest in sport is tremendous and a strong aspect of that interest is that it is cross-community. During the Adjournment debate, I mentioned that I drove from Dublin airport with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. We passed endless pubs from which people were overflowing into the streets. I was only sad that I did not have time to partake of any Guinness before I reached the ground. The enthusiasm on that day was tremendous and it has had a lasting impact on Northern Ireland.

I am able to report that, in recent months, my officials and I have met a number of interested groups and individuals in Northern Ireland, including an all-party delegation, the Irish Football Association and the Irish Football League to discuss concerns. I have also met representatives of the Football Trust, which has been the main conduit for financial support for safety improvements in Great Britain following the Taylor report on the Hillsborough stadium disaster in 1989. Those meetings have been most useful and we have tried to find a way of making progress in that important area.

I am pleased to be able to provide an update on safety at sports grounds in Northern Ireland. By way of background, I should explain that, following the strengthening of safety legislation in Great Britain in the wake of the Taylor report, the need for equivalent action in Northern Ireland was considered by an inter-departmental working group chaired by the Department of Education and drawn from the health and safety inspectorate of the Department of Economic Development, the Department of the Environment, the Northern Ireland Office, the Royal Ulster Constabulary and the Sports Council for Northern Ireland. The working group's final report has made several recommendations, including the need to introduce for Northern Ireland legislation, similar to that which exists in Great Britain, covering larger venues.

The proposal for new legislation governing safety at sports grounds would affect not only 19 soccer grounds but one rugby ground and seven Gaelic football venues. A compliance cost assessment prepared as part of the report suggests that the cost of upgrading safety standards at Northern Ireland sports grounds in line with Great Britain would be about £20 million. The report envisaged an improvement programme phased over several years, which is again similar to the approach taken in England. It also envisaged that clubs would be required to contribute some 25 per cent. of the cost, but recognised that other funding, perhaps through the Football Trust, would be required.

The hon. Member for East Londonderry mentioned Coleraine football club in his constituency and the fact that it is facing closure. It is clearly important to keep such venues open. The short-term solution involves the Sports Council for Northern Ireland and the long-term solution involves the Football Trust, legislation and the Assembly. However, we do not need legislation to move on that problem initially. I hope that it will reassure hon. Members when I say that we are actively discussing the matter with the Football Trust.

Let me comment on Coleraine football club, to which the hon. Gentleman referred specifically. Local health and safety officers inspected the showgrounds, the home of the club, last year. Media reports suggested that £250,000 would be needed to put the ground in order and mentioned the threat of closure. We understand that, unofficially, the cost is likely to be less than £250,000. However, the club has not approached the Sports Council—which can provide limited help in the short term—for assistance. I suggest that the hon. Gentleman urges Coleraine to explore every funding avenue, including the Sports Council.

Although my ministerial colleagues and I have signed up, in principle, to the recommendations in the report, I emphasise that it will be for the new Northern Ireland Assembly to decide how matters should proceed. I realise that that presents uncertainties, which include the Assembly's acceptance of the proposals and the time scale within the Assembly's legislative programme for introducing any new legislation to strengthen safety requirements.

It is worth noting at this point that individual clubs have an obligation to meet the requirements of existing general health and safety legislation. The Sports Council for Northern Ireland makes available modest grants from the sports lottery fund for health and safety improvements at sports grounds. Although that is a useful contribution, Northern Ireland's share of the sports lottery fund is not sufficiently large to cope with the capital requirements needed to deal with the problem of safety at sports grounds. The Sports Council has begun a safety awareness and education programme involving the major spectator sports. That work is very important as a means of promoting a health and safety culture and encouraging club managers to face up to their obligations.

My overarching concern is that further progress should be made towards ensuring the safety and comfort of those who attend sporting events in Northern Ireland. Progress towards that end will encourage family support, and ultimately help clubs embed themselves more firmly in their local communities. We must remember the community as well as the sporting element. It is important to encourage the fertilisation of communities and

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eliminate the cross-community divide in the long term. Health and safety improvements at sporting grounds should accompany the implementation of the Belfast agreement so that we secure a new future for Northern Ireland. Sport should take its proper place in Northern Ireland's cultural life.

In light of safety concerns, we have been considering options for moving forward, which include the need to secure funds to support safety improvement costs. We believe that there is scope to fund a programme of safety work under existing legislation that could potentially provide an interim solution in advance of any enactment of new legislation for Northern Ireland. To help progress the development of an interim scheme, the Sports Council has commissioned a health and safety officer from Belfast city council to undertake a feasibility study, which will include a priority needs analysis. That exercise will provide a basis for establishing which grounds have the most pressing need, but it recognises that wide consultation will be required before final conclusions are reached.

As I said earlier, I recently met the chief executive of the Football Trust and its chairman, my hon. Friend the Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (Mr. Pendry).

Mr. William Ross: The Minister is well aware of the closure threat to grounds that do not conform to the necessary health and safety regulations within a short time. Is there some way of extending that period to give clubs time to meet those safety requirements?

Mr. McFall: I am sure the hon. Gentleman agrees that all health and safety problems will not be solved overnight, but the Government are extremely sympathetic when it comes to ensuring that football grounds remain open. I cannot give any commitments from the Dispatch Box, because that is a matter for health and safety officers. However, the Government will make every effort in that regard.

If we marry the short-term solutions that are available through the Sports Council and other areas with the longer-term element—the Government could talk to the Football Trust, legislation might be enacted and lottery funding awarded—progress might be achieved. We recognise that it would be folly to allow football grounds to close, because it would be difficult to generate support for the game again. We must foster the good will that exists in Northern Ireland soccer, and the Government will do everything possible to ensure that football grounds do not close. There is no automatic cut-off date, and the Government and communities will expend much effort considering that question.

As the hon. Gentleman knows, previous attempts to secure some of the Football Trust budget for improving sports grounds in Northern Ireland have received a sympathetic, but negative, response. That is not good enough. In my meeting with my hon. Friend the Member for Stalybridge and Hyde and the chief executive of the Football Trust, I pointed out that Northern Ireland had been left out in the past and that it was now time to act. The Government and the Football Trust were very pleased with the meeting, which we viewed as a seminal event. It was previously believed that legislation was required and that the Assembly had to be up and running before any action could be taken. Some people are optimistic about what legislation will achieve—I know that the hon. Member for East Londonderry takes a pessimistic view. However, whether optimistic or pessimistic, all want to see early action. As a result of my meeting with the Football Trust, I can confirm that action will be taken soon that may be carried through to the Assembly.

I am delighted that the trust is now keen and willing, in principle, to support and become involved in an interim scheme for Northern Ireland. As I have said, the scheme includes soccer, the Gaelic Athletic Association and rugby grounds. An important element is that the Football Trust is looking for—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord): Order. We now come to the next debate.

Suburban Areas

1 pm

Mr. John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington): The overriding aim of this debate is to secure from the Government a recognition of the problems associated with the economic, social and environmental decline of many suburban areas and to suggest a way in which to develop a policy programme targeted at those communities. Straightforwardly, it is an unashamed attempt to influence the drafting of the White Paper on the future of urban policy, which is promised for publication later this year. I hope that that will provide an opportunity for a fundamental reappraisal of the urban agenda of central and local government.

The debate on our suburban areas has been a long while coming. Understandably, discussion of urban policy in Britain has concentrated on the dereliction and decline of our inner-city areas and the terrible social consequences for many of their residents. Any discussion of suburban areas has largely focused on their role in the relocation of inner-city populations and as dormitory towns for commuters serving the central urban core.

In the 1980s in London, however, attempts were made to broaden the debate when the Greater London council launched its community areas programme. That acknowledged that significant pockets of deprivation had grown up in suburban areas and required the special attention of central and local government. The programme allocated additional resources and enhanced policy-making powers to those communities so that local organisations throughout the public, private and voluntary sectors could work together to regenerate their areas. The abolition of the GLC by the previous Government halted the community areas programme and contributed to hindering the development of discussion of policies for suburban communities, certainly in London and possibly nationally, for nearly a decade.

By contrast, internationally, there have been several major studies of the problems of suburban areas which have stimulated a healthy debate leading to specifically designed policy initiatives. In this country, the problems and challenges of suburban areas have, in recent months, been placed back on the agenda through a combination of initiatives.

The first was this Government's recognition that several large suburban estates with high levels of unemployment, poverty, alienation and crime demand their urgent attention. The social exclusion unit, set up by the Prime Minister within No. 10, has established policy action teams to launch a strategy for neighbourhood renewal targeted at those estates. Useful lessons will be learned from that initiative, which I welcome. Nevertheless, its remit is geographically limited and although it is often targeted at sizeable estates, it is not envisaged that it will encompass a whole suburb or town or strategically cover a town centre, estates, mixed ownership housing areas and industrial estates.

The second development that highlighted suburban regeneration was the publication in February of the Joseph Rowntree Trust report "Sustainable Renewal of Suburban Areas". The report provides a valuable stimulus to the suburban debate. It confirmed that few recent studies of the suburbs have been undertaken in Britain, in contrast to international analyses. It identified the fact that some suburbs show signs of stress, with deteriorating community facilities, declining local centres, car domination and monotone housing which does not reflect population and social change and has undermined community spirit.

The report drew up a checklist of sustainability criteria and described how some suburbs were becoming less sustainable than when they were first built. In the researchers' judgment, there was a good case for careful intervention in some suburbs by working with the local communities to try to improve facilities and transport patterns and to adapt the housing stock. The researchers argued that there was a need for an urban renaissance and for the contribution of the suburbs to be recognised and fully explored.

The study identified four themes that were regularly identified where scope for early action clearly existed—transport integration and the need to reshape local centres, improve community facilities and renew housing. In a range of recommendations, the report suggested that the Government could pilot community-based programmes in a number of suburban areas and consider how we could tackle the specific problems of suburban communities.

I welcome the fact that the coincidence of Government concerns about the deterioration of the quality of life on suburban estates and the publication of the Rowntree report has contributed to broadening the urban debate. Both initiatives reflect the experience, analysis of problems and emerging policy programme that are evident within my constituency. My area is a typical example of the suburban areas that are under stress, as highlighted in the Rowntree report, and is open to the same policy solutions recommended in it.

After the general election in May 1997, a common theme emerged from my discussions with community groups, employers and residents. People were angry about the state of our town and how it had been allowed to deteriorate. They were angry about issues ranging from the litter in our streets, the running down of our parks, the decline of our town centre and the level of crime to the standards in our schools. They were also worried for the future, especially about the prospects for our children. People were becoming increasingly frustrated that there was nobody to listen to their concerns and that, when they expressed their worries or complained to many official bodies, they appeared to be ignored.

As a result of those discussions, I felt that we could not continue to stand back and let our town decline into a suburban slum. I took the view that we must and could take action to turn that situation around. For that reason, I convened a community conference at our local theatre, to which I invited representatives from as many community organisations, firms and public bodies as I could identify—roughly about 2,500. The aim of the conference was to discuss the future of Hayes and Harlington. For each problem that our community faced, I was determined that we would identify a solution.

All who attended the conference were surprised at the large number of representatives—450—who came and actively participated. The conference was not only well attended, but genuinely representative of all sectors of our community and overwhelmingly positive. It examined the main issues that confronted our community. Our analysis described the long-term spiral of economic, social and environmental decline that had afflicted our area.

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We produced evidence of the lack of stable investment in our public services under the previous Government and the policy mistakes and neglect that we had experienced at the hands of local and national decision makers.

The result of that neglect was a town with a weakened sense of community, an incoherent structure of community leadership and a lack of any sense of direction or vision. In summary, if we were a school, we would be classed as failing. We had a failing town on our hands. On the positive side, however, we acknowledged that, in the past two decades, we had survived three recessions and that, with a change of Government, we now faced a period of planned, stable investment over the next five years. In addition, the public agencies pledged to concentrate anew on Hayes and Harlington.

The community conference had awakened a new sense of community activity. We concluded that it could stimulate a new structure to give Hayes and Harlington a new start, laying new foundations for a prosperous and successful town in which we could all enjoy living and of which we could all be proud to be a part.

At that conference, subsequent conferences and what we described as brainstorming sessions, we agreed that a succinct and readable prospectus should be drawn up describing the vision for the future of our town and setting out a series of recommendations for action aimed at securing that objective. The aim was not only to describe a way forward for our community, but to agree a programme of action that we could all sign up to and implement over the coming decade.

In 1998, a further community conference was convened to launch the prospectus for consultation. The prospectus tried to address the main concerns within the community and set out the policies and ideas designed to tackle those issues and to give our town a future. It was circulated to local community groups, companies and public bodies for their comments and advice. Numerous local organisations across the public, private and community sectors signed up to support in whatever way they could the achievement of that vision for the future of our community.

Last month, I led a delegation of the chief executives of local bodies, including the chamber of trade, the police, the health authority and the local authority, to present the prospectus to No. 10, and met the head of the Prime Minister's policy unit to discuss the development of suburban policy making.

The prospectus examines the economic, social and environmental problems facing our community and sets out our solutions. A key factor in our decline has been the restructuring of our local economy. Recent structural changes in the economy have led to major losses of traditional sources of employment. There have been significant reductions in employment in, for example, the defence industry and its subsidiaries. There has been intense downsizing in the manufacturing sector. Although there has been growth in the number of jobs at Heathrow airport, even in recent years there have been significant lay-offs at airport-related firms. Those structural changes have produced a black-eye effect around Heathrow, which depicts Heathrow as a centre of heightened economic activity, which is surrounded—especially to the north and east—by an outer ring of relative deprivation. Structural changes and rapid technological advances are forecast to continue and the future of Hayes and Harlington may ultimately depend on how we can respond and adapt to such changes.

Hayes town centre has suffered particularly from the consequences of economic decline and a reduction in residents' spending power over the past two decades. The development of out-of-town retail parks and supermarkets, which was given permission to go ahead by the previous Government, has had a severe detrimental effect on the town. Those developments have drawn people away from the town centre in large numbers. Our task now is to develop the town in a way to enable it to survive alongside the out-of-town parks.

We believe that, if the regeneration of our town is to be successful, we need to bring together a new structure and co-ordinate new initiatives that build on the current successes and avoid present failures. A central aim, therefore, is to build on existing partnerships, notably our single regeneration budget partnership, and those with the Hillingdon chamber of commerce and the West London training and enterprise council, to launch a new economic development forum to promote the growth of economic prosperity in our area. The forum would promote and support initiatives to tackle three key drivers of local economic regeneration. These are business development and competitiveness, developing our skills base and improving the environment and infrastructure to attract inward investment.

Education is seen throughout the community as a key ingredient for the future success of our local economy and for improving the life chances of local people of all ages. We have identified the central questions to be addressed if we are to provide a high-quality education service in Hayes and Harlington. They include the supply of pre-school, school and college places. That has been greatly aided by new Government initiatives. A new school is being built in Hayes and Harlington, as is a new extension to our local TEC college and the first Sikh college in the country.

We have also identified the need to raise standards of attainment at local schools and to retain high-calibre staff, teachers and governors. We have a broad range of very high-quality, committed head teachers and teachers, and we need to retain them within the area. We need more support for parents and pupils out of school. We agree that we need to strengthen local partnerships between schools and business. We need also to develop facilities for lifelong learning. Again, that is greatly assisted by current Government policy.

As local people gain the skills to enter and progress within the local jobs market, it is crucial that we retain them as residents within the area. Too often, an increase in income in Hayes and Harlington has resulted in families moving away. Those residents move away to secure a safer, cleaner and healthier environment in which to raise their families. Our aim, therefore, must be to transform the quality of our local environment so that they remain within the area.

One of the issues is crime. To make our community safer, the community, the council and the police are already working together to tackle crime in Hayes. Consultation on our new community safety plan for the area has recently been completed. The plan highlights the role of partnership between the police, the community via a local sector working group and neighbourhood watch

schemes in enhancing safety and tackling issues such as security by design, including street lighting and the use of closed-circuit television; anti-social behaviour and disorder; youth offending; racial harassment and domestic violence; and, unfortunately, drug and alcohol abuse.

We aim to promote a healthier environment and life style in our community, and our prospectus has kick-started action on a number of issues, including plans and consultation to establish a new community hospital in Hayes after the closure and sell-off, under the previous Government, of our two community hospitals. We want to improve the facilities for doctors' surgeries in Hayes and Harlington. We already have two new health centres on the stocks. We want to promote healthy living and increased awareness of conditions that, unfortunately, are increasing in prevalence within the area, such as diabetes and asthma. We want to address the environmental issues that affect health locally—for example, pollution and asthma.

One of the hardest challenges for us is how we can restore the quality of our green environment. Local residents can chart the transformation of Hayes from an industrious town surrounded by villages separated by open fields and market gardens into an urban sprawl. Its open fields were used for gravel pits and rubbish dumps, and its Edwardian parks, gardens and municipal buildings were allowed to fall into dereliction, particularly over the past 20 years.

This historical decline is reflected in the number of key environmental issues that have become self-evident concerns for local residents. These include—they reflect many urban areas such as Hayes and Harlington—street cleanliness and the quality of our built environment, the loss and dereliction of our open spaces and parks and their inaccessibility for social and cultural activity, the protection of local wildlife, air pollution arising from the confluence of the airport and the M4 and M25 motorways and the heavily congested local road network, the lack of adequate recycling facilities and a strategy for minimising and recycling waste.

It has become clear that there is a need for a comprehensive programme to include the quality of the environment in which we live. That is reflected in many suburban areas. That should start with some basic improvements in local environmental services and facilities, leading on to long-term and more ambitious environmental regeneration projects.

Key components of our environmental programme are, first, providing good-quality affordable homes by new build and refurbishment and experimentation in the provision of homes by, for example, converting offices and derelict shops; secondly, enhancing our street environment by tackling litter and fly-tipping and involving residents in the assessment of their own street, architecturally and environmentally, as well as involving them in discussions about improvements; thirdly, reclaiming our parks and open spaces from dereliction and vandalism; fourthly, creating a biodiversity plan for the area, protecting our local wildlife; and, fifthly, implementing a sustainable transport and energy plan which is aimed at reducing air pollution.

The community conference process has identified a weakened sense of community within Hayes and Harlington as one of the key issues to be addressed. There is a general perception that, over recent years, there has been a decline in the organisation of and participation in community and cultural activities. This has led to feelings of isolation and exclusion and a breakdown in many of the networks of support which traditionally existed in our area. The problems that community organisations face in our community include a lack of volunteers, especially people who will take on a leadership role, a lack of resources, a lack of a comprehensive network between groups and a lack of acknowledgement of their valuable contribution to the community.

Although there is a wide range of local community organisations, there is an obvious need to strengthen their ability to act more effectively in serving their communities of interest. There is a need also to ensure that the community organisations in our area come together regularly and are linked to the networks of support in the rest of the borough. This is all about capacity building within our community, and it needs assistance. In particular, it needs assistance through fundraising and the provision of the professional resources to ensure that grant applications are successful.

I am proud that my community, in which I live and which I represent, has risen to the challenge of renewal. Suburban areas are located at the geographical periphery of urban areas, but, for too long, we have been on the periphery of the political agenda. Too often, the image of leafy suburbs has hidden the real deprivation that many suburban areas experience. However, we can succeed in tackling this problem only if the Government go further in recognising the needs of suburban areas such as mine in the development of their urban policy, and especially in the development and drafting of the future White Paper. My community needs that little extra governmental attention and resources to fulfil the promise of our community prospectus. The investment of energy and resources now in suburban areas under stress will halt their decline into inner-city squalor.

I hope that my contribution has given my hon. Friend the Minister some food for thought as he and his colleagues finalise the drafting of the White Paper. I end by inviting my hon. Friend to visit my constituency to see our renewal programme in action and to ascertain what further could be achieved with his assistance.

1.18 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Mr. Alan Meale): First, I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington (Mr. McDonnell) on securing this debate on what we in the Government feel is a very important subject. He has drawn attention to just one part of the work that interests us in undertaking the various tasks that we have set ourselves in terms of economic generation.

I pay tribute to my hon. Friend. It is typical of him that, yet again, he is busily at work representing his constituents in a macro-economic approach. His history in the movement in that direction, in everything from being a member of the Greater London council, being a leading figure in local government, particularly in London, and to working in trade unions, has shown him to be someone who is a good soldier in fighting for those whom he represents.

The work carried out by my hon. Friend and the local community in preparing the Hayes and Harlington prospectus makes a valuable contribution. Many new

[Mr. Alan Meale]

Members should follow his example and try to produce similar reports outlining the economic needs of their areas.

It is right that, from time to time, we should focus on the suburbs. Too often, they are taken for granted. The media often focus on the needs of rural areas, and rightly so, as many topics affecting them need to be discussed. Equally, the issues affecting inner-city areas are often examined, but little attention is paid to the suburbs. Perhaps that is because they are seen, by and large, as pretty ordinary places.

As my hon. Friend commented, the debate on suburban regeneration has been a long time coming. The suburbs are, of course, home to the majority of Britain's urban population. Those who live in the suburbs know that issues affecting the future of their neighbourhoods are well worth considering. I congratulate the Civic Trust and the Rowntree Trust on identifying the need for research on the topic, and on giving us a fine report to stimulate debate, such as our debate today.

It is odd that the word "suburban" is sometimes used in a derogatory manner, especially by people seeking funds for such areas. To many people, the word—wrongly, in my opinion—conjures up an image of rows of semi-detached houses occupied by families keeping themselves to themselves, with a neat lawn and a car in the drive, although such people commute daily to work. The image is respectable, domestic and perhaps rather boring, compared with the vitality of many city centres, or the natural beauty of our rural areas.

The reality is often quite different, as my hon. Friend knows. The suburb is perhaps a peculiarly British development. Few continental cities have suburbs, whereas many of our towns and cities have developed highly successful suburbs over the years. At one time, areas such as Chelsea and Brixton were suburbs of London, but much has changed since then. With the movement of the population to the cities and the growth of public transport, new suburbs were created. The Civic Trust report describes the various categories.

Some suburbs were viable and remain so. Bedford Park in west London, for example, is still an architectural gem. In other cities, there were planned suburbs, such as Bourneville in Birmingham. Those "leafy" suburbs offered the growing urban classes a better quality of life than was available in the inner cities. The original objective of the Barbican centre was to create a new inner-London suburb. The suburbs met the urban population's need for accommodation in a broadly sustainable way.

More recently, there have been some less successful examples. As cities expanded outwards into urban sprawl, we created low-density homogenous suburbs which lacked the distinctiveness and character of earlier suburbs. The newer suburbs tend to be dependent on the car, which makes them less sustainable in terms of transport, social mix and the amount of land that they use.

The report by the Civic Trust and Ove Arup and Partners focuses on different types of suburb and includes some useful case studies based on particular cities. The authors give a timely warning that there is evidence that some suburbs are becoming less stable and sustainable with respect to their local economies, social structures and environment, as my hon. Friend pointed out.

The report draws attention to deteriorating community facilities such as community centres and green spaces, declining shopping centres and parades, public transport that is not adapting to changing needs, and large areas of ageing houses of a single type. Such problems may not be as stark as those in the more deprived inner cities, where there are multiple causes of deprivation and social exclusion, but the authors argue that a stitch in time may prevent the problems from becoming more serious and leading to rapid decline.

The authors of the report make various recommendations directed at government, local authorities and other agencies. They highlight the need to encourage and assist suburbs to adapt to the future. They rule out large-scale restructuring of suburban areas, and suggest that smaller-scale changes over time could improve the quality of suburban life and foster community involvement and civic pride, while contributing to a sustainable urban renaissance.

I am pleased that the report places a high premium on community involvement, as it is recognised in all parts of the House that change that does not have the support of the community will not be sustainable.

The report is timely. As the House knows, the Government will issue White Papers on urban and rural policies later this year. The urban policy White Paper will look at towns and cities, including suburbs, and will suggest how we can help them to become vibrant and prosperous, offering a good quality of life to those who live and work in them.

As my hon. Friend mentioned, Lord Rogers is leading a task force established by my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister to examine the future of urban areas. It was born out of the need to make sure that we make the best use of previously developed land in meeting the demand for new housing, so that the pressure on green-field sites will be reduced. However, Lord Rogers and his team will consider all the factors affecting the development of urban areas, and will report in the summer.

The social exclusion unit is studying related issues, including neighbourhood management. Some aspects of the Rowntree report will be relevant. Today's debate will become part of the consultation exercise. The unit will produce a strategy for neighbourhood management next year.

My hon. Friend spoke about the economic problems faced by suburban areas. The key to resolving them must be to create national conditions that provide a climate for our towns and cities to prosper. We must promote national economic performance and sustainability, and maintain a stable macro-economic climate with support for enterprise, skills and work initiatives, which will be essential to improve the quality of life in all parts of the country.

That agenda will be driven forward by the recent Budget announced by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer, and the work that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry has put in train following his competitiveness White Paper. The Government's aim is to provide employment opportunities for all. We are encouraging economic growth, and we are committed to ensuring that everyone has the chance to share in the benefits. My hon. Friend pointed out that, after the election, the Government

wasted no time in introducing the new deal initiative to get people back into work. So far, more than 350,000 people have participated, and 70,000 have found jobs. That is real progress.

I know that we are running out of time, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I assure my hon. Friend that I will accept his invitation to visit his constituency shortly.

Water Charges

1.30 pm

Mr. Colin Breed (South-East Cornwall): I am delighted to have secured the debate, in which I shall raise the issue of regulating water charges. The debate is timely for many of my constituents whose bills, which are already the highest in the country, have risen by an additional 10 per cent. They have written to me expressing their anger and, in some cases, their worry.

It is 10 years since the previous Government privatised the water utilities. There have been undreamed of riches for very few and benefits for many, but some—particularly those water charge payers in the south-west—have had to pay thousands of pounds more than owners of comparable homes in other parts of the country, which is demonstrably unfair.

The House of Commons Library has produced figures showing that the average annual household bill has increased by well over 100 per cent. since the industry was privatised in 1989, but water bills in the south-west have risen by 142 per cent., which is 76 per cent. in real terms. The average annual water and sewerage bill for customers in the south-west is £354, which is well above the national average of £242.

No wonder people in the south-west are angry and frustrated. The south-west includes some of the poorest areas in Europe, something that the Government have clearly recognised in their endorsement of Cornwall's objective 1 bid. Wages are low and unemployment is high. The region is home to far more elderly pensioners than most other regions. Pensioners who have to rely on a meagre state pension are paying roughly 10 per cent. of their income in water and sewerage bills. All those people clearly fall into the Government's classification of vulnerable groups, but they are paying the highest water and sewerage bills in the country.

Customers in my constituency and across the south-west region have the additional burden of paying for the coastal clean-up.

Mr. Andrew George (St. Ives): Does my hon. Friend agree that not only are high charges being made against those on the lowest incomes in the United Kingdom, but, in Cornwall, about 1 per cent. of the nation's population has to pay for 20 per cent. of the coastal clean-up?

Mr. Breed: My hon. Friend is quite right. A relatively small number of people in a poor area have to pay for cleaning up the bathing waters off a large part of the national coastline, but we were told that we need not worry about that because the revenue that would be generated from the tourists who would come to the area because of our clean beaches would offset those costs. For an area with one of the lowest gross domestic products in Europe, let alone the country, that argument does not—forgive me for this—hold water.

The background to the differential in water companies' charges was evident even before privatisation. Geographical factors and other specific characteristics make the area different from other parts of the country, but privatisation—and, perhaps more particularly, the way in which the industry was privatised—has widened that gap over the past 10 years. Neither the Government nor the regulator has clearly addressed the inequity of the position of people living in the south-west.

[Mr. Breed]

In 1989, when privatisation of the water industry was introduced, the then Conservative Government approved a 10-year plan by South West Water to clean up the coastline. That plan was costed at roughly 5 per cent. above inflation—the so-called K factor—but, 18 months later, the Government had a rethink. The then Secretary of State for the Environment, Chris Patten, decided to concede to European pressure to clean up our bathing waters more quickly. That meant that the 10-year clean-up plan was squeezed into a five-year funding plan, which worked out at 11.5 per cent. above inflation—more than twice the original K factor. That was a good idea at the time, but the then Government's ill-thought-out decision has had enormous repercussions for us 10 years later.

Ms Candy Atherton (Falmouth and Camborne): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Breed: I have only a few moments, so I shall carry on with my speech and then give the Minister an opportunity to reply.

That idea was good at the time, but the then Government's decision was ill thought out, as it has cost customers in the south-west rather dear. It is certainly costing us dearly today.

The latest increase in South West Water bills has grossly affected non-metered customers. Bills for the majority of them have risen well above the 4 per cent. agreed by the regulator. Most customers have meters installed for one reason, and one reason only—they think that they will save money. Not surprisingly, the revenue obtained by South West Water is reducing as more and more people take to meters. To address that shortfall, bills have had to rise. The burden has fallen, harshly, on to customers who are not on meters. Many of them are single-parent families or pensioners and they face huge increases on what were already unacceptably high bills.

In opposition, the Labour party vociferously opposed what is effectively compulsory metering. Less than three years ago, in a debate on water metering, the Secretary of State for Health, who was then shadow environment spokesman, said:

> "The regulator has rigged the water price formula, beginning with the startling decision that the cost of installing meters should not fall upon the customers who get the meters but upon those who do not have meters. He also came to the extraordinary conclusion that the fixed cost element of the charge to unmetered customers should be higher than that for metered customers."—[*Official Report*, 9 July 1996; Vol. 281, c. 192.]

In that same debate, he noted that it was "unacceptable" for the Government to pretend that the regulator had nothing to do with the Government.

It is estimated that installing a domestic water meter costs water companies between £250 and £300. As more and more people adopt water meters—particularly when they will be available free of charge soon—can we seriously believe that the industry can or will foot that bill? No, I suggest; the simple fact is that that would result in even higher charges.

After 10 years, it is surely time for a wholesale review of the regulatory system. The water industry faces a period of immense change, with the periodic price review occupying the time of the regulator and the Water Industry Bill making its way through Parliament. In opposition, the Government rightly berated the Tories' performance over water; now, with the added benefit of 10 years' experience, they have an opportunity to put things right.

November 1999 will be a telling time. We will finally see the results of the much-heralded price review. I understand that the Office of Water Services anticipates a one-off reduction of 15 to 20 per cent. on bills. Such a reduction, which would be welcome, would ensure that bills fell well below the 1999-2000 rate—providing that prices do not rise relentlessly after that initial reduction. However, I am sceptical about whether the industry can deliver that much-needed price stability and implement a substantial permanent reduction to ensure that bills are lowered to about the national average for the long-suffering water charge payers in the south-west.

The regulator has expressed uncertainty about the definition of environmental obligations and the costs associated with those future improvements on which Ministers are insisting. From 2000 to 2005, the industry will be expected to deliver an ambitious package of improvements, although the costs have yet to be assessed in relation to how they will be distributed across the various water companies.

Although we are told that the increase in water bills is likely to be relatively small between 2001 and 2004, sewerage bills are clearly likely to increase significantly—yet again, consumers in coastal areas such as the south-west will be hit.

It is now clear that a framework that will ensure fair, affordable and stable prices is essential. We need firm long-term strategies, implemented by the companies and monitored by the regulator, that provide incentives for efficiency so that customers benefit from a stable pricing structure.

The current regime is based on asset management plans over a 15-year period, while the pricing formula is set for only five years. Companies tend to undertake expenditure towards the end of the pricing period, because they must go through a planning system and deliver improvements by the end of the period. That creates an unbalanced budget, which hampers the long-term investment plans.

The implementation of water directives requiring additional tertiary treatment is a welcome and necessary step, but the effect of those directives has hit the south-west particularly hard. South West Water has been investing heavily in sewage treatment projects to meet the requirements of the urban waste water treatment directive. Those improvements and the way in which customers are charged fall directly in line with the regulator's pricing principle.

A customer's bill should reflect the cost of supplying clean water, disposing of dirty water and draining surface water from the property and the highways, but it should not be significantly higher than the bills of comparable customers elsewhere in the country. Water is a national resource and our coastal waters are national assets. A longer-term view of investment and pricing plans by the regulator, combined with interim reports on progress, would benefit the industry, ensure that companies were carrying out necessary environmental improvements and bring an end to the constant fluctuation in prices.

Customers do not want one-off price cuts if those are then followed by even sharper price increases. In the absence of true commercial competition, which I suspect

is a long way off even now, a long-term strategy is the only way to prevent that from happening. The Water Bill offers an opportunity to rectify, within the regulatory system, some of those deficiencies, which have led to unfair bills which often hit the poorest in society.

Although the Bill recognises that there are vulnerable groups, it has failed to replace as a basis for charging the archaic rateable value system, which causes some of those inequities. Indeed, the Bill extends the use of rateable values, many of which are over 30 years old. Both the regulator and the industry representative, Water UK, would like at least a time limit on the use of rateable values as a basis for charging while other methods are properly evaluated.

Some 18 months ago, I introduced a 10-minute Bill advocating the replacement of rateable values with charges based on council tax banding. Metering would continue on a voluntary basis. The introduction of such a system would have many benefits: it would be relatively cheap, easy to administer, easily understandable and, if properly implemented, would broadly reflect the use of water. It would include the ability to give single households discounts and low-income households rebates. Water companies such as Wessex Water have already suggested trialing the council tax banding system as a method of charging. It would certainly provide easier identification of the vulnerable groups whom we all want to support.

Water has long been a politically sensitive issue in the south-west. Customers are simply fed up with having to pay bills that are far higher than the national average. The Conservative Administration's decision to privatise the water industry has resulted, in the south-west, in a relentless increase in bills. I hope that the Minister has some words of encouragement for my constituents and for people throughout the country. We want an end to the boom-bust situation where water companies boom and customers go bust, and rebates given one year are taken away the next.

I hope that the Minister recognises the need to implement a new regulatory framework, which will provide long-term strategies for the companies, environmental improvements for the country and a stable, fair and cost-effective charging system for all water customers.

1.44 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Mr. Alan Meale): I am grateful to the hon. Member for South-East Cornwall (Mr. Breed) for raising the subject of water charges on behalf of his constituents. Hon. Members on both sides of the House sympathise with some of the points that he has raised. I welcome the opportunity to set the record straight on the past, the present and the future of water charges in the south-west.

Let me say at once that I entirely agree that, in recent years, water customers everywhere have had a lot to put up with. Customers have seen not only soaring prices, but an industry that sometimes seemed more concerned with the welfare of its shareholders and directors than with its customers.

That is why, within three weeks of coming into office, the new Labour Government held a water summit to start fighting on behalf of the customer for a better deal over water. My right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister launched a 10-point action plan to help secure reliable, efficient and environmentally sustainable water supplies in the long term.

We are pleased that the water industry has responded positively to our proposals. We are now starting to achieve our aim of giving this country a world-class, water-efficient, and environmentally sustainable water industry. Significant progress has been made since the water summit, but we accept that there is no room for complacency. To take one key example, leakage targets were introduced following the water summit. Those targets will have reduced leakage by a quarter in just three years, but water companies' performance has been mixed and under-performing companies have been told that they will continue to be pressed hard to catch up.

We have informed all water companies that progress with leakage and water conservation must continue. However, overwhelmingly, the most important issue for water customers is still the level of prices. As the hon. Gentleman pointed out, since privatisation in 1989, average household water bills nationally have increased by 36 per cent. and average household sewerage bills by 42 per cent. Those are real-terms increases after allowing for inflation. In nominal terms, household water and sewerage bills have roughly doubled.

Ms Atherton: Does my hon. Friend agree that many of my constituents and those of colleagues across the region face a real problem in dealing with South West Water because they face huge bills as well as problems with interim schemes to deal with sewage? I am thinking particularly of the Falmouth sewerage scheme, which may directly threaten the existence of a very old oyster fishery. I have written to the Minister and met his colleagues on a number of occasions about this. It is unacceptable that South West Water has introduced schemes that may have such an environmental effect, at the same time as having the highest charges in the country.

Mr. Meale: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention. I congratulate her on the long campaign that she has led in that regard. Like her, I have great sympathy with the people who have had to put up with those problems. I have agreed with her suggestion to visit the area to see for myself the problems that have been caused. She rightly points out, as did the hon. Gentleman, that South West Water must act a little differently than it has acted recently in the interests of its customers.

The Government are determined that that rate of increase must not continue, and that determination is shared by the regulator, the Director General of Water Services, Mr. Ian Byatt. Companies are still working under the price limits set in 1994, but new price limits will apply from April 2000. The director general is concluding his periodic review of prices. In July, we expect him to announce draft limits to apply for 2000–05. Final price limits will be announced later in the year, following further consultation.

The Government have made it clear that we can provide for an ambitious environmental programme: improving our beaches and rivers, making further improvements to our drinking water quality and protecting our precious nature conservation sites. For example, in the south-west, there will be a scheme to protect the internationally

[Mr. Meale]

important River Camel. The Government believe that such a programme should still leave scope for substantial cuts in average water bills in April 2000. That is wholly in line with the Government's manifesto commitment.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): As the Minister refers specifically to the River Camel, which is in my constituency, may I put a point to him? Does he recognise that, when he and I were on the Opposition Benches, we were united in our concern that the way in which the regulator was operating, and the terms under which the then Government had imposed privatisation, were penalising certain parts of the country? Will he give an assurance that, when the Government examine the way in which the new regulatory system is introduced, the comments by the right hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) in the debate to which my hon. Friend the Member for South-East Cornwall (Mr. Breed) referred will be taken into account? Otherwise, people in the south-west and many other regions will suspect that, in terms of the impact on bills in a low-income area, there is not much change from what happened under the previous Government.

Mr. Meale: I thank the hon. Gentleman. I seem to be congratulating many hon. Members, but it is true that he has raised the issue on many occasions. He is right to say that my right hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) gave a view at that time. I have no doubt that, in the consultation, due regard will be paid to pronouncements that have been made by politicians on both sides of the House.

As I have said, the Government believe that such a programme should still leave scope for substantial cuts in the average water bill in April 2000. That is wholly in line with the Government's manifesto commitment to pursue tough and efficient regulation in the interests of the consumer and the environment.

On 1 March, Ministers announced the detailed company programmes to deliver our national objectives. In its investment programme, South West Water will be required by 2005 to complete improvements to more than 2,000 km of distribution system, to improve 309 unsatisfactory combined sewer outflows and to introduce full treatment of the vast majority of sewage discharges and high-level treatment of all company discharges to bathing and—this is of particular interest to my hon. Friend the Member for Falmouth and Camborne (Ms Atherton)—shellfish waters.

Those environmental improvements are essential if the attractiveness of the region to tourists is to be maintained. That investment programme will strengthen the tourism industry that contributes so much to the south-west's economy. The hon. Member for South-East Cornwall mentioned that people are angry. I realise that, but I think that he would accept the importance of the tourism industry to the region. The Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions is working hard via its 10-point plan to ensure that there is a proper level of investment to protect the environment.

The Government recognise that the south-west has had the highest price increases of any major water company area since privatisation, and continues to face tough challenges in funding quality improvements. Therefore, we have ensured that the programme does not overburden consumers, while still offering significant improvements in line with our national aims. We have made it clear that we want to ensure that quality objectives do not have unacceptable impacts on water prices in different parts of England and Wales, and that programmes reflect local environmental priorities.

So far, I have been putting the concerns of the hon. Member for South–East Cornwall into context by setting out the background to the current situation. I shall deal now with the specific points about price rises to apply from 1 April 1999.

In the south-west, as elsewhere, companies are still operating under price limits that were set in 1994. For South West Water, average prices are permitted to rise by up to 1 per cent. on top of the rate of inflation. That is the basic limit set by Ofwat. As the hon. Member for South-East Cornwall said, it is referred to as the K factor.

With inflation at 3 per cent., the bills for customers for 1999–2000, which are being issued at this time of year, must not, overall, rise by more than 4 per cent. Price rises of up to RPI plus 1 per cent. have been permitted for South West Water for each year since 1997–98.

Of course, there is no obligation on companies to raise prices to the maximum extent that is allowed by their price limits. I am glad that South West Water has had the grace, in each of the past three years, to give customers a rebate on their bills: £10 in 1996–97 and £15 in both 1997–98 and 1998–99. However, I am sorry that the company has not yet felt able to offer any rebate for next year. I hope that, in view of the continuing and justifiable public concern about water charges in the region, it will look at its position again and consider whether a further rebate is possible in the coming year.

That is one reason for the very high increases in South West Water bills that have been reported in the press. Calculating the increase from last year's bills after rebate to next year's bills without a rebate produces, as I hope hon. Members will appreciate, significant price rises.

There is a further reason why some customers may experience higher price increases. The price limit that is set by Ofwat applies to average increases, but there may be variations around the average in the "tariff basket" that the companies operate. Some customers will see higher increases and some will see lower.

I understand that South West Water makes two technical adjustments in the balance between measured, or metered, charges and unmeasured charges to ensure that there is a fair distribution of charges between those groups. First, customers who choose to be metered tend to use less water than unmetered customers. The costs of metering are charged to metered customers alone, so that a customer with average consumption would pay slightly more to be metered than to pay on an unmeasured basis, but companies make an adjustment to the unmeasured tariff to prevent the differential becoming so great that metered customers are subsidising unmetered customers.

Ofwat has specified that it believes that the difference should be no more than £29 for customers with average consumption. Therefore, South West Water has made an increase of 1.5 per cent. in average unmeasured bills to ensure an appropriate differential between measured and unmeasured charges.

The second, smaller adjustment is to take account of the change in the average rateable value of those properties remaining on an unmeasured charge. Where consumers in higher rateable value properties switch to a meter, there is a fall in the average rateable value for unmeasured properties, requiring some increase in tariffs to ensure that the company receives the same average income.

In the south-west next year, that final adjustment is no more than about 0.5 per cent. An adjustment in the opposite direction would be made if there were a preponderance of occupiers of smaller-value properties moving on to measured charges.

I emphasise that the average permitted increase in price limits for all South West Water customers next year is 4 per cent. While some customers may see their bills rise by more, others will see smaller increases. I do not pretend that a 4 per cent. price increase is good news, but it is not the sensational 10 per cent. or more that has been reported in the press.

As I have already explained, charges from April next year are the subject of the periodic review of price limits. We have specified the environmental objectives to be achieved by 2005, and we expect the Director General of Water Services to announce draft price determinations in the summer. It is for the director general to make decisions on prices, but we believe that the programme that we have set out will allow for some relief to hard-pressed consumers in the south-west in future.

In the little time left before the debate ends, I want to deal with possible use of council tax for water charges. A number of water companies and others have set out a case for using council tax data instead of, or in conjunction with, rateable values as an unmeasured basis of charging.

We shall work with water companies and other groups with an interest to consider proposals for new charging arrangements, but, before any new charging method is implemented, we would need to be assured that it represented an improvement in fairness compared to the present system and that the transition could be managed without unacceptable social effects.

Last, but not least, while still staring at the clock, may I congratulate the hon. Member for South-East Cornwall again on raising what I and other colleagues think is an important issue, which we hope to solve—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord): Order.

It being Two o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

Sitting suspended, pursuant to Standing Order No. 10 (Wednesday sittings), till half-past Two o'clock.

PRIVATE BUSINESS

CITY OF WESTMINSTER BILL *[Lords]*

Considered; to be read the Third time.

Oral Answers to Questions

CABINET OFFICE

The Minister was asked—

Drug-testing Programmes

1. **Mrs. Ann Winterton** (Congleton): What initiatives have been taken to increase the number of United Kingdom companies operating routine drug-testing programmes. [75356]

The Minister for the Cabinet Office (Dr. Jack Cunningham): The Government encourage individual employers to act in accordance with guidance issued by the Health and Safety Executive, "Drug Misuse at Work", copies of which are in the Library of the House.

Mrs. Winterton: It is estimated that only about 10 per cent. of companies in the United Kingdom have drug-testing programmes. Will the Government therefore encourage, through organisations such as the Confederation of British Industry and the Institute of Directors, a zero tolerance policy in regard to drugs in the workplace? Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that, although drug testing is of course vital in the case of jobs to which safety is critical, it should be extended to more sectors to prevent deterioration in work performance, reduce damage to the health of employees and preserve the jobs and careers of those employees?

Dr. Cunningham: As I have said, the Government encourage employers to act on the HSE guidance, which was launched by the UK anti-drugs co-ordinator. As for a policy of zero tolerance, we shall continue to urge all employers to follow the guidance; but, ultimately, it is a matter for them. We have no plans to take statutory powers enabling us to insist that they do so.

Better Regulation Task Force

2. **Mr. John Bercow** (Buckingham): If he will make a statement on the work of the better regulation task force. [75357]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Mr. Peter Kilfoyle): The better regulation task force is providing valuable advice. So far, it has published five major reports, and it will publish a further four over the next three months.

Mr. Bercow: Given that British companies are now expected to swim in a sea of regulation deeper and more hazardous than any that they previously have had to negotiate, and given that the British food industry alone now faces extra regulatory costs of £497 million imposed by the Government, will the Minister urge all his ministerial colleagues to study the United States Regulatory Flexibility Act 1980 and the Small Businesses Regulatory Enforcement Fairness Act 1996, and then to heed the lessons of that crucial legislation?

Mr. Kilfoyle: Not for the first time, the hon. Gentleman has shown his ignorance of what is actually happening in government. He is obviously not aware of the work that is done not only by the better regulation task force, but by the better regulation unit—or of the work that we do to help businesses, small and large, by means of initiatives such as the access business initiative and the outstanding initiative announced recently by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, which was designed to focus on the needs of small business.

Business—and, not least, his hon. Friend the hon. Member for Totnes (Mr. Steen)—would appreciate it if the hon. Gentleman gave some credit to the Government's attempts to support business, rather than denigrating them. They might even enlighten the hon. Gentleman about what business is actually doing, which bears no relation to his prejudiced view.

Dr. Brian Iddon (Bolton, South-East): I congratulate my hon. Friend on the work that the better regulation task force is doing. Last July, it published an excellent guidance document for Ministers, recommending eight weeks as the minimum period for consultation on Government regulations. Is my hon. Friend's section of the Cabinet Office monitoring whether that good advice is followed? I ask because, over the busy Christmas period, the Medicines Control Agency issued an important regulation, which is causing a good deal of controversy, called MLX 249. Last Wednesday, in an Adjournment debate, we were told that the MCA's consultation period was six to eight weeks.

Mr. Kilfoyle: We have issued guidance, and we are monitoring whether it is followed. I should add that it is advice, not prescriptive guidance. However, my hon. Friend's comments will be brought to the attention of the appropriate Minister.

Government Modernisation

3. **Mr. Andrew Robathan** (Blaby): What recent representations he has received concerning the forthcoming White Paper on the modernisation of government. [75358]

The Minister for the Cabinet Office (Dr. Jack Cunningham): I have most recently had meetings with the Council of Civil Service Unions, the Consumers Association and the National Consumer Council.

Mr. Robathan: We have been waiting for that White Paper for some time. What is the real desire for so-called modernisation?

Mr. Desmond Swayne (New Forest, West): I can tell my hon. Friend.

Mr. Robathan: I thank my hon. Friend.

There is a lot of talk about "modernising Britain", but what exactly does the Minister mean by that? Although we certainly appreciate that the civil service should be "joined up"—to use the terminology of the day—how will the establishment of regional development agencies impact on his own civil servants? No one has ever written to me about regional development agencies. Perhaps the

right hon. Gentleman will tell us how many of his own constituents have written to him in the past 20 years asking for such agencies.

Dr. Cunningham: I am not sure whether the hon. Gentleman's question was on modernising government, or merely a little ramble. He will not have to wait very much longer for us to publish the White Paper; then he will see the answers for himself.

Mr. John Healey (Wentworth): Is my right hon. Friend aware that there are RATs in the Rotherham council housing and council tax benefits office? Remote access terminals were installed last month and paid for by central Government, allowing council officers to track pensioners entitled to income support regardless of whether they claim support at the Benefits Agency. Does he agree that the next logical step would be to enable those council officers not only to monitor the progress of claims at the Benefits Agency, but to complete income support claims on behalf of those pensioners? Will he give some assurance that the White Paper on modernising government will consider exactly that type of joined-up government service delivery?

Dr. Cunningham: Yes, it will.

Sir George Young (North–West Hampshire): Are not the Government's claims to be a modern and effective Administration somewhat undermined by the repeated delays in publishing the White Paper on better government, which is now over a year late? Will he assure us that the wait will have been worth while? If one of the White Paper's themes is to be joined-up government and a more coherent approach to the needs of the individual, will that approach not be injured by devolution, and indeed by regional government, leading to the fragmentation of both policy and service provision—with different policies and different approaches at different levels? Will the Government's ill-thought-out constitutional provisions not pull in the opposite direction to better government?

Dr. Cunningham: It is difficult to know where the Opposition stand on devolution. I thought that the Conservative party in Scotland had now accepted that devolution was a reality, and that it would work for success in the Scottish Parliament. The right hon. Gentleman really should make it clear where he stands. Apparently, he has taken a different view on the issue from that of the Leader of the Opposition; but that is not new for Opposition Front Benchers, as so many of his colleagues take a different view.

The White Paper will be published soon. As the right hon. Gentleman says, it will be about making life better for people, not about the convenience of civil servants or making life easier for Ministers. Regional development agencies are about joining up government, not about dislocating it.

Genetically Modified Foods

4. **Mr. Chris Mullin** (Sunderland, South): What assessment he has made of *(a)* the quality and *(b)* the independence of the advice the Government are receiving on genetically modified foods; and if he will make a statement. [75359]

The Minister for the Cabinet Office (Dr. Jack Cunningham): Independent expert committees are in place to ensure that the Government receive the best possible scientific advice on those issues.

Mr. Mullin: My right hon. Friend will be aware that there is an unhappy tradition of senior civil servants, on retirement, taking up posts with the very commercial interests on whose activities they were supposed to be advising the Government impartially. The example of Sir Walter Marshall and nuclear power springs to mind, but I expect that one could think of others. How confident is my right hon. Friend that some of those who are advising the Government on GM foods will not end up working for the very vested interests whose activities they are supposed to be impartially overseeing?

Dr. Cunningham: I was about to say that my hon. Friend's crystal ball was at least as good as mine, but, on reflection, history shows that his is much better than mine, because he has been able to see some things long before the rest of us. Of course, anyone retiring from the Government service has to abide by the rules laid down by the Cabinet Secretary. I assure my hon. Friend that that will be done in future.

My hon. Friend's question gives me the opportunity to lay another ghost to rest. It is not true that the Government have reached or are seeking any secret deal with the industries on genetically modified foods or crops.

Mr. Ian Bruce (South Dorset): The right hon. Gentleman will know that the Conservative party has been keen for safe genetically modified foods to be allowed to be grown in the United Kingdom, but only after the proper tests have been carried out. Are the Government ready to admit that they made a monumental error in trying to go against the advice of an environmental committee to have a three-year moratorium on putting in commercial crops? Surely ignoring such advice is undermining people's trust in the Government and in science.

Dr. Cunningham: The hon. Gentleman is confused. The Government have not licensed any crops for commercial development in this country. The only genetically modified foods that are on sale in this country were licensed by the Government of which he was a supporter. The real policy is that we are moving to the farm and field testing of genetically modified crops. Only when we are satisfied with those tests will we move to the next stage.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): I understand that a written answer is to be given this afternoon on the labelling of genetically modified foods. Did the Minister see the comments on Monday last week of Professor Philip James of the Rowett research institute to the Select Committee on Science and Technology that the issue of labelling would prove to be irrelevant because it was increasingly difficult to guarantee the segregation of genetically modified ingredients? Would the Minister care to comment?

Dr. Cunningham: I do not agree with Professor James on that issue. The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and

Food has published a list of companies able to provide non-genetically modified products. As Sainsbury's and others have made clear today, supermarkets are moving to ensure that their own brand products do not contain genetically modified ingredients. The Government are determined to press ahead with clear labelling of food products so that the consumer has a real choice, in contrast with the policy of the previous Government, who steadfastly refused to label foods to help the consumer in that way.

Public Consultation

5. **Mr. Paul Clark** (Gillingham): What mechanisms are available for consulting the public about specific Government initiatives. [75360]

6. **Dr. Phyllis Starkey** (Milton Keynes, South-West): If he will make a statement on the ways in which the Government consult the public about new initiatives. [75361]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Mr. Peter Kilfoyle): The Government use many mechanisms, including written consultation exercises, citizens panels and qualitative research, to consult the public about specific initiatives.

Mr. Clark: I thank my hon. Friend for that response. I have always believed that good government requires good listening skills. My constituents appreciate the opportunities to discuss and be consulted on Government initiatives. Will my hon. Friend take the opportunity to explain what the Government will do with the results of the consultation exercise and how that feeds into policy deliberations? Does he agree that the fact that the Government listen explains why they are popular and why the Tories are in opposition?

Mr. Kilfoyle: On the second part of my hon. Friend's question, he is self-evidently speaking good sense. As for the first part, we shall place the results of the research in the public domain—unlike the practice of the previous Government. The aim of gathering the information is to inform debate objectively so that we have evidence-based policy making.

Dr. Starkey: I thank my hon. Friend for outlining the methods that he is using to consult the public. Will he consider the model of consensus conferences, which have been used in Denmark and the Netherlands to consult the public on the ethical and social aspects of science policy? Is he aware that consensus conferences have been run in this country—in 1994, on plant biotechnology—and produced some sensible recommendations, which, unfortunately, were not taken up by the previous Government?

Mr. Kilfoyle: Given the overwhelming consensus behind the Government's initiatives, I can do no more than agree with my hon. Friend.

Mr. Christopher Gill (Ludlow): By this time last year, the Government had set up 179 review bodies—after only nine months of government. After 18 months of government, the figure had grown to 224. When will the Government turn this year into the year of delivery, as they promised at the beginning of January?

Mr. Kilfoyle: The £19 billion on education, the £21 billion on the health service and the other measures revealed by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor in his Budget statement answer the hon. Gentleman's question effectively.

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): How many millions of pounds are the Government spending on focus groups and people's panels? Does the Minister agree that the people would far prefer to see that money being spent on services for the people, rather than on eliciting information to try to help the Government win the next election?

Mr. Kilfoyle: It is a mere drop in the ocean, given the £330 billion that the Government spend overall. It is well worth spending that money. [HON. MEMBERS: "Answer the question."] "Refer to previous parliamentary answers" is my advice to Conservative Members. Informed policy making will be in marked contradistinction to what happened during 18 years of misrule by the Conservative party.

People's Panel

7. **Jacqui Smith** (Redditch): What proposals he has for future use of the people's panel. [75363]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Mr. Peter Kilfoyle): My Department plans to use the people's panel to carry out two further waves of quantitative research this year. The panel is also used by other Departments for various quantitative and qualitative research.

Jacqui Smith: May I suggest that my hon. Friend ask the people's panel to consider the Government's Budget priorities? In particular, will he ask whether the panel would rather see the doubling of support for children, or the freezing of child benefit—[HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."]—whether the panel would rather see £100 support for fuel payments for all pensioner households, or an increase on VAT on fuel—[HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."]—and whether the panel believes that £40 billion extra spending on schools and hospitals is important, or reckless spending, as the Opposition believe?

Mr. Kilfoyle: Although I admire the motivation behind my hon. Friend's question, the answer comes via the popular acclamation for the points that she raised.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): After that cringingly nauseating question, may I ask whether the people's panel is the same as the citizens' panel, which sounds like an instrument of the French revolution? How much does it cost, how is it recruited and what are its three greatest achievements to date?

Mr. Kilfoyle: We have before us an expert in cringe. The panel, in itself, will not create something remarkable overnight, but it is a serious enterprise. Conservative Members should give credit to the fact that we are making

sure that what people think—rather than what the top-down politicians think—is taken into account when the policy is formed. For the first time, we have evidence-based policy making that reflects what people want—not what politicians and civil servants think that they might want.

Sir Patrick Cormack: And what does it cost?

Mr. Kilfoyle: It costs, in net terms, very little to the taxpayer.

Dr. David Clark (South Shields): My hon. Friend will recall that, when the panel was established, it was agreed that all the research would be published, as has been done. Will he consider making more of the raw research available more quickly, which would certainly be more helpful to the Opposition in deciding what their policy should be?

Mr. Kilfoyle: We will certainly consider how to make more information available.

Regulations

8. **Mr. Michael Jack** (Fylde): On which regulations he has recently received representations from the Federation of Small Businesses, the Engineering Employers Federation and the Confederation of British Industry. [75364]

The Minister for the Cabinet Office (Dr. Jack Cunningham): The better regulation task force, supported by officials in the better regulation unit of the Cabinet Office, has received representations from those organisations in the course of the reviews on long-term care, enforcement and consumer affairs.

Mr. Jack: I am sorry that the unit has not received a representation from the Engineering Employers Federation about the difficulty that engineers are having in dealing with the implementation regulations for the wholly unnecessary and unwanted working time directive. The Minister may be aware that a 200-page document has had to be published to help them with that task, but engineers in Lancashire are still struggling with the complexities. I would be grateful for an assurance that he will dispatch an official from the better regulation task force to Lancashire straight away, to help the engineers with the task that the Government have imposed on them.

Dr. Cunningham: The right hon. Gentleman is slightly confused: the better regulation task force is independent of the Government, and it is not for me to dispatch its staff anywhere. I can more than meet his request, however, because—although I am sure that they have had consultations with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry—if members of the Engineering Employers Federation would like to talk to me about the matter, I would be happy to see them.

Information Technology

9. **Fiona Mactaggart** (Slough): What assessment he has made of the introduction of new IT systems across government; and if he will make a statement. [75365]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Mr. Peter Kilfoyle): Major information technology-related initiatives have been launched across government, including in the areas of education, social security, health and crime reduction. We will publish information in the early summer about progress towards the Prime Minister's 25 per cent. target.

Fiona Mactaggart: My concern is that my hon. Friend inherited a situation in which several very large IT projects were under way—some of them delayed under the private finance initiative—and that there is not a sufficient drawing together of the different approaches to information technology in different Departments. Is there any role that the Cabinet Office could play in getting a unified IT strategy throughout government?

Mr. Kilfoyle: My hon. Friend should await the publication of the White Paper, in which she will find the answer to her question. She will be very pleasantly surprised by the initiatives that the Government are undertaking to tackle the problems which, as she rightly said, we inherited from the previous Government, with computer systems that were incompatible and did not speak to each other.

Mr. James Gray (North Wiltshire): What has happened to electronic red boxes?

Mr. Kilfoyle: Quite simply, things have moved on since then: we now have an extremely effective Government secure intranet, and we are investigating other ways of providing all members of the Government with secure electronic communications.

Mr. Tom Clarke (Coatbridge and Chryston): In drawing up policy for access to information technology, will my hon. Friend remember the needs of disabled people, and especially those who need to use voice-activated equipment? Will he ensure that, consistent with last night's excellent presentation by the Royal National Institute for Deaf People and the Trades Union Congress, those organisations are indeed consulted?

Mr. Kilfoyle: I can assure my right hon. Friend that the contents of the White Paper will reflect the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Cabinet Office for mainstreaming equal opportunities, in access to IT, as in other matters.

Genetically Modified Foods

11. **Sir Sydney Chapman** (Chipping Barnet): When he expects the Ministerial Group on Biotechnology and Genetic Modification to complete its examination of the United Kingdom framework for overseeing the technology. [75367]

The Minister for the Cabinet Office (Dr. Jack Cunningham): Officials have now completed the consultation stage of the examination of existing advice and control and will be reporting to Ministers shortly.

Sir Sydney Chapman: The right hon. Gentleman has already refuted extensive reports in Sunday newspapers that the Government have agreed a three-year moratorium

on the planting of GM crops. Given the extent of those reports, was that just another spin-doctoring exercise? Given the recent announcement by the Sainsbury's group—an eclectic family if ever there were one—when will the Government accept the representations made by my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition as long ago as 3 February that a three-year moratorium should be announced?

Dr. Cunningham: Let me make it clear that there is no secret deal between the Government and the industry in respect of genetically modified crops; nor has one been sought, and nor is any such deal under discussion. The Government are not offering any favours to the industry and I cannot make the position any clearer. We have no intention either of accepting the remarkably absurd suggestion by the Leader of the Opposition that we should bring our bio-sciences and GM programmes to a complete halt with a universal moratorium.

Civil Servants

12. **Mr. Michael Fabricant** (Lichfield): If he will make a statement on the average length of service of civil servants within his Department. [75368]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Mr. Peter Kilfoyle): On 1 March 1999, the average length of service of civil servants in the Cabinet Office, including both permanent and loaned staff, was 11 years and four months.

Mr. Fabricant: I am grateful for that answer. What assurances has the Minister's master given to the permanent secretary of his Department that there will be no repetition of the events that occurred when he was at the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, when Mr. Neil Whitney, who worked in the Minister's private office, was sent to a gulag—the BSE department in Tolworth—for saying that it was improper of the Minister to order six bottles of Macallan malt for his private cabinet at the taxpayer's expense?

Mr. Kilfoyle: Apart from the fact that the hon. Gentleman's question is a load of rubbish, that is as far removed from the reality of the situation as it is possible to be, I can tell him that the Cabinet Office is a happy ship for all who work in it.

Illegal Drugs

13. **Dr. George Turner** (North-West Norfolk): What targets he proposes to set for reducing the illegal use of drugs. [75369]

The Minister for the Cabinet Office (Dr. Jack Cunningham): Under the Government's 10-year strategy, we aim to reduce young people's drug misuse, to reduce drug-related offending and access to drugs among young people, and to increase participation in drug treatment programmes.

Dr. Turner: I wonder whether my right hon. Friend is as unhappy as I am with that response. Until we can quantify what we are trying to do, we will not get real about the problem. I understand that targets cannot be plucked out of a hat. We must ensure that the numerical targets that are set are realistic and that we have the means to deliver them, but when will figures be added to what are widely accepted as good intentions?

Dr. Cunningham: Perhaps I had better make it clear to my hon. Friend that, if I had been unhappy with the response, I would not have given it in the first place. As for figures, we have a public service agreement in that area and we are currently putting together the first annual report of the UK drugs co-ordinator. We shall also examine the possibility of setting more specific targets in the future.

Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration

14. **Mr. Peter L. Pike** (Burnley): What extensions in the power and scope of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration his Department is proposing. [75370]

The Minister for the Cabinet Office (Dr. Jack Cunningham): As I announced to the House on 10 February, the Government are seeking to extend the jurisdiction of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration to an additional 158 non-departmental public bodies. An order amending the list of bodies within the commissioner's jurisdiction was laid before the House on 22 February and came into force on 15 March.

Mr. Pike: I thank my right hon. Friend for that answer, which indicates that the Government's commitment to be more fully accountable to the people has been honoured by that move. However, one of the problems with many of the ombudsman schemes is that the screening process seems to prevent many genuine cases from being examined. Do we need to consider that point and ensure that the ombudsmen take up more of the cases submitted to them?

Dr. Cunningham: I am sympathetic to that point. We are determined to ensure that non-departmental bodies are open and accountable, and that they are as effective as we can possibly make them. It would be a natural extension of our determination to have more openness if we were to ensure that the ombudsman's work was as effective as possible, in the interests of consumers.

PRIME MINISTER

The Prime Minister was asked—

Engagements

Q1. [75386] **Mr. Oliver Heald** (North-East Hertfordshire): If he will list his official engagements for Wednesday 17 March.

The Prime Minister (Mr. Tony Blair): This morning, I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further such meetings later today.

Mr. Heald: Since the Prime Minister claimed last week that taxes are set to fall next year, numerous economists,

including Anatole Kaletsky in *The Times*, have described his comments as being completely false. Will he therefore accept the House of Commons Library's figures, which show a whopping £7.1 billion increase in taxes for next year? Does he agree that the public want less tax, not stealth tax? Will he promise to publish a list of all his stealth taxes and hidden taxes, entitled not "Your Financial Health Check", but "Your Financial Stealth Check"?

The Prime Minister: The public will remember the 22 Tory tax rises. We certainly do.

Let me refer the hon. Gentleman to the Institute for Fiscal Studies, which published an analysis last week indicating that every single decile—every tenth of the population from the bottom right up to the top—gained as a result of the Budget. There will be a net tax cut next year of £4.5 billion, and direct taxes will be down by £9 billion.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Should not the outside police investigation into the foul murder of Rosemary Nelson be absolutely thorough and unhindered in any way? Since those who put that brave lawyer to death describe themselves as loyalists, should we not say without contradiction today that those murderers are traitors to everything that this country stands for?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is right. No stone will be left unturned in the hunt for the killers, whose clear intent in murdering Mrs. Nelson was to stir up tensions in the local and wider communities and to attack the political process. The investigation by David Phillips, chief constable of Kent, will be independent—as my hon. Friend wishes—and he will be given every possible assistance by the RUC. The investigation's remit will be very wide.

Let us be clear about what the killers are trying to do. They are trying to wreck the hopes of peace for the vast majority of people in Northern Ireland. They are not loyal to anything other than their own bigotry and prejudice. That is not a loyalty shared by any sensible member of the United Kingdom.

Mr. William Hague (Richmond, Yorks): I agree with the Prime Minister's last remarks.

Following the devastating report on the European Commission, may I ask the Prime Minister three specific questions? First, does he agree that the huge pay-offs involved should not apply—presumably they were never intended to apply—to Commissioners who are forced to resign in disgrace?

Secondly, does the Prime Minister agree that, in addition to procedural reforms, the Commission should do less, and do it better? Thirdly, is there any reason why we should not agree across the House that the appointment of new British Commissioners should be subject to parliamentary scrutiny and the approval of the House?

The Prime Minister: It is interesting to reflect on the three points put to me by the right hon. Gentleman who had 18 years to act on them, but never did.

In respect of the pay-offs, if someone is guilty of fraud or misconduct, they will, of course, not [illegible]ly. In respect of procedural reforms, I believe that the reforms that we set out yesterday, which were based on the findings of the committee of inquiry, and which would overhaul the whole financial management system, are the right reforms. I do not know exactly what the right hon. Gentleman believes the Commission should not do that it is doing at present.

In respect of parliamentary scrutiny, appointments are of course always subject to parliamentary scrutiny, but the system of appointment that has applied under successive Governments is the best system.

Mr. Hague: The right hon. Gentleman has not appointed Commissioners before and I have not been involved in such appointments. This is an opportunity to talk about the future, not the past. Is it not an opportunity to enhance the role of Parliament? The right hon. Gentleman has never missed an opportunity to diminish its role in the past two years. Can he not agree for once to expand it? People will listen to his lectures abroad more if reform starts here at home. Why should not a parliamentary Committee scrutinise the nominations for the European Commission?

The Prime Minister: Parliament is always entitled to scrutinise whatever it wishes. The right hon. Gentleman tries to say that the past 18 years were nothing to do with him. This is all part of the new campaign to say, "We were wrong. Everything that we did was wrong in those 18 years." However, the right hon. Gentleman was a member of the last Tory Cabinet. On the nomination of European Commissioners, he made his nomination on behalf of the Conservative party and, as far as I can recollect, his letter never once mentioned that it should be done differently.

Mr. Hague: I am telling the Prime Minister that we now have an opportunity to do things differently. His response—as ever—to the enhancement of the role of Parliament is utterly inadequate for Parliament and for the occasion. Will he also accept that it is of paramount importance to tell the Commissioners that they must do less? The report that we saw on Monday stated that the Commission was implementing policies over which it was exceedingly difficult to exert effective control and was pursuing highly expensive programmes that it could not manage. So, should not the Prime Minister stop signing up to the Commission doing more, as he has been doing with the employment chapter, the European social model and so forth, and say instead that real reform means doing less?

The Prime Minister: The theme of the right hon. Gentleman's intervention was less opportunity than opportunism. On the Commission doing less, the employment chapter is an attempt to move away from the regulatory model and was pioneered in part by this Government to do so. As for the other issues, the comments made by the former shadow Home Secretary, the right hon. Member for North-West Cambridgeshire (Sir B. Mawhinney), and the former Prime Minister are worth investigating: that is, how we ensure that the Commission is held more properly to account. That is precisely what we are going to do, but we will do it better if we are working constructively in Europe in alliance

with other countries, rather than indulging in the anti-European rhetoric that characterises the Conservative party today.

Mr. Clive Efford (Eltham): As a former Greenwich councillor and someone who has supported the millennium experience since before most people knew that there were two "n"s in "millennium", will my right hon. Friend confirm that the New Millennium Experience Company has succeeded in achieving its target for sponsorship for the dome? Will he also comment on the fact that the dome is becoming the internationally recognised symbol of the year 2000? Does that not demonstrate that it will be a resounding success, not merely for my borough, but for this country?

The Prime Minister: With the eyes of the world on us at midnight Greenwich mean time, it is entirely appropriate that we should celebrate the millennium in that way. We also believe that the resultant incoming tourism will benefit not merely London, but the whole country and will run to several billion pounds. Not a single penny piece of taxpayers' money will be used on the dome itself. We believe that the sponsorship target of £150 million will be met fully. I can announce today that schools will get maximum benefit from the dome at minimum cost. One million school children from schools throughout the United Kingdom will be able to visit the dome for no charge—10,000 schools will benefit.

Mr. Paddy Ashdown (Yeovil): In so far as the Brussels fiasco of the past few days was a scandal waiting to happen, is it not worth remembering that no Government in Europe were more responsible for the appointment of Mr. Santer and for resisting any expansion in the powers of the European Parliament to hold that Commission to account than the Conservative Government? *[Interruption.]* A little more quiet regret from this side of the channel would be most welcome.

What urgent steps will the Prime Minister take to ensure that, following the welcome resignation of Mr. Santer today, the Commission is not left leaderless, Europe is not left incapacitated and the essential reforms—

Hon. Members: Give him the job.

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Ashdown: I assure hon. Members that it would be subject to scrutiny.

Will the Prime Minister ensure that Europe is not left incapacitated and that the essential reforms that are on the table for the Berlin summit are not indefinitely delayed?

The Prime Minister: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for that. Labour Members liked the idea, which is a good omen.

In respect of the two points raised by the right hon. Gentleman, first, the reform package should be agreed as quickly as possible. Those reforms are far-reaching, but they are based on what the committee of inquiry revealed and we can put them into practice quickly. Secondly, we should get the new President and the new Commission in place as soon as possible, but we should ensure that we have the right person for President.

Mr. Ashdown: I thank the Prime Minister for that answer. Is it not clear that, just as we are embarked on the wholesale reform of Britain's political institutions, so we must now embark on the root-and-branch modernisation of Europe's institutions? Is it not also clear that, at the heart of that reform, there is now an unanswerable case for a new constitutional settlement for Europe which takes the powers of the European institutions and makes them clearly defined, clearly limited and clearly subject to full democratic accountability?

The Prime Minister: I confess that I am hesitant about trying to draw up a new constitution for the whole of Europe, and the right hon. Gentleman would find that other countries would also be hesitant. However, it is important that we consider the longer-term reforms that are going to bring about greater accountability between the people of Europe and the institutions of Europe. The European Parliament is obviously one avenue; the Council of Ministers is another; and the way in which national Parliaments interact with the European Parliament and the European institutions is another. At the conclusion of our presidency, we made a series of proposals at Cardiff and, although they were not taken up at the time, the time has now come to return to them.

Mr. Llew Smith (Blaenau Gwent): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the resignation of the European Commissioners will have no effect on the negotiations on objective 1 status for communities such as my own? Will he also make a statement about progress on matching funding from the Government if those negotiations are successful?

The Prime Minister: In respect of my hon. Friend's first point, I do not believe that the fact that the Commission has resigned should affect the efficacy of the Agenda 2000 negotiations; those negotiations are now firmly in the hands of the Council of Ministers and the Heads of Government meeting next week. On his second point on additionality or matching funding, the Government will have to consider that in due course.

Q2. [75387] **Mrs. Caroline Spelman** (Meriden): In the tax year 2000, is a wife who stays at home to look after others worthy of a tax credit?

The Prime Minister: The working families tax credit will help precisely such a person—*[Interruption.]* The Tories complain about it now, but, the other day, they complained that we would give the tax credit to people whose incomes were at too high a level. Now, they are complaining about the opposite. The working families tax credit will help the very people about whom the hon. Lady is talking. If there is a family in which one member of a couple is an earner, that family will be better off as a result of the working families tax credit—some people will be better off by up to £20 a week.

Q3. [75388] **Fiona Mactaggart** (Slough): Is my right hon. Friend aware of the shocking statistics on child

cruelty in Britain, where one child dies every week from abuse or neglect, and the chances of an infant aged less than 12 months being murdered are five times greater than for the rest of us? Does he know that the reason why the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children launched its "Cruelty to Children Must Stop, Full Stop" campaign in advertisements yesterday is that most of us prefer not to confront those horrible statistics? Can he assure us all that he will confront that horrible abuse and ensure that the Government do everything in their power to make Britain a safe place for children?

The Prime Minister: Two things are happening in that regard. First, the Protection of Children Bill, which the House should pass, will greatly improve the safety and protection of children. Secondly, the range of measures that we are taking to tackle social exclusion—such as poor housing and poor educational opportunities—and the sure start initiative for young people will strengthen our society and give hope to children who are presently without it.

Q4. [75389] **Sir David Madel** (South-West Bedfordshire): The Red Book published with the Budget is full of references to the Government's desire to help business. Why do the Government then contradict that policy by introducing measures in the Budget that will increase taxes on business by £3.2 billion in the next three years?

The Prime Minister: We are cutting corporation tax for business. Under this Government, Britain will have the lowest corporation tax that we have ever had.

Mr. Geraint Davies (Croydon, Central): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the fact that Jock Santer—*[Interruption.]* I have forgotten his name already, Madam Speaker. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the fact that Jacques Santer suspended the Dutch official who originally reported the European Commission to the European Parliament illustrates that, far from being whiter than white, he is irredeemably stained? Does my right hon. Friend agree that we should celebrate the mass resignation of the Commission as a victory for democracy, and that the future of Europe lies with increasing democracy and financial transparency, and ending the era of "I'm all right, Jacques"?

The Prime Minister: I welcome the statement that Jacques Santer has made today. It is correct to point out that we have managed to get to the truth of the matter because the European Parliament decided to set up the committee of inquiry. That is a victory not just for the European Parliament, but for the forces of democracy.

Mr. William Hague (Richmond, Yorks): When the Chancellor raised diesel duties by 12 per cent. last week, why did he not mention it in his speech?

The Prime Minister: The Chancellor specifically mentioned the fuel escalator in his speech.

Mr. Hague: The Chancellor made no reference whatsoever to the 12 per cent. increase in diesel duty. Is that not a further example of the misleading presentation of a dishonest Budget? Has the Prime Minister seen the widespread forecasts that 53,000 jobs will be lost in the haulage industry? The Budget foreshadowed the loss of 53,000 transport jobs while the Deputy Prime Minister—who has responsibility for transport—was chasing angel fish around a coral reef. The Prime Minister has claimed that business taxes are going down, and he has done so again today. After the Budget, the British Chambers of Commerce said:

"Business today is more heavily taxed and more heavily regulated",

and will be a total of £6 billion worse off each year than it was before the last election. Is it not time the Prime Minister had the guts to admit that that is the truth?

The Prime Minister: I certainly understand the problems of the road haulage industry as it has set them out. However, one group of people have no right to criticise this Government: the previous Conservative Government. Let me give the facts to the House. The price of derv has risen by 7p since the election, but it rose by 26p under the previous Government. It is true that duty has increased as a result of the fuel duty escalator, but the previous Government introduced the fuel duty escalator. The highest single rise in duty in the past 10 years occurred in 1995 under the Government of whom the right hon. Gentleman was a member of the Cabinet.

Mr. Hague: To describe accurately the Prime Minister's answers about business taxation would be unparliamentary. The fact is that those duties have increased by 11 per cent. on average under this Government and by 7 per cent. in the last Parliament. The Prime Minister will not answer straightforward questions about diesel duty and about how much taxes have been increased by the last three Budgets because he does not want to admit that his party's commitment at the last election not to increase taxes at all was a total lie.

The Prime Minister: No, that is not correct. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh."] I have the facts if hon. Members want them. The last five rises by the right hon. Gentleman's Government were 10 per cent., 10 per cent., 13 per cent., 10 per cent. and 7 per cent. That averages a much higher figure than he is quoting. I also point out to him that this Government have frozen vehicle excise duty for 98 per cent. of lorries, and offered a £1,000 road tax discount for low-emission lorries and a £400 million subsidy in low-sulphur fuel discount. We have also cut corporation tax. In each of those areas, we stand in very good shape in any comparison with the Government of whom the right hon. Gentleman was a member.

Mr. Tom Levitt (High Peak): Is the Prime Minister aware that, in this Chamber 50 years ago today, almost to the minute, a Labour Government introduced the Bill that became the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949? The first national park was the Peak District, and, of course, it is still the best. Will he agree that last week's announcement about a statutory right of access to the countryside is a fitting way to mark the 50th anniversary of that wonderful Bill?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend and I once did a photo opportunity together in High Peak, so his question brings back happy memories. I entirely agree that the announcement is a most fitting way to mark the

50th anniversary of that historic legislation, with a Bill that will open up access to people in a sensible and consensual way. Yet again, this party is standing up for the rights of ordinary people, in contrast to the Tory party, which is always standing up for the rights of privilege.

Q5. [75390] **Mr. John Wilkinson** (Ruislip-Northwood): Has the right hon. Gentleman had the time today to reflect on his failure to answer the question put to him last week by my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Hague) about the £250 million that the self-employed will have to pay as a consequence of the Budget statement for the alignment of their national insurance contributions with those of employees? If he did not know about that consequence, surely he is not fit to be First Lord of the Treasury and, if he did know about it, he was demeaning his office because he should have shared that information with the House.

The Prime Minister: To give the hon. Gentleman the facts, we have cut the entry fee for national insurance contributions for the self-employed. They benefit, as everyone else does, from the cut in the basic standard rate of income tax. I know that Conservative Members do not like it, but, under this Government, the basic rate of tax, like that of corporation tax, is the lowest that it has ever been.

Mr. Michael Clapham (Barnsley, West and Penistone): May I tell my right hon. Friend about the case of my constituent, 63-year-old Ted Dudley, whom I have been advising? His lungs are chock-a-block full of asbestos and he is fading away with mesothelioma cancer. He knows precisely when he came into contact with that asbestos. It was for a few months in 1954, when the brake linings on a machine that he was driving gave off the dust. It is probable that those brake linings were made with white asbestos. Will my right hon. Friend therefore take note of the Health and Safety Executive, which says that there is no safe working threshold for white asbestos and has approved the substitutes as safer than white asbestos? Will he support a unilateral ban on the importation into the UK of white asbestos and materials containing it?

The Prime Minister: I know that the case of my hon. Friend's constituent is not an isolated one, and, like those others, it is tragic. We shall, of course, reflect carefully on the points made by the Health and Safety Executive and my hon. Friend. We have continually said that, on white asbestos, we must proceed according to the scientific evidence, but we are well aware of the points that have been made by many campaigners, such as my hon. Friend, and we shall take careful account of them.

Q6. [75391] **Mr. Christopher Fraser** (Mid-Dorset and North Poole): Does the Prime Minister consider himself a socialist?

The Prime Minister: I get asked some hard questions. The hon. Gentleman will like this answer. We redrafted clause IV so that the first line says:

"The Labour Party is a democratic socialist party."

Q7. [75392] **Mr. Harry Barnes** (North-East Derbyshire): Today is St. Patrick's day, the day that Irish people throughout the world like to celebrate. Many seek to return to the island of Ireland itself to engage in celebrations. There are some people, however, from Northern Ireland who have been placed in exile by paramilitary groups, who are not allowed to return for celebrations or for any other purposes. Will my right hon. Friend join me in condemning the practice of paramilitaries and calling for an end to this activity? Would it not assist the peace process considerably if the paramilitary groups did that?

The Prime Minister: I agree entirely with what my hon. Friend says. There can be no justification for these so-called exile sentences; they are simply another form of terrorism. My hon. Friend is also right to draw attention to the necessity to make sure that the peace process deals with all these various issues. The single greatest danger that Northern Ireland faces is that the will of the majority in the centre—the vast majority who want the process to succeed—will be pulled apart by the extremes. Whether it is the murder of Mrs. Nelson, exile sentences or so-called punishment beatings, it is all an attempt to pull apart the vast consensus for peace in Northern Ireland. The best response to it is to say that whatever incidents of violence are carried out in Northern Ireland we, the decent majority, will carry on constructing a peaceful structure for the people there.

Mr. David Davis (Haltemprice and Howden): Will the Prime Minister tell the House what instructions he has given his Ministers about what the proper action is when they receive leaked Select Committee reports?

The Prime Minister: We have answered extensively parliamentary questions on this matter. As for the right procedure, I understand that that is being looked into by the House. Whatever recommendations are made, we will fully abide by them.

Q8. [75393] **Mr. Chris Mullin** (Sunderland, South): Is my right hon. Friend aware that there has been a fairly sophisticated attempt to smear my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary, using apparently classified material about my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott)? Will my right hon. Friend call for an inquiry into what has happened? Might this be the right moment to bring the security and intelligence services under the scrutiny of Parliament?

The Prime Minister: As we have said many times, we believe that the Intelligence and Security Committee is the most effective way for the work of agencies to be scrutinised. As for the attempt to smear my right hon. Friend, he has made it clear that this is an obvious and amateurish fake. He has written to my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington. I agree that it is not a trivial matter. If she would like to show my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary the full contents of the paper sent to her, I know that we would be happy to consider whether there is anything that should be referred to the police for investigation.

Mr. John Gummer (Suffolk, Coastal): Has the Prime Minister noticed that the Commissioners who have been most directly accused of cronyism are almost entirely socialist Commissioners? Does he, therefore, agree that it

would be extremely good if the people of Britain elected an overwhelming number of Conservative MEPs to keep them in their place?

The Prime Minister: For a Conservative Member who disagrees fundamentally with the Opposition Front-Bench spokesmen's policy on Europe, that was a remarkably supportive question. The answer to it is that the committee of inquiry looked into Commissioners of all political hues. I believe that the people of this country would be better voting for a party that is united on Europe—*[Interruption.]* I repeat—united on Europe, rather than a party riven with division that reduced this country to having less influence in Europe than at any stage of our membership of the European Union.

Q9. [75394] **Mr. Ken Purchase** (Wolverhampton, North-East): May I turn to an issue that will directly affect many people in this country? My right hon. Friend will not have missed the trailing over the weekend of the idea of reforming housing benefit. Of course, that reform will be welcome, but does he recognise that it was the policies of the Conservative Government, in trying spuriously to apply market forces to council and housing association rents, that led directly to the unsustainably high housing benefit costs today?

The Prime Minister: Yes, of course it was the policy of the previous Government that turned an investment of £10 billion in housing into a housing benefit bill of £10 billion. We want to look at housing benefit as part of housing policy as a whole. That is why we have announced our intention to publish a Green Paper on housing later in the year. The purpose of the reform, as with our other welfare reforms, will be to focus help on people getting back into the labour market and working for themselves. As a result of the Government's policies, we have more people at work. Under the new deal, 200,000 young people are being helped. We know from the policies advanced by the Conservative Opposition that they would scrap the new deal, the working families tax credit and the minimum wage. So much for caring Conservatism.

Overseas Territories

3.31 pm

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Robin Cook): With permission, Madam Speaker, I shall make a statement on the dependent territories.

We have completed a major review of the relationship between the United Kingdom and the dependent territories. Its objectives were to establish better and more effective communication between the Government of the United Kingdom and the Governments of the dependent territories; to improve the status of the residents of the dependent territories; and to ensure that the United Kingdom could discharge its international responsibilities in respect of those territories.

During the review we consulted widely. We listened to the Governments, Opposition leaders and governors of the dependent territories.

I am today publishing the White Paper "Partnership for Progress", which sets out the results of that review. It provides the basis for a renewed contract and a modern partnership between the United Kingdom and the dependent territories.

It is a striking measure of the degree to which the dependent territories value that partnership that none of their Governments expressed any desire during the review for independence. They all want to preserve the constitutional link with the United Kingdom, which has provided all of them with security, and most of them with a high level of prosperity.

The review has already led to a series of improvements in the arrangements within Government for our relationship with the dependent territories. The Secretary of State for International Development and I have established parallel structures to deal with the dependent territories in our Departments. We have established a ministerial liaison committee to ensure that our activities and policies are fully co-ordinated.

Within the Foreign Office, my noble Friend Baroness Symons has been appointed Minister with specific responsibility for the dependent territories. That responsibility was previously split between a number of geographic departments. The changes we have made will ensure a unified ministerial responsibility for policy on all the dependent territories except Gibraltar and the Falkland islands.

In order to improve liaison with the dependent territories, as well as within Whitehall, we will be establishing a Council of the Territories, which will include the Chief Minister or equivalent of each dependent territory and will be chaired by the Minister for the territories. Its first meeting will be convened later this year in advance of the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting, in order that the UK can fully reflect their views, particularly in the discussions on the special challenges to small island states.

The White Paper confirms our commitment to drop the title "dependent territories". It is the wrong name for today's territories, which are energetic, self-governing, and anything but dependent. It is also does not fit the concept of partnership on which we want to build our relationship. We will be introducing legislation to rename the territories "United Kingdom overseas territories", and in the meantime we will adopt that title in all Government communications.

There is a strong sense of grievance in many overseas territories that the right of abode in Britain was taken away from them; that is felt particularly strongly in St. Helena. The residents of the overseas territories are proud of their connection with Britain, but are often puzzled that Britain appears not to be proud to have them as British citizens.

I can announce today that we will be offering British citizenship to all residents of the overseas territories who wish to take it up. That improved status will be welcomed throughout the overseas territories. It will give their residents the right to travel freely throughout the European Union and enable their young people to support themselves through work experience while they study in Britain.

We do not expect that change of status to result in any substantial number of people taking up permanent residence in the United Kingdom—70 per cent. of the citizens of the overseas territories have a higher per capita income than citizens of the United Kingdom, and their residents have no incentive to leave on a permanent basis.

The offer of right of abode will be made on a non-reciprocal basis. The unanimous view in consultations with the overseas territories was that they were anxious that their small communities did not have the capacity to absorb uncontrolled numbers of new residents. Our decision on that follows the precedent set by Gibraltar and the Falkland Islands, whose existing right of abode is also non-reciprocal.

We are not extending the offer of citizenship to British dependent territories citizens who were associated with the British Indian Ocean territory and the sovereign base areas in Cyprus, all of whom have alternative nationality.

Although most overseas territories have prosperous economies, the United Kingdom recognises its obligations to promote the development of those territories that need assistance. In the Department for International Development, my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State has been appointed Minister responsible for the sustainable development of the overseas territories. The White Paper on international development confirmed:

> "The reasonable assistance needs of the Dependent Territories are a first call on the development programme."

It is not possible for all the smaller overseas territories to promote development on their limited resource base alone. We will therefore be maintaining a programme of development aid for the poorer territories to support their economic infrastructure, their social provision and their good government. In the case of the two least developed territories, Montserrat and St. Helena, we will be continuing budgetary aid.

The White Paper demonstrates that the United Kingdom is fully committed to meeting its obligations to the overseas territories. Any partnership, though, must have obligations on both parties. The United Kingdom accepts its responsibility for the defence of the overseas territories and for their international representation. In return, we have to insist on the Governments of the overseas territories fulfilling their obligations to meet the standards of international organisations in which the United Kingdom represents them.

There are two issues which are of priority in meeting those obligations. The first is to match the best international standards in financial regulation. Many overseas territories have made substantial progress in proper and transparent regulation of their large financial sectors. They have recognised that a sound reputation for financial regulation is a prime asset in maintaining the prosperity of a sound financial sector.

Nevertheless, some overseas territories do not yet fully meet international standards. We will therefore be requiring all overseas territories, by the end of this year, to meet in full international standards on money laundering, transparency and co-operation with law enforcement authorities, and independent financial regulation. The globalisation of international finance means that we cannot tolerate a weak link anywhere in the chain without exposing investors everywhere to risk.

The second area of priority is in human rights. Those overseas territories that choose to remain British must abide by the same standards of human rights and good governance that we demand of ourselves. We require our overseas territories to maintain legislation that fully complies with the European convention on human rights and the international convention on civil and political rights, to which the United Kingdom is a party.

Specifically, we require changes in the law in a minority of overseas territories which retain corporal punishment and criminalise consensual homosexual acts in private. Our strong preference is that the overseas territories should enact the necessary reforms themselves, but we are ready to make such reforms by Order in Council if they fail to do so.

One important duty of the United Kingdom, as the sovereign authority for the overseas territories, is to preserve their rich and unique environment. Taken together, the overseas territories contain 10 times as many species of animals and plants as the United Kingdom. The British Antarctic territory acts as a barometer for climate change and atmospheric pollution—it was there that British scientists discovered the hole in the ozone layer. Coral reefs in the Caribbean territories and Bermuda are as beautiful as they are fragile.

We propose to develop an environment charter between the United Kingdom and our overseas territories. That will help the overseas territories to build their capacity to protect their environment, and will ensure that the United Kingdom can fully reflect their interests in international agreements. As support for work under that environment charter, the United Kingdom will provide funding of £1.5 million over the next three years.

The White Paper sets out the basis for a modernised and strengthened partnership between the United Kingdom and our overseas territories. We already have a firm basis for that partnership founded on three centuries of shared history. I believe that the proposals in the White Paper will give us a confident basis for our future partnership in the next century.

Mr. Michael Howard (Folkestone and Hythe): Anyone who read this morning's newspapers or listened to the "Today" programme will have had a feeling of déjà vu listening to that statement. BBC radio reported not only that a White Paper would be published today and that it would extend British citizenship to 150,000 residents of overseas territories, but that the overseas territories would have to adapt their legislation accordingly.

Will the Foreign Secretary therefore follow the example of the former Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, the right hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark), who apologised to the House for the premature disclosure of his White Paper on freedom of information—and earned your gratitude in the process, Madam Speaker? Can the Foreign Secretary assure the House that neither his office nor any of the offices of his ministerial colleagues briefed the press prior to this statement? Does he share the annoyance of the right hon. Member for South Shields at such press reports, and does he agree with him that details of White Papers emerging in this way does a disservice to the House?

On the substance of the White Paper, there is much in it that we would welcome and support—the provisions on aid, defence, financial regulation and many other issues. The House will, of course, recall that the review that led to the White Paper was initiated on 27 August 1997 at the height of the golden elephants farce, when Montserrat was the subject of an unedifying tug of war between the Foreign Secretary and the Secretary of State for International Development.

On citizenship, as the Foreign Secretary said in his response to the Foreign Affairs Committee report, the extension of full British citizenship to the citizens of overseas territories who do not at present have it raises significant and complex questions. For example, the Foreign Secretary will be aware of the need to ensure that citizens of third countries cannot secure a right of abode in Britain by becoming citizens of an overseas territory. In his discussions with the Home Office, what reassurances could he offer on that issue? How does he intend to allay such concerns from this House and from members of the public?

Can the Secretary of State confirm that there will be a review of each territory's constitution to ensure that it meets the needs of that territory? Will he also confirm that he will not impose a "one size fits all" policy?

Finally, will the Secretary of State explain why he is imposing European Union human rights obligations on those territories that are not part of the EU? Does he not have confidence in the instincts and abilities of legislators in those territories to reflect the cultural and political wishes of their inhabitants? Why does he not devolve those powers to the overseas territories if, as he says, he believes in devolution and partnership? Is this not legislation without representation?

Mr. Cook: The promise of early retirement has not made the right hon. and learned Gentleman any more emollient. I am glad that he included the sentence saying that he welcomed our proposals because, apart from that sentence, it was hard to tell that he did.

The bones of what I have announced today have been in the public domain since 4 February 1998, when I addressed the Dependent Territories Association. Nothing in the White Paper will particularly surprise those who have paid attention to the debate since then.

On citizenship, of course it is important that we are protected against an unreasonable number of people taking advantage of the proposal. We are fully protected, because the White Paper makes it plain that British

[Mr. Cook]

citizenship will be available only to those who already have a residence qualification for British dependent territory citizenship. Those residence qualifications are quite severe in most of the territories precisely because, as I have said, they themselves are anxious about uncontrolled settlement in their area.

I can assure the House and the right hon. and learned Gentleman that nothing in the White Paper threatens changes to the constitution of any territories. Their constitutions will continue. What the White Paper is about is how the Government relate to them and how we can better service their Governments.

I am surprised that the shadow spokesman on foreign affairs does not understand that the European convention on human rights has nothing to do with the European Union. Indeed, this country was committed to the convention long before we joined the European Union.

I make no apology for the proposal. Britain is committed to the European convention. We accept any obligations that are imposed on us by the European Court of Human Rights. We also are fully signed up to the two international covenants—on civil and political rights and on economic and social rights. We abide by them. We have a perfect right to tell those overseas territories that we represent throughout the world that we expect them to abide by them, too, so that we can defend them throughout the world. We have a particular obligation to all the residents of those territories, including any minorities within them, to ensure that they have the same rights that we claim for ourselves.

Mr. Jim Marshall (Leicester, South): May I warmly congratulate my right hon. Friend on his statement and plead with him to ignore the hypocrisy from Opposition Members? He is aware that the nationality legislation that the previous Government introduced some 17 years ago treated residents of dependent territories shamefully. The previous Government made them carry the buck for the problem that they foresaw arising from Hong Kong. To resolve the problem of Hong Kong, they withdrew the right of abode of all residents of the dependent territories. It is right and proper—great credit is due to the Government—that they have decided to give back those people their right of abode in this country and, with it, Britain citizenship. May I welcome that?

Clearly, there will be a—

Madam Speaker: Order. I cannot allow hon. Members to make speeches on the matter. I am waiting for a question on the statement, so that the Foreign Secretary can answer.

Mr. Marshall: I prefaced my remarks by asking whether my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary agreed with my comments—if I did not do so, I do it in retrospect.

Clearly, there will be a time lag before the legislation comes in. Will my right hon. Friend give those people who are resident in dependent territories an assurance that, if they wish to come to the United Kingdom before the legislation is on the statute book, they will not have to apply for visas, as they do at the moment, but will be able to travel freely?

Mr. Cook: I appreciate my hon. Friend's question and am happy to say that the answer is yes, I accept his welcome.

I have put right something that has long been wrong. What we have said today will be welcomed throughout the dependent territories, particularly by people who felt a strong sense of grievance that they were cheated out of their right of abode in the UK.

I give an assurance that British dependent citizens will not require a visa to come to Britain and do not require one at present. Of course, whether it is possible to anticipate the change in legislation is a matter for my colleague at the Home Office, but we will seek to put the changes in the legislative programme and to bring them into effect as quickly as we can. It should be appreciated that that is important for their access not just to Britain, but to Europe.

Many citizens of British overseas territories find it an affront that, when they visit other European countries, they are treated as non-EU citizens. They see a contrast between their treatment and that of citizens of territories of the Netherlands and of France. After the legislation and in the light of the White Paper, that insult will have been removed.

Mr. Menzies Campbell (North-East Fife): I welcome both the statement and the White Paper. Given the rather febrile atmosphere of the times, may I assure the Foreign Secretary that I have not seen a pre-publication version of the White Paper?

Is the Foreign Secretary satisfied that the arrangements for ministerial responsibility that he has described will prevent a repeat of the rather undignified scramble—almost a turf war—of the summer of 1997, which erupted, to coin a phrase, over the island of Montserrat? Is he aware that many hon. Members regard the events of the early 1980s that resulted in citizenship being taken away from people living in overseas territories as a particularly shameful chapter in the history of the United Kingdom, and will welcome what he has said today about the restoration of those rights? The sense of grievance to which he referred has been entirely justified, has it not?

There is to be no extension of the offer of citizenship to citizens of British dependent territories who were associated with the British Indian Ocean territory. Am I right in thinking that will apply to the Chagos islanders? If so, why?

If there is any procrastination or unreasonable delay in the introduction of domestic legislation to deal with the issue of homosexual rights, will the Foreign Secretary ensure that the necessary Order in Council will be promoted through the House of Commons at the earliest opportunity?

Mr. Cook: I thank the right hon. and learned Gentleman for what he has said. For the record, I should say that a pre-publication copy of the White Paper was given to the Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee, which is today on a welcome visit to one of the overseas territories, Gibraltar.

I agree with the right hon. and learned Gentleman about what has been done in the past to the citizenship of islanders and other citizens of overseas territories. We put that right after taking office, as quickly as we reasonably could.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman is correct is assuming that what I have announced will not apply to former residents of the Chagos archipelago. That is because they left 30 or 40 years ago, and no one has lived there since. Moreover, they all have access to Mauritian citizenship. The offer of British citizenship that I have made today applies to residents of our territories to whom no other national citizenship is available.

I can give the right hon. and learned Gentleman the assurance that he seeks. If there is no progress to put right the legislation on human rights to which I referred, we shall do it by Order in Council. We would prefer not to do that; we would prefer those concerned to do it themselves, because that would respect the principle of self-government on which our relations are founded. Should they fail to do so, however, we will carry out our obligations to the international community, and also to minorities in the territories.

Mr. Peter Bradley (The Wrekin): I should not presume to speak on behalf of St. Helenans, but I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his statement, and assure him that the restoration of those citizens' rights—withdrawn by the last Government in 1982—will be very welcome. I imagine that the islanders will be celebrating joyously today.

Will my right hon. Friend acknowledge the tremendous contribution made by the few relatives but many friends of St. Helenans in this country who have campaigned so tirelessly on their behalf, and whose appeals for justice fell on deaf ears throughout the lifetime of the last Administration but have been met in full today?

Mr. Cook: I thank my hon. Friend for his comments. When hon. Members have a chance to read the White Paper, they will note that we have made a number of specific commitments in relation to the development of St. Helena. Today's statement will be welcome in relation to its citizens' constitutional status, and our commitments to the development of their infrastructure and communications with the outside world will be almost as welcome.

Sir Teddy Taylor (Rochford and Southend, East): European treaties contain many references to overseas territories of member states. Is there any difference in the rights, entitlements or obligations of their citizens as a consequence of the change of name? In order to avoid any misunderstanding, will the Foreign Secretary also make it abundantly clear that the statement has no relevance to the Channel islands?

Mr. Cook: I am happy to respond to that point by saying that the hon. Gentleman is absolutely correct—it has no relevance to the Crown territories, such as the Channel islands or the Isle of Man. The statement was purely on those legally defined as dependent territories, which will now become overseas territories. I am also able to tell him that the statement does not change the status of the overseas territories in relation to the European Union. All of them, with the exception of Gibraltar, are outside the European Union. Gibraltar is within certain competencies of the European Union, although it is not a member of the customs union. Today's statement and White Paper do not change any of that.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Thirty years ago, I stayed for three days with Len Williams, who was the general secretary of the Labour party and—appointed by Harold Wilson—governor of Mauritius. His wife took me to see some of the Ilios people, from the Chagos islands, who were at that time absolutely traumatised by their removal. They are very different from the Mauritians.

The Secretary of State is quite right: at that time, it was hoped that there would be integration and Mauritian citizenship; alas, that has not happened. Will he talk to Professor Tony Bradley—former professor of public law at Edinburgh, whom he will know well—and Bindmans, the lawyers who are operating for the Ilios people, about the possibility of their returning to one of the areas of Diego Garcia? Whereas it might be unreal to think that the biggest base outside the continental United States would be moved for the sake of relatively few people, none the less, could their interests be considered, with a view to returning after 30 years—which is what they desperately want to do?

What is the future of the Diego Garcia base? What are our relations with the Americans on that absolutely crucial, huge base?

I welcomed in particular the reference to coral reefs. As the Under-Secretary of State for International Development will remember, there was an Adjournment debate on coral reefs. I hope that the Foreign Secretary will give the Under-Secretary total support in his good deeds in that matter.

Mr. Cook: I am well aware of Professor Bradley, and am always happy to seek his advice. However, I am not entirely sure whether it would be right to discuss with him a legal case taken out against the Government. However, I respond to my hon. Friend's point sympathetically. The position of the Ilios in Mauritius is a troubling one and is very unsatisfactory. In fairness to Britain, it should be noted that, over the years, we have made available £5 million in aid for the settlement of the Ilios and to help them to integrate into Mauritian society. We very much regret that more progress has not been achieved on that.

The current status of Diego Garcia is that it is a dependent territory. However, as my hon. Friend knows, it is subject to a defence agreement with the United States that is of value to both the United States and the United Kingdom.

When my hon. Friend reads the White Paper, I think that he will be pleased at the very strong emphasis that we have placed on the environmental dimension of the overseas territories and on our commitment to improving and safeguarding that environment. I hope that the environment charter will deal with many of the problems, including security of the coral reefs.

Mr. Michael Colvin (Romsey): When the Foreign Secretary mentions St. Helena, will he also add the two words "and dependencies"? Will he confirm that his statement applies equally to Tristan da Cunha and

[Mr. Michael Colvin]

Ascension? On democratic rights and Gibraltar—which, as he said, is a member of the European Union—and following the European Court's decision that the British Government are in breach of international law by denying the people of Gibraltar the right to vote in European elections, what will the British Government do to give them that right in time for the European elections on 10 June?

Mr. Cook: I can assure the hon. Gentleman that what I have said about St. Helena applies also to the two dependencies with it. When he has an opportunity to study the White Paper, he will see that we are making specific proposals on examining the constitution of Ascension. We accept the ruling of the European Court on Gibraltar, as we accept all its rulings. We shall also seek to deliver the right to the people of Gibraltar to vote in the European election. We are already raising that issue in Brussels, in discussions on the common position on the European Parliament. In fairness, however, I should tell the House that there is no prospect of our being able to secure that in time for the elections this June, as that is beyond any realistic timetable. However, we accept the obligation in principle and shall seek to implement it.

Mr. John Austin (Erith and Thamesmead): As chairman of the all-party—I stress the words "all-party"—group on overseas territories, may I assure my right hon. Friend, following the churlish comments from the Opposition Front Bench, that many hon. Members on both sides of the House will warmly welcome his statement? I heard his answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) about the British Indian Ocean territories, but has consideration been given to the right of the Ilios to return, if not for residence, then to visit the burial grounds of their ancestors? Will he comment on the anomaly that citizens of the Spanish colonies or overseas territories of Ceuta and Melilla on the north African mainland are able to vote in European elections, but citizens of Gibraltar, which is part of the territory of the European Union, cannot?

Mr. Cook: My hon. Friend offers a valuable argument which will be useful ammunition for me in the debate that I am sure that we are going to have with our European Union partners. I am aware of the desire of some of the Ilios to visit their burial grounds. We are examining the issue with understanding. The problems are not simple. Mauritius is 2,000 miles from the Chagos archipelago and there are tight security requirements at the defence base, but it is a legitimate aspiration that we shall continue to consider and try to find a solution to.

Mr. Andrew Rowe (Faversham and Mid-Kent): The Foreign Secretary will accept that some reciprocity would make the settlement even more acceptable. I understand that, given the numbers, it would be unreasonable to expect dependent territories to accept British citizens going out in large numbers, but will he give us an assurance that those who have a legitimate desire to seek employment, work experience or research projects in the territories will have an appropriate opportunity?

Mr. Cook: Those are essentially points for the Governments of the overseas territories. By and large, it is possible to visit, to work and to carry out research in the territories. The more successful of them have a number of people working there who are not citizens. They guard the right of residence in their islands jealously. We recognise that our offer of citizenship is non-reciprocal. However, I hope that, in the better spirit of co-operation and partnership that our offer and other commitments in the White Paper will generate, we may be able to resolve some other areas of friction.

Mr. Lindsay Hoyle (Chorley): In welcoming the White Paper, hon. Members on both sides should, in fairness, welcome the fact that we are putting right the mistakes of the previous Government. I am pleased to be associated with that. Allowing for that, what assurances are there for people crossing from Gibraltar into Spain, particularly after the plight of three of my constituents from Chorley, who were held for 15 hours in the Spanish customs post, not being allowed to go on into Spain or back into Gibraltar? I hope that my right hon. Friend will look into that.

Mr. Cook: I am aware of my hon. Friend's concerns about his constituents. He raised the issue in the House during the statement on Gibraltar. The delays at the border post at that time were wholly exceptional and wholly unacceptable. I am pleased that there have been considerable improvements in the border situation since then. Nevertheless, the rate at which vehicles and now pedestrians are being cleared is unacceptably slow. There has not been a return to normality.

I saw the Spanish Foreign Minister as recently as last weekend to raise the matter. We hope to discuss it again in the near future and shall be looking for progress that will enable people on both sides of the border to travel freely. It is proper for the House to note that a large number of Spanish residents and workers on the Spanish side of the border have complained just as vigorously as the residents of Gibraltar about the border delays. It is in the interests of Madrid to respond to their concerns as well as those of Gibraltar.

Sir Nicholas Lyell (North-East Bedfordshire): Financial regulation is obviously extremely important. Does the Foreign Secretary accept that, although a number of the dependent territories are highly sophisticated, a number will need considerable help if they are to reach the required standards this year, unless rapid changes are made? What steps are being taken by way of a suitable package of training to enable those dependent territories that have such problems to meet their obligations?

Mr. Cook: I am pleased to assure the right hon. and learned Gentleman that we provide funding for good government, and specialist advice. In fairness, the deadline of the end of this year has not been announced for the first time today; it was announced in my speech of February 1998. There has been a long lead-in, and it is a reasonable deadline. We will give assistance to those who require it, but those overseas territories that have acted, and acted well, to bring themselves up to the standard are keen that others should do so as well, because they recognise that their own reputation is at stake.

Mr. Ian Davidson (Glasgow, Pollok): Many of my constituents are interested in the overseas territories,

particularly given that Fergus McCann, the owner of Glasgow Celtic, is seeking political asylum in Bermuda—and, after the goings-on in Scottish football, who could blame him?

May I follow the point made on the need for the highest possible financial standards? I seek further clarification on whether the British Government will do all they can to ensure that any territory that changes its rules and regulations does not then face unfair competition from external jurisdictions that adopt much laxer standards, causing a leakage of trade, business and commerce away to such jurisdictions.

On the environment, what steps are the British Government taking to try to ensure that the Americans clear up bases that they have left behind—particularly in Bermuda, where they have made no effort to clear up the pollution that has been left behind? That is in noticeable contrast to the British Government—under the previous regime—who did everything they could to ensure that the British base was cleared up and completely ready to be handed over and redeveloped.

Mr. Cook: I assure my hon. Friend that there is nothing in the White Paper or my proposals that would give Fergus McCann a reciprocal right of abode in Bermuda. My hon. Friend can look forward to the return of his constituent.

We remain exercised about the environment in all our overseas territories. I cannot comment on the specific point to which my hon. Friend referred, but, if we can influence an allied country in its conduct on overseas territories, we shall certainly do so.

Mr. Bob Russell (Colchester): It may be premature to be dancing in the streets of Jamestown, but I welcome the announcement this afternoon; I am sure that all 5,500 residents of St. Helena welcome it. Has the Foreign Secretary received any apologies from the Conservative party for its legislation of the past 18 years, which made the residents of the overseas territories—and in particular St. Helena—second-class citizens when they are, in fact, as British as we are? When precisely will full British citizenship be restored? Is there a timetable? How difficult will it be to legislate? Can any other methods be used so that those people return as soon as possible as full members of the British family?

Mr. Cook: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his welcome, and I am aware of his long interest in the issue. The proposal will require legislation, and the House will understand that I cannot give a commitment as to precisely when that will take place. We will look for as early an opportunity as is practical because we want to give effect to our commitment.

I have not received any apology, but an apology would be a bridge too far. I will happily settle for an afternoon free of gratuitous insult.

Mr. Bill Michie (Sheffield, Heeley): I welcome the statement, particularly as it affects St. Helena. My right hon. Friend will be aware of my correspondence to the Department over a considerable time concerning constituents who served in the armed forces with the Saints and have campaigned for the measure—which is to be welcomed. What plans do the Government have regarding the economy and jobs; and will recruiting into the armed forces continue?

Mr. Cook: My hon. Friend raises an important point about our connection with the overseas territories. Every year, as Foreign Secretary, I lay a wreath at the cenotaph to honour those in the overseas territories who gave their lives in wars on behalf of Britain. Those who served in that way are entitled to the recognition and citizenship that we have given today.

I can assure my hon. Friend that the armed services will remain open to people from St. Helena, and indeed I understand that there are 20 to 30 currently serving. The White Paper contains several proposals to help with the economy; in particular, we commit ourselves to £26 million of continuing development aid over the next few years. We will work hard with the people of St. Helena to ensure that they have a future in their own community.

Mr. John D. Taylor (Strangford): I welcome the Foreign Secretary's statement. A wrong has certainly been made right. He stressed that one of the benefits of the changes would be that people from the overseas territories would no longer be treated as second-class citizens compared with those of French and Netherlands overseas territories. Citizens in French overseas territories have votes in European Parliament elections, and we now learn Gibraltar has been awarded the same right.

I recognise that Gibraltar is different from the other dependent territories, in that it is already in the European Union, but does not the Foreign Secretary believe that another step forward must be the consideration of how British citizens in those other territories can be given votes in European elections?

Mr. Cook: That is not a request that has been made by any overseas territory other than Gibraltar. It is hard to see how it could be contemplated as long as they choose to remain outside the European Union. The parallel with the French and Netherlands overseas territories halts on one leg, because those territories have a long tradition of being highly integrated with the Government systems of the metropolitan country and, in the case of the French ones, are in the European Union. For those reasons, I cannot see a precedent to build on, and I am not aware of any such demand from those overseas territories.

Fiona Mactaggart (Slough): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on ending an injustice that has lasted not only since the British Nationality Act 1981 but, in effect, since 20 years before, and on the associated recognition of human rights standards in the dependent territories. Does the White Paper deal with the administration of justice in some of those territories? I have been concerned about the administration of law in Anguilla and have written to him about it. Is he satisfied that we have efficient and effective ways of delivering justice in the overseas territories?

Mr. Cook: By and large, the administration of justice in the overseas territories is of a high standard, but one reason why we maintain governors is to ensure that we have an oversight of law and order and of due legal process; if we have concerns, we certainly air them. We will take up the point about which my hon. Friend has

[Mr. Cook]

written to me and ensure that she gets a full reply. As a general principle, I would not want the House to believe that it should not have faith in the judicial system in the overseas territories.

Mr. Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): I understand that, now that Hong Kong is no longer a colony, the White Paper, the publication of which I welcome, refers to about 150,000 people. Did the Foreign Secretary consider or discuss with any of the people with whom he was negotiating in the dependent territories whether they would want any representation, not in the European Union, as has been suggested, but here in the House of Commons? Was there any suggestion that they would like representation, perhaps by only two or three Members of Parliament, which would give some legitimacy to our issuing them with Orders in Council?

Mr. Cook: Although I am confident that, after today's White Paper, we could expect strong support from the overseas territories, I believe the Government's majority to be sufficiently strong without such a gesture. There is no demand from the overseas territories for the change that the hon. Gentleman proposes. It would mean that they would have had to accept a much greater integration with our government system than they have at present. The overseas territories have wide autonomy and self-government and that is more precious and important to them than any risk of compromising it to gain representation here.

Iraq

4.15 pm

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Your antennae, ever sensitive to the mood of the House of Commons, will have registered yesterday—not least through the eloquence of the right hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell), both in *The Independent* and on the Floor of the House, and of the hon. Member for Mid-Sussex (Mr. Soames), the former Minister for the Armed Forces—the growing cross-party unease at the daily bombing in Iraq. Have you had any requests from the Ministry of Defence for a statement to give an explanation of why the Syriac Christian community at Aniwa, near Erdbil, was bombed? There is evidence to suggest that there were civilian casualties, although we do not know how many. The House deserves some explanation for the constant bombing, bombing, bombing. To what end?

Madam Speaker: I regret to inform the hon. Gentleman that I have not been informed by any Cabinet Ministers that they are seeking to make a statement on that issue. I have noted the hon. Gentleman's keen interest in the subject over a long time and he has been fortunate in obtaining Adjournment debates on the subject. All credit is due to him for his assiduity in seeking those debates on the issue, and I hope that he will continue to do so.

Leasehold Reform

4.17 pm

Mr. Gareth Thomas (Clwyd, West): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to amend the law with regard to leaseholds in relation to housing for older people; and for connected purposes.

The case for reform of leasehold law is overwhelming and is recognised by many, not least the Government. Leasehold law embraces a feudal system and is a relic of the past. It creates a gross imbalance in terms of power and control between the rights and responsibilities of leaseholders and landlords. It is a system which is susceptible to grave abuse, and many hon. Members will be familiar with the many examples of exploitation, especially of older people in leasehold accommodation. Such abuse includes excessive management charges, poor-quality services and spiralling costs.

I remind the House that, in England and Wales—it is an English and Welsh problem—some 2 million homes are held under leasehold tenure. It is not just a London issue. A reform process has been under way in the House for many years, and many hon. Members, especially from Wales, have been involved. The Government have acknowledged the need for comprehensive reform of leasehold law, and their consultation paper has been widely welcomed. I also welcome the presence of the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, my hon. Friend the Member for Greenwich and Woolwich (Mr. Raynsford). He is an acknowledged expert in this area and I hope to have a constructive discussion with him on the issues that I shall raise.

The consultation paper does not go far enough in one vital area—the provision of leasehold retirement housing for older people. That area is capable of statutory definition. Leasehold retirement housing consists of blocks of purpose-built flats with communal facilities sold on long leases with age-restrictive covenants.

There are about 100,000 such housing units, many in retirement areas such as north Wales, including my own constituency. The hardship caused to holders of long leases by the defects of the present system justify special legislative consideration. I shall enumerate some of my reasons for believing that to be so.

Older people are vulnerable to financial abuse. Many live on fixed incomes and are less able financially to move elsewhere. Many move into purpose-built homes to escape the headaches and hassles of keeping larger homes. Many are unwilling to rock the boat. The average age of people who live in retirement leasehold properties is about 78.

There has been rapid growth in this sector of the housing market. Elderly people are particularly reliant on services provided by landlords or management agents, which are one attraction of this form of housing. Particular problems arise from spiralling service charges and lack of accountability, especially for the management fee element of the service charge. Despite glossy brochures and sophisticated promotional devices that help them to decide to move into such properties, people often feel that they do not ultimately get what they had bargained for. That causes great concern, particularly among older people who find services deteriorating.

Elderly people find leasehold valuation tribunals, which were meant to provide some redress in cases of dispute with landlords, inaccessible and unaffordable. I know of numerous examples of hardship. One of my constituents has encountered a string of problems over many years with the quality of service: rooms have been left dirty; house managers' hours have been cut; and there has been no cover at weekends. Much distress has been caused to residents, and my constituent feels powerless to do anything about it.

My Bill will address that mischief in three ways: first, by putting a cap on the management fee element of service charges; secondly, by enacting the right-to-manage provisions contained in the consultation paper to which I have referred; and, thirdly, by making leasehold valuation tribunals more accessible.

I propose that the cap on the management fee element should apply to all public and private retirement leasehold homes. I intend to incorporate the formula for leasehold schemes for the elderly, which applies to no less than 25 per cent. of retirement leaseholders. I disagree with the preliminary view in the White Paper that the leasehold schemes for the elderly formula should be scrapped. Many leaseholder organisations believe that it is an important yardstick, and that it should be extended, not curtailed.

Average service charges amount to £1,400 a year, a large element of which is the management fee paid above staff costs and other disbursements capable of verification. The problem is that the management fee is not provable by receipts or paperwork, which creates a temptation for hard-headed landlords to increase it willy-nilly.

The Bill will enact the right-to-manage provisions contained in the consultation paper. That will give substantial extra leverage to tenants. That right should apply across the board, to both registered social landlords and private landlords. I remind the House that no less than 50 per cent. of retirement leaseholds are run by housing associations or their subsidiaries. Housing associations have moved on from the early days. Their work is to be welcomed. Of course, they are charitable organisations with charitable objectives, but they have become more hard-headed businesses, and there is no reason why there should not be a level playing field between the private and the public sectors.

The Bill would also give the right of first refusal to registered social landlord tenants, as well as the right to appoint a new manager. Those are lacunae in the present system as it relates to leaseholders of registered social landlords.

Finally, the Bill would make the leasehold valuation tribunal system, which tends to be rule bound, more accessible. I would eliminate the fee of £500, make representation available and facilitate alternative dispute resolution.

The form of housing to which I have referred presents an attractive and viable option for those who want to be independent for as long as possible. Better regulation would improve confidence in this sector of the housing market. It would also provide valuable protection for the elderly. I commend it to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

[Mr. Gareth Thomas]

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Gareth Thomas, Mr. Barry Gardiner, Mr. Adrian Sanders, Jacqui Smith, Mrs. Ann Winterton, Mr. Austin Mitchell and Dr. Doug Naysmith.

LEASEHOLD REFORM

Mr. Gareth Thomas accordingly presented a Bill to amend the law with regard to leaseholds in relation to housing for older people; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time: and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 23 April, and to be printed [Bill 65].

TAX CREDITS BILL [*MONEY*] [No. 2]

Queen's recommendation having been signified—

Resolved,

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Tax Credits Bill, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of any expenses incurred by the Secretary of State in consequence of the Act.—[*Mr. Clelland.*]

Orders of the Day

Tax Credits Bill

As amended in the Standing Committee, considered.

4.28 pm

Madam Speaker: I must inform the House that, when we reach Third Reading, I have selected the amendment that stands in the name of the leader of the Liberal Democrats.

New Clause 5

NEW CATEGORY OF CHILD CARE PROVIDERS FOR TAX CREDIT PURPOSES

'.—(1) The Secretary of State may by regulations make a scheme for establishing a new category of persons whose charges for providing child care are to be taken into account for the purpose of determining—

(a) the appropriate maximum working families' tax credit for the purposes of section 128(5) of the Social Security Contributions and Benefits Act 1992 or section 127(5) of the Social Security Contributions and Benefits (Northern Ireland) Act 1992; or

(b) the appropriate maximum disabled person's tax credit for the purposes of section 129(8) of the Social Security Contributions and Benefits Act 1992 or section 128(8) of the Social Security Contributions and Benefits (Northern Ireland) Act 1992.

(2) A scheme so made shall—

(a) provide that a person shall not fall within the new category unless he is approved by an accredited organisation in accordance with such criteria as may be determined by or under the scheme;

(b) authorise the making of grants or loans to, and the charging of reasonable fees by, accredited organisations; and

(c) include such other provisions as the Secretary of State considers necessary or expedient.

(3) In subsection (2) above "accredited", in relation to an organisation, means accredited by the Secretary of State in accordance with such criteria as may be determined by or under the scheme.

(4) Regulations under this section—

(a) may make different provision for different cases or circumstances or for different areas;

(b) may make such incidental, supplemental, consequential and transitional provision as appears to the Secretary of State to be necessary or expedient; and

(c) shall be made by statutory instrument which shall be subject to annulment in pursuance of a resolution of either House of Parliament.'.—[*Dawn Primarolo.*]

Brought up, and read the First time.

Madam Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss the following: New clause 2—*Eligibility criteria for childcare tax credit—*

'.—In respect of the childcare tax credit component of working families' tax credit and disabled person's tax credit the Treasury shall, before this Act comes into effect, publish eligibility criteria as to what constitutes qualifying expenditure on childcare and the conditions that must be fulfilled for a childminder to be registrable for this purpose.'.

New clause 3—*Eligibility of relatives and guardians as childcare providers*—

'.—In respect of the childcare tax credit component of working families' tax credit and disabled person's tax credit, the Treasury shall publish guidelines as to whether a person who is

(a) the parent or relative of a child;

(b) has parental responsibility for a child; or

(c) is a foster parent of a child

may, for the purposes of this Act, qualify as a provider of eligible childcare for which relevant childcare charges are payable.'.

Government amendment No. 14.

The Paymaster General (Dawn Primarolo): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

I am delighted to be able to move the new clause, which will extend the range of eligible child care for the child care tax credit. There was much discussion in Committee about the eligibility of child care and it is the subject of the other new clauses grouped with new clause 5.

The current rules on eligible child care focus almost entirely on child care for the under-eights, but we have raised the children's age limit to help with child care costs for children up to 14 years, in line with the national child care strategy, and to 16 years for disabled children.

There is little in the current rules to cater for child care for the older age group, whose needs are different from those of younger children. That older group need breakfast clubs, after-school clubs and holiday clubs. Such child care is increasingly available, but the clubs are no longer limited to those run by schools or on their premises, which is what the current rules envisage. They can be organised by commercial organisations or voluntary groups, by voluntary management committees of parents and teachers, or independently from any school. The diversity of the ways in which child care is provided for those older children means that there is currently no common feature that would distinguish the appropriate good-quality providers from the inappropriate ones.

The clause enables us to create such a category of good-quality providers. That category can then be used in the tax credit rules as a definition of eligible child care. The clause is the joint work of the Inland Revenue, which administers the tax credits, and the Department for Education and Employment, which is responsible for the regulation of child care in England; it was drawn up in consultation with the Scottish Office, the Welsh Office and the Northern Ireland Office, which are responsible for child care in their areas.

The clause enables the Secretary of State to set up a two-tier approval scheme. The Secretary of State would accredit appropriate organisations to administer an approval system for child care providers. The details of the scheme would be contained in regulations made by the Secretary of State, as would the criteria for organisations to become accredited so that they can be approved providers.

Subsection (1) sets out the general principle, purpose and limits of the clause. It enables the Secretary of State to make regulations for a scheme to establish a new category of child care provider, the costs of which would be taken into account in calculating the maximum working families tax credit and disabled persons tax credit.

Mrs. Jacqui Lait (Beckenham): I am grateful to the hon. Lady and to the Government for taking up one of the points that I raised in Committee about provision for children aged between eight and 14, or between eight and 16 if they are disabled. Are the draft regulations available for perusal? If not, will the hon. Lady give me some idea of what definition of organisation will be used? For example, will it be registered companies—whether closed companies, limited companies or plcs—partnerships, or companies owned by only one person? What sort of organisations are we talking about?

Dawn Primarolo: The hon. Lady asks a number of questions and I shall do my best to reply. If I miss one out, I shall be happy to give way to her again on this important matter.

The draft regulations will be available at about the same time as the clause is considered in detail in the other place; a memorandum is now available in the Vote Office. There will be an opportunity to comment on those draft regulations and we shall seek views, especially from the child care sector, and from others who have an interest in these matters, before the draft regulations are laid before the House.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Dawn Primarolo: If the hon. Gentleman can hold on, I shall finish answering the questions of the hon. Member for Beckenham (Mrs. Lait) and then give way to him.

The hon. Lady asked who the providers would be. We shall be looking to existing recognised child care providers. It would be invidious for me to give a long list, but one current provider is the Kids Club Network, which I shall talk about later in my speech. We shall require that such providers meet a quality threshold and there will be an assessment before accreditation is granted. The child care provider will have to fall within the definitions that I mentioned—for example, breakfast, after-school or holiday clubs. I hope that that has answered all the hon. Lady's questions.

Mr. Bercow: Does the right hon. Lady agree that the regulations should be as succinct and intelligible as possible? If she does agree, will she take account of the fact that the president of the CBI, Sir Clive Thompson, has referred to the creeping paralysis of regulation currently afflicting this country? In the light of that statement, will she give a pledge to the House this afternoon that the final form of the regulations will be shorter than the 72 pages of the working time regulations and the 112 pages of the regulations relating to the implementation of the national minimum wage?

Dawn Primarolo: I assure the hon. Gentleman that we will endeavour, through the consultation process, to ensure that the regulations are clear and precise and assist those who seek to provide this type of child care. As to the length of the regulations, I am sure he accepts that it is crucial that the quality of the providers is set at a high standard. The regulations must provide guidance in that area, and the providers will be assessed according to that criterion. We are talking about people who will care for children, and parents have a right to expect that tight provisions will apply.

[Dawn Primar

We do not seek to write regulations that are of no use—that do not help people and do not achieve their objective. We intend to ensure, through consultation, that the regulations in this important area of child care are as clear as possible.

Mr. Steve Webb (Northavon): We have just passed the money resolution that pays for the implementation of the new clause. As is the nature of such things, it provides a blank cheque. Can the Minister give the House an idea of the sorts of sums the Secretary of State might spend? How many clubs are we talking about—is it tens, hundreds or thousands? How much money will be spent on accrediting them?

Dawn Primarolo: The hon. Gentleman is always keen to encourage Ministers to cite figures in the House. I do not wish to say that X number of organisations will qualify under the regulations. Many organisations may apply, but the test will be whether they reach the quality threshold. I cannot make an assessment of the numbers at this stage. However, child care provision in many sectors—for instance, Kids Club—is of a high standard, and I am sure that the number of accreditations will reflect demand.

The Secretary of State for Education and Employment will draft and lay before the House the final regulations governing assessment. An assessor appointed by the organisation seeking accreditation will undertake the assessment and then report to the Secretary of State. As to whether there will be any extra burden, I think it is fair to say that we are talking about tiny amounts of money.

Mrs. Lait: I am sorry to pursue the right hon. Lady on this narrow point, but it is best to clarify the matter. Did she say that only current providers will be able to bid for accreditation? Will new firms that pass the quality threshold be able to enter the market?

Dawn Primarolo: I do not wish to mislead the hon. Lady. It is a question whether a provider satisfies the assessor. Accreditation will not be limited only to current providers. I said earlier that there are a huge number of existing providers, but their accreditation is a matter for the assessor. That decision will be made on the basis of the quality threshold. The hon. Lady tried in Committee to ensure that payment for child care could not circulate within family units. Such arrangements should not be viewed as providing quality child care as defined in the eligibility criteria of the regulations.

Mr. Nick Gibb (Bognor Regis and Littlehampton): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Dawn Primarolo: Yes, but I shall then try to make progress.

Mr. Gibb: Will the hon. Lady explain why, at this late stage, when the Bill is on Report and is to receive a Third Reading later this evening, the Government have tabled a new clause? Why are the regulations not available to be examined before we debate and vote on the new clause? It is intolerable that we will not be receiving those regulations before the Bill receives its Third Reading tonight. Is that not a sign that the Government are in complete disarray over the Bill? It is a sign of an ill-thought-through Bill and clear incompetence.

Dawn Primarolo: I would expect no less a comment from the hon. Gentleman, who could not recognise the purpose of quality child care if it were staring him in the face. We debated that issue in Committee several times, and the Government have responded positively because good points were made. Two Departments have had to work together closely to draft the regulations and ensure that they can be placed before the House when the proper consultation has taken place. I answered the question of the hon. Member for Beckenham about when the regulations would be available and about the consultation process when the regulations were in draft form. If the hon. Gentleman had been paying a little more attention, he might have caught that.

I return to the new clause. Subsection (1) sets out the general principle, purpose and limits of the new clause. It will enable the Secretary of State to make regulations for a scheme to establish a new category of child care provider, the costs of which will be taken into account in calculating the working families tax credit and the disabled persons tax credit.

Subsection (2) says that the scheme will enable accredited organisations—this returns to the point made by the hon. Member for Beckenham—to approve the new type of child care provider within the regulations. It will enable grants or loans to be made to the accredited organisations, and them to charge prospective providers reasonable fees for that assessment. It will also allow the Secretary of State to make such provision as is necessary.

Subsection (3) confirms that the accredited organisations will be those accredited by the Secretary of State under the rules set out in the scheme.

Mrs. Lait: On a point of detail, which is not clear from my reading of the new clause, am I correct in believing that the registered organisations will be registered under education Acts by the Department for Education and Employment, not by local authorities?

Dawn Primarolo: Yes, the power to confer the accreditation will lie with the Secretary of State.

Subsection (4) sets out the powers to make the rules for the scheme in regulations and states that they are to be made by statutory instrument under the negative procedure, under which either House can make a resolution or annul them.

Amendment No. 14 is consequential on the new clause and will enable the Secretary of State to incur the costs of administering the new child care scheme. It will amend the Bill's financial provisions to authorise the Secretary of State to use the moneys provided by the vote of Parliament, a point about which the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) asked me earlier.

We have placed a memorandum explaining the details of how the scheme will work in the House of Commons Library, and copies were made available.

Mr. Eric Pickles (Brentwood and Ongar): This is a technical point. I may have misheard the hon. Lady. Did she say that the registration will be the responsibility of

the Secretary of State? As she knows, local authorities have that responsibility for child care providers for children under eight. Will there be two sets of people responsible for registration—local authorities and, for children over eight, the Secretary of State?

4.45 pm

Dawn Primarolo: Yes, for the purposes of eligibility and tax credit, the Secretary of State sets the regulations for children over eight years of age. The hon. Gentleman will know that consultation has been completed and that the details concerning the regulations that apply generally to child care and all child care providers are being considered by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. When he arrives at final decisions, the provisions that are before us will fit in with the regulations, whatever they may be.

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): I have a simple question on new clause 5 and the hon. Lady's answer will assist me and, perhaps, the House. Has it passed the plain English test?

Dawn Primarolo: I do not know. Is the hon. Lady about to tell me that it has not? We do our best, but if she feels that the clause needs some correction, I should be more than happy to take note of what she has to say. She echoes the point that the hon. Member for Beckenham was pressing earlier about the need for the regulations to be simple, while being clear and precise in their intention.

Broadly, the proposal will allow the Secretary of State to establish a scheme that will accredit organisations that have an appropriate quality assurance scheme for child care providers. Quality assurance schemes will need to cover the way in which the providers ensure the safety and welfare of the children in their care, look at the quality of the activities offered to the children and ensure that they are cared for equally.

Accreditation can be conditional and organisations may be required to supply to the Inland Revenue information about approved providers and monitor the operation of their quality assurance schemes. Once accredited, organisations will be able to approve child care providers who reach the appropriate agreed standard, and the tax credit rules will then enable the costs of child care by these approved providers to be eligible for help.

Miss McIntosh: Will the hon. Lady explain to me what a quality assurance scheme is? Who will define what such a scheme is? Will it be uniformly applied throughout the United Kingdom?

Dawn Primarolo: Quality assurance will be laid out in detail in the regulations. It will cover the period of accreditation; the agreement of the organisation to be monitored and evaluated and to keep and produce records when required; the establishment of an arbitration system by the organisation for the use of child care providers who are unhappy with the decision not to approve them; and the sort of information that organisations will need to provide to parents, child care providers, the Inland Revenue and relevant national authorities. As I said earlier, it would have to cover the health, safety and welfare of children, including the employment of suitable staff, quality of activities and programmes offered to children and, of course, the security of the children.

Mr. Bercow: Earlier, we talked about simplicity and intelligibility. Perhaps I may press the hon. Lady on specificity, given that she said a few moments ago that the regulations would shortly be available. They are a Pandora's box, which we all wait to see opened. Can the hon. Lady be a little more precise and tell us exactly when we shall be able to focus our beady eyes on them?

Dawn Primarolo: I think I have answered that question—and once the draft regulations are available for scrutiny, I look forward to the hon. Gentleman casting his beady eyes over them and assisting us, both in achieving clarity and with plain English.

The regulations setting up the scheme will be made by the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, and they will be for the specific purpose of extending the range of child care eligible for the child care tax credits.

Mrs. Lait: I am simply asking for information, as the proposals are so important and so new to us. Under which Act will the Secretary of State for Education and Employment make the regulations?

Dawn Primarolo: The power to make the regulations is conferred by the Bill. The Secretary of State for Education and Employment is the relevant Minister. The power to create the regulations is covered by the clause, and the Secretary of State has that power as part of his responsibility for education.

Mrs. Lait: I am sorry to pursue the hon. Lady. Although the power to make the regulations is provided under the Bill, it must surely come under the Department for Education and Employment's own legislation, as does, for example, the legislation providing for the registration of private and state schools, and thereby allowing the Department to inspect. I am asking under which Act of the DfEE the clubs will be registered.

Dawn Primarolo: The Secretary of State has powers to set regulations relating to child care. Clearly, that is under review. I do not have the reference to hand, but I shall be happy to get the information that the hon. Lady seeks. She will understand that the Bill gives the power for the purpose only of tax credits, to extend eligibility for that purpose only, while the Secretary of State completes his consultation on the regulation of child care to fit in with the national child care strategy.

Mr. Pickles: It would be helpful if hon. Lady would give an undertaking to confirm before Third Reading where the authorisation is provided for in statute. If it is any help to her, I think that it is in the Children Act 1989.

Dawn Primarolo: I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's comment. I am not convinced that he is correct about the reference. He may well be, but, in any case, I am happy to give him the assurance that he seeks. I shall be speaking during the evening, and I shall give the reference to the House, as he requests.

The accreditation scheme will be United Kingdom-wide, just as the tax credits are United Kingdom-wide, but the regulations will be made after consultation with colleagues in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. As is proper for issues relating to regulations for child care, the scheme will be administered separately in Scotland,

[Dawn Primarolo]

Wales and Northern Ireland, using a common set of rules which, as the clause makes clear, can reflect specific national or regional needs.

We believe that that is an important extension of the categories of child care eligible for child care tax credit. It fills a practical gap in the current rules, as was clearly identified in Committee and elsewhere. I commend new clause 5 to the House.

New clauses 2 and 3 are grouped with new clause 5. The measures that new clause 2 calls for have already been taken. It calls for us to publish the eligibility criteria, which has been done in the regulations. It also calls on us to publish the conditions for registration as a child minder, which is not for the Treasury or the Inland Revenue to do, but is done by local authorities on the basis of published guidance from the Department for Education and Employment. Therefore, new clause 2 is not necessary.

With respect, new clause 3 looks at the problem from the wrong end. It asks us to publish guidance about the eligibility of people listed in the Children Act 1989 as those who do not need to register as child minders to care for their children, but our rules operate to consider the type of care that is provided and whether it is one of the types that will qualify.

If such people are registered child minders they get over the first hurdle, but further rules prevent the churning of payments within households, which has been referred to in Committee. That obviously stops the abuse, which has so concerned many members of the Committee, and I therefore ask the House to reject new clauses 2 and 3 and to vote for Government new clause 5.

Mr. Pickles: What a pleasure it is to hear the Paymaster General in full voice. She was a little indisposed in Committee and lost her voice, which is a cruel and unusual punishment for a politician, so it is nice to hear her in good voice today.

Dawn Primarolo: It is a pleasure to sit opposite the hon. Gentleman, who always behaves as such. I am grateful for the kind views that he expressed in Committee, especially when he asked me to leave so that I did not give him the flu. That was said, however, with the best of intentions and my recovery was helped by knowing how much he wanted me to get well.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. This is all very touching, and I hope that we feel a great deal better for it, but may we return to discussing the Bill?

Mr. Pickles: Indeed, but I am afraid that we are like that, Mr. Deputy Speaker; we are fairly chummy. I can recall—

Mr. Bercow: This is the cuddly Conservative party.

Mr. Pickles: I have no objection to that description.

On the day that the Bill was published, I remember waking to the melodious tones of the Paymaster General, who was on the BBC's "Today" programme. She said, "The really important element for women is the presence of the child care tax credit." So, with some enthusiasm, my hon. Friend the Member for Bognor Regis and Littlehampton (Mr. Gibb) and I reached for the Bill to look for the child care tax credit. Could we find a reference to child care rates? Sadly, we could not. The absence of any such reference was a matter of contention on Second Reading and remained a matter of contention in Committee. The child care tax credit is the tax credit which dare not speak its name.

We were told that it was not necessary to amend the Bill to include the child care tax credit and that everything would be taken care of through regulations, so it is not surprising that we regard the Government new clause as something of a victory, particularly for my hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Mrs. Lait), who raised the matter consistently in Committee.

How can we consider how the credit will operate when no regulations have been published and we have no real knowledge of what will happen? We are told that by the time the regulations are published, the Bill will have gone to the other place, which will have the benefit of considering the legislation. Although hon. Members voted yesterday to abolish certain people's membership of the other place, they place enormous trust in them in this respect.

I should have liked to have the opportunity to consider the regulations and to arrive at a conclusion, but I believe that the Conservative Opposition must take some of the blame for this new clause. I asked an official to explain the meaning of it because it was a little unclear, and was told that I should not be surprised that it was unclear as it was part of the panic reaction to our protracted probing in Committee.

5 pm

Many questions remain unanswered. Is it still the Government's contention that the measure will cost £200 million, as they have so optimistically suggested, or will it cost £4 billion, as the Institute for Fiscal Studies has suggested? It remains a question of eligibility and take-up. The new clause seeks to give more regulation-making powers to the Secretary of State to establish a new category of claimant, whose child care charges can be taken into account when calculating entitlement to working families tax credit and disabled persons tax credit.

I had an opportunity to read the memorandum produced by the Inland Revenue, which makes it clear that the Government intend to expand the definition of eligibility to child care for children over the age of eight. As is so often the case, we shall have to wait a long time for the regulations to understand exactly what will happen. We do not know about the new quality assurance measures for those concerned; nor are we clear who will carry out or pay for those inspections. We are told that the trained independent quality assessors mentioned in the memorandum will be the responsibility of the Department for Education and Employment.

We know that registration of child care for children under the age of eight comes under the Children Act 1989 and is the responsibility of local authorities. The Paymaster General said that there would now be two forms of registration: one for children over the age of eight, and another for children under the age of eight. It would be helpful if she would say whether the Government intend gradually to relieve local authorities of their responsibility in that regard. If not, this measure will be a further burden on those authorities.

There remains the question of eligibility and take-up. The current arrangement under family credit operates by way of disregard rather than cash payment. Cash payment is a much more attractive way to receive a credit. It is therefore not surprising that the House of Commons Library has said:

"The increased generosity of the tax will potentially create a situation in which parents will have a clear financial incentive to obtain registered child care rather than rely on informal networks, such as friends and relatives".

The Committee spent a lot of time discussing eligibility. The evidence was conflicting. We know the position with regard to section 71 of the Children Act 1989. In response to a question by my hon. Friend the Member for Bromsgrove (Miss Kirkbride) about whether a child's mother could become a registered child minder, the assistant director of the personal taxation division at the Inland Revenue stated before the Social Security Select Committee:

"there is nothing to stop anyone, if they can meet the conditions, and it is not for us to make a judgment on that, if they passed the conditions in previous years."

On 9 February, the Financial Secretary said:

"Parents and relatives, including grandparents, can register as child minders, but family credit legislation does not consider payment between partners to be a relevant child care charge. That provision will be incorporated into the rules governing the working families tax credit."

I asked the hon. Lady a simple question: was not the difference between what the Government were saying and what the Institute for Fiscal Studies was saying a question of human behaviour? She replied that it was. I have the quotation before me. Does she want me to read it out? I said:

"Would it be fair to say . . . that the difference between the IFS estimate and the Government's estimate is a difference in the understanding of the way in which human nature operates?"

She replied:

"I understand the point that the hon. Gentleman is making. I would have more regard for it if Opposition Members had made the same points about family credit legislation, but they did not."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee D*, 9 February 1999; c. 83-85.]

I accept the ticking off. She is right, but the point is nevertheless a good one.

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mrs. Barbara Roche): The hon. Gentleman knows that I would never dare tick him off, but we had a number of exchanges in Committee on the subject. I said that, in relation to behaviour, the determining factor for parents choosing child care was the best interests of their child. That is the key underlying point. That is the message which was sent by Labour Members, not only on Second Reading, but throughout the Committee stage. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will confirm that.

Mr. Pickles: I still think that that is a yes to my original question. We need to have a look at the potential take-up rate. We know from 1996 Trades Union Congress general council survey that half the women with children below the age of four years work. We know that 16 per cent. are in full-time work and that 33 per cent. are in part-time work. We also know that 78 per cent. of pre-school children regularly spend some time being looked after by some person other than their mother.

It is not unreasonable to say that the IFS estimate of £4 billion is probably wrong—that suggests 100 per cent. take-up. However, the figure for the number of children in the informal care network is about 78 per cent and if we round that down to 75 per cent, the cost of the child care tax credit is probably £3 billion. If grandparents, as the Minister suggested, were used as child minders, 30 per cent. of children would be involved, so the cost would be £1 billion. No matter how we stack up the figures, the cost is considerably greater than the £200 million that the Government are suggesting. The point that the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) rightly made is that we should have some suggestion of the sums involved.

There appears to be nothing in the Bill or the suggested regulations to prevent neighbours from mutually looking after each other's children, with both generating child care tax credit and working families tax credit. I cannot see how it is to the benefit of children or the families, or how it helps to get people into work, if we set up a scheme by which people can generate tax credit simply by splitting their child care among themselves.

The Minister must deal with that point and the others that I have raised. She must give an indication of cost. She must say when the various regulations will be ready; otherwise, we are writing more than a blank cheque because the money allocated for working families tax credit will simply be eaten away by a rapid expansion of child care tax credit, on a self-generating basis.

Mr. Webb: It is some weeks since we concluded the Committee stage of our deliberations. The feeling of walking through fog that persisted throughout those deliberations lifted briefly, but has suddenly returned this afternoon when the Paymaster General described the new clause. Throughout the Committee, we asked a series of simple, straightforward questions that were amenable to simple, straightforward answers, but straightforward answers came there none. I feel that we are getting the same thing this afternoon.

I find it incredible that the money resolution relating to new clause 5 has just gone through on the nod, but, when pressed, the Minister was unable to tell us—she could not even tell us the number of zeros—how much money would be spent by the Secretary of State under the new clause. I am astonished that there seems to be no indication of the number of organisations that the new accreditors will have to accredit—whether it is hundreds, thousands or tens of thousands. It is somewhat depressing that the Minister was unable to give any answer to that question.

I reiterate the concerns that have been expressed about the lack of scrutiny. The memorandum that we saw this week says:

"Draft regulations will be exposed shortly, while the Bill is being considered by Parliament"—

viz, not by the House of Commons.

I know that the Government do not have a lot of respect for parliamentary scrutiny of their legislation, but it is deeply distressing that they should table a new clause almost the day before the debate on Report and not produce draft regulations until afterwards. It does not encourage us to feel that the Bill will be properly scrutinised.

Mr. Oliver Heald (North-East Hertfordshire): Can the hon. Gentleman give any instance of the Government's

[Mr. Oliver Heald]

taking account of the scrutinising role of the House? He says that they do not take much account of it, but they do not seem to take any account of it.

Mr. Webb: There is an interesting contrast between this debate and what happened in Committee, when we were presented with draft regulations that helped our deliberations.

Let me now raise the issue of which form of child care should be subsidised by the state. My party wants to give parents—mothers, typically—choice in two regards. They should be able to choose whether to bring up their children themselves or pay someone else to do it, and if they decide to pay someone else they should be able to choose the most appropriate form of child care. The new clause provides neither of those choices. It offers no financial assistance to a mother who prefers to bring up her children herself, rather than taking paid employment and paying someone else. As the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. Pickles) pointed out, that could lead to neighbours looking after each other's children, which would be bizarre in the extreme.

The new clause identifies yet another category of state-approved child care; but the second most popular category of child care is provided by nannies, who are no longer the preserve of the rich few but are widely employed, for example, to provide support for mothers who have flexible employment patterns—such as nurses—and who would not be catered for appropriately by registered forms of child care.

We do not think that child care should be subsidised only in the case of certain providers, as the new clause suggests. We want the money to be paid to mothers whether or not they choose to take paid employment, to be spent on the form of child care that they prefer. We want mothers to be able to choose whether to work, and to choose the child care that they want. Regrettably, new clause 5 allows them to do neither.

Mrs. Lait: I hope that the Paymaster General did not think I was persecuting her; if she did, I apologise. I was merely trying to establish the precise meaning of new clause 5, given that, regrettably, there are no draft regulations—as the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) and some of my hon. Friends have already pointed out.

At least the Government have finally recognised the problem posed by children aged between eight and 14, and I am grateful for that. Does the provision extend to disabled children of 16, thus plugging a gap in the Children Act 1989?

Dawn Primarolo: Yes.

Mrs. Lait: I assumed that was the case, but it is as well to put it on the record.

Welcome though that is, some problems remain. The Paymaster General said that only organisations that currently exist, such as breakfast clubs, after-school clubs and holiday clubs, will be eligible to provide child care whose cost can be recovered. As some of my hon. Friends have pointed out, there are many other forms of care for children aged between eight and 14.

Dawn Primarolo: I thought I had made it clear that new providers would not be excluded. The point is that the quality assurance threshold must be reached, and an assessor would make that decision.

5.15 pm

Mrs. Lait: I thank the Paymaster General, but that is not quite what I meant. I took on board her confirmation that there would be room for new entrants into the market. That is, in fact, almost inevitable, as large parts of the United Kingdom do not provide many clubs of the kind that the hon. Lady said would be most likely to be recognised.

We should think more about the provision that children between eight and 14 need. However unstructured breakfast, after-school and holiday clubs may seem, they nevertheless provide a structured set-up which not all children will fit into. Children of that age may want to do other things, but they may still require child care of some sort if their parents work. I may be castigated for saying this, but more and more children enjoy riding. Would pony clubs count as registered child minders, given that they would, in effect, be looking after the children during the day?

Many special interest groups provide child care in that sense, and the Government should consider enabling them to apply and be assessed for quality status. Children between eight and 14 do not want Tonka toys; they are at a crucial stage, when they are exploring possibilities and expanding their horizons. I understand that the Financial Secretary to the Treasury has a child of that age, and I am sure that she will back me up. Indeed, she may be able to advise her fellow Minister on the potential eligibility of other forms of child care.

Might a child minder, or a group of child minders, be a better option? I shall not go into the potential for families to provide child care, but children between eight and 14 may well want one-to-one child care, and their parents may want that as well. To rule out such provision would be short-sighted, and might not benefit children.

A school of thought is emerging in the world of education. As we all know, after a day at school children are tired and their blood sugar is low. In my day, children went home and had tea and sandwiches to raise their blood sugar levels, went out to play and then did their homework. *[Interruption.]* An interesting dispute is in progress on the Government Front Bench. I suggest that it is best for a child to work off excess energy, or perhaps build it up again, and then do homework before turning on the television. I agree with the Financial Secretary if that is what she thinks. There are different formats and formulae, however. The education world seems to be moving towards the view that a long day of continuous education is not the best way of enabling children to perform properly at school the next day, as well as getting the best from their homework. I completely accept the principle that we should emphasise homework, but I do not believe that the best way of educating our children is to send them straight from school to homework.

There is still a need for diversity in child care for children aged between eight and 14. I am concerned that the new clause would only force children between parallel

lines—the last thing that they need is to be forced into one, narrow type of after-school care. As the Bill is being considered in the other place, I very much hope that the Government—who have already re-thought some issues, for which I am grateful, such as our original suggestion that they should broaden the scope of after-school care—will also re-think the different types of child care to which the provisions will apply, so that children aged between eight and 14 might benefit to the maximum from the care that best suits them.

Our amendments would deal with another concern expressed in Committee: who will be able to register as a child minder. The Government have not yet recognised that concern, which perhaps poses a conundrum for them. The issue arose initially from a question in the Social Security Committee from my hon. Friend the Member for Bromsgrove (Miss Kirkbride), who asked:

"There is nothing to stop mum becoming a registered child-minder?"

The Inland Revenue official replied:

"there is nothing to stop anyone, if they can meet the conditions, and it is not for us to make a judgment on that, if they passed the conditions in previous years."

The Inland Revenue is effectively saying that there is a loophole, as it would be possible for someone in the family circle to become a registered child minder if he or she meets the local authority's criteria. Although we dealt with the matter exhaustively in Committee, I am not satisfied that that loophole has been closed. One rather suspects that, should the loophole remain open after the Bill is passed, then, before long, test cases will be heard on it.

As I said in Committee, people will act in their own best economic interests. Many people may say, "My best economic interests are served by keeping my child in the family circle, but it would be economically better for us all if a member of my family circle could register as a child minder." The prohibition in the Children Act 1989 would therefore be got round.

Although I laud the Government's belief that people will not change their patterns of behaviour merely because of tax or benefit provisions, I deeply and fundamentally disagree that people will not change their behaviour for those reasons. People will act to maximise their income—which is one of the reasons why the poverty trap exists: some people feel that they will receive more income by staying on benefit, rather than going out to work.

I accept and appreciate that the Government are trying very hard to end the poverty trap, as they have defined it. However, with the very generous benefits that they are providing—we can argue about whether the benefits are too generous—Ministers are effectively encouraging people to organise their affairs so that they maximise their income. I therefore most strongly urge the Government to clear up the confusion over whether a family member may register to provide child care.

I am most grateful that we have made some progress on some of the issues, but hope that the Government will take into account the other issues that I have raised.

Miss Julie Kirkbride (Bromsgrove): My hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Mrs. Lait) very generously mentioned in her speech the contributions made by me and other hon. Members in Committee. She also eloquently raised issues about what is still wrong with new clause 5 and the Bill. I should like to do the same.

My hon. Friend made a good point about whether the Government proposals on carers for eight to 14-year-olds are appropriate. Sadly, it is a long time since I was eight or 14. Nevertheless, I believe that being shoved into an institution may not be the most appropriate form of child care. Many mothers who will be able to claim the working families tax credit will have an incentive to do just that, rather than to let their child stay at home, with gran or with anyone else, although that might have been the most appropriate form of care. My hon. Friend made an interesting point on the fact that an incentive-based system of help with child care will create different priorities for families.

Provision for eight to 14-year-olds will be different from that for other age groups precisely because—as Opposition Members pointed out to the Minister and other Labour Members in Committee—there will be an open-ended public expenditure commitment on the child care tax credit. In the sum required for the credit, there is a vast gap between the Government's figure of £200 million—I think that that is their figure, which was so low that I should be forgiven for adding or omitting a zero—and the £4 billion figure that, as my hon. Friend the Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. Pickles) said, was provided by the Institute for Fiscal Studies as the credit's potential take-up. The Chancellor cannot be very pleased with that £4 billion figure.

Even if new clause 5 is added to the Bill, it is still possible that younger children may be eligible to have a child minder—rather than being pushed into institutionalised care, in the kids' clubs envisaged by the Government. It will be a problem if current informal family child care arrangements are affected.

Dawn Primarolo: Has the hon. Lady ever been to a nursery or a kids' club, which she consistently calls "an institution"? Does she agree that mothers in her constituency, like those in my constituency, make their choices solely on the basis of what is best for their children?

Miss Kirkbride: I have been to many of those organisations in my constituency, including pre-schools—which, under the current Government, are closing down in droves, as they can no longer afford to operate. I am very well aware of the arrangements—

Dawn Primarolo: The hon. Lady calls them institutions.

Miss Kirkbride: I used the word in its wider definition. The fact is that they are based not in the home, but somewhere else. If the hon. Lady wishes to dispute semantics, Mr. Deputy Speaker will only call us to order. Children would not be at home, but in another building, which—using a wide definition—could be called an institutionalised form of care. It may be more appropriate—*[Interruption.]* Forgive me, but there seems to be an awful lot of interruptions by Ministers.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I simply tell the hon. Lady that if she does not wish to be distracted by sedentary comments, she should ignore them.

Miss Kirkbride: It might be even more appropriate if Ministers were to refrain from making sedentary comments. However, as I was saying before the hon. Lady interrupted me—

Dawn Primarolo: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Miss Kirkbride: No, I shall not. The hon. Lady has already intervened.

Dawn Primarolo: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I did not make any comment across the Chamber to the hon. Lady except for the one that she—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The Minister knows perfectly well that that is not a point of order but a point of argument. I suggest that the debate settles down and gets back to the substance of the new clause.

5.30 pm

Miss Kirkbride: I was about to close my remarks on the open-ended financial commitment that the Government appear to be making. There is still a problem that the child-minding arrangements for younger children could undermine existing child care arrangements that do not involve the taxpayer. Situations could be created in which people will seek to become registered child minders, creating a commitment and a huge expense for the taxpayer. However much the new clause may be an attempt to reduce the potential financial commitment, we feel that it is not good enough.

Dawn Primarolo: I have nothing to add to my earlier comments. I have laid out clearly the proposals for the undertakings in the accreditation. Perhaps this is an appropriate time to answer the question of the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. Pickles) about regulation for eight to 14-year-olds and eight to 16-year-olds. Powers are provided for in the Bill. There are no other powers. The Children Act 1989 provides regulation for those up to eight years old. This is the first time that the older age range will be regulated.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause read a Second time, and added to the Bill.

New Clause 1

HOUSING COSTS

'.—In section 135 of the Social Security Contributions and Benefits Act 1992, there shall be inserted—

"(1A) The applicable amount prescribed for a working families' tax credit and a disabled person's tax credit shall include an amount for prescribed housing costs".'.—*[Mr. Webb.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Webb: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

The previous new clause was hailed ás a victory for the hon. Member for Beckenham (Mrs. Lait). I believe that this one is about to be hailed as a victory for the hon. Member for Northavon. When I opened *The Guardian* on Monday morning, I saw the headline "Housing benefit to become a tax credit". That is the subject of the new clause, which says that an amount for housing costs should be included in the applicable amounts for the working families tax credit and the disabled persons tax credit. I am confident that the Minister will tell us that the Government accept the new clause and that we can move on.

In case the Minister does not accept the new clause, I should like to explain the purpose of the new clause further. I thank her for giving me access to her officials, with whom I have been able to talk through the ideas. I shall not attribute any views to those officials, but the fact that I saw the story in the newspaper some days later makes me think that my ideas were well received.

The new clause addresses two problems with the existing regime. First, there is an inequity between renters and home buyers, because whereas low-income renters can receive help with the cost of their rent, low-income home buyers receive no such help. The second problem is the overlap between the working families tax credit and housing benefit. We still have the absurd situation in which some people—admittedly fewer—can lose up to 90p in the pound through the combined withdrawal of working families tax credit and housing benefit. The Government could have minimised that absurd overlap through a new clause such as this.

We propose that an amount in the working families tax credit should relate to household size and composition, meeting some proportion of an individual's rent—or imputed rent, in the case of home buyers. It would not relate to their specific rent. There would not be all the bureaucracy of finding out precisely how much rent the person concerned was paying, or how much their mortgage was and how much it changed when interest rates changed. The aim would be to make a contribution towards the typical housing consumption of a household of a given size and composition.

That strategy has two advantages. First, it would provide a work incentive. The Government talk endlessly about welfare to work. The new clause would give unemployed home buyers an improved incentive to take a low-paid job. In my constituency, where unemployment is at only about 1.5 per cent., the only people who tell me that they cannot afford to take a job are those with mortgages, because they would lose all help with their mortgage interest. My proposal would not cover the whole mortgage. We are not trying to help people to acquire valuable assets; all that we are trying to do is meet the cost of housing services at a minimal level. The new clause would give an improved work incentive to one of the groups still in the unemployment trap. For that reason, I hope that the Government will look sympathetically at it.

Secondly, the new clause would minimise the absurd overlap with housing benefit. It is extraordinary that someone could be given the working families tax credit with one hand, but find that the council reduced their housing benefit with the other. Rent levels are already extraordinarily high. If the working families tax credit could be used to make a contribution towards rent, the housing benefit system would not have to cover that portion of the rent. That would float tens of thousands of people off housing benefit, saving on bureaucracy and making the system simpler for the claimant and for the authorities.

We probably differ from the Government in not seeing the inclusion of housing in the working families tax credit as a means of cutting overall housing benefit support.

We do not want to leave people without enough money to pay their rent. We do not want to leave them having to engage in mythical shopping around for smaller rented accommodation, because for social tenants in particular there is often no opportunity to shop around. The Government might be thinking of using the proposals as a way of leaving people short on their rent assistance. That is what I infer from the newspaper reports. If that is not the case, I hope that the Minister will contradict it. We are talking about giving a slice of money, varying only according to household size and composition, to reflect the consumption of housing services and help to float some people off housing benefit.

In its briefing on the Bill, the Chartered Institute of Housing urges the Government to make clear their intentions on housing benefit. I am concerned about the rush in which the Government brought forward the Bill—a rush which we have seen from this afternoon's child care proposals and the fact that there was no mention of housing in the Bill. I am offering the Government a chance to redeem themselves and bring housing into the Bill, as the Prime Minister apparently wants. If we put the measure in this afternoon, when the Government get round to working out exactly what they want, we shall have done them a favour by giving them the provision in primary legislation, so they will be able to get on with the matter without the need for extra primary legislation. This is a long-overdue reform.

How a proposal might be paid for is always a subject close to my heart. I would not dream of making a suggestion that did not have a price tag attached. The Government are spending money through the working families tax credit on reducing the taper from 70 to 55 per cent. On the face of it, that looks good for work incentives. Surely taking a lower rate from people is good. However, as the Government know, although fewer people face 80 per cent. or so, more people face 50 or 60 per cent., which is still a substantial chunk. It is not clear that bringing more people into such marginal rates is good for incentives overall. As with so many elements of the Bill, the Government have produced no evidence to show that their proposals would be better overall. There are simulation models that could be used to assess that, but I am not aware that the Government have used them. My suggestion to pay for my proposal is to keep the taper relatively high. Putting assistance in with housing would equalise the position between tenures and would reduce the overlap with housing benefit.

The proposal is costed and we have provided the means of paying for it. It would reduce distortions and work disincentives, while doing the Government a favour, because they propose to do something similar anyway. I warmly commend the new clause to the House.

Mr. Pickles: It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb). His arguments were persuasive, although I do not think that they will affect our vote this evening.

At times, the three weeks that we spent going through the Bill felt like performing "Hamlet" without the Prince of Denmark. We cannot come to a reasonable decision about the effect of tax credits without a good understanding of how housing costs will be affected. The success of the tax credit system—the declared aim of which is to ease the gap from dependency to work—will largely depend on the relationship between housing costs, working families tax credit and disabled persons tax credit.

We are fortunate to have the guidance of the Select Committee on Social Security in its report "Tax and Benefits: Implementation of Tax Credits". We see from the report that a succession of groups pointed out that marginal tax rates are likely to be fairly limited in respect of people who claim housing benefits. The Institute for Fiscal Studies has calculated that, following the introduction of working families tax credit, people subject to tax and national insurance reductions and receiving family credit, housing benefit and council tax benefit will see their marginal tax rate reduced by only about 1.5 per cent., to around 95.3 per cent.

Under the Bill, working families tax credit will be treated as income for housing benefit and council tax benefit. As the hon. Member for Northavon said, there is no in-work benefit to help housing costs for those with mortgages, and about half of those entitled to working families tax credit will be owner-occupiers.

Professor Stephen Wilcox, of the centre for housing policy at York university, told the Select Committee that only those with a very small mortgage will be better off as a result of working families tax credit or disabled persons tax credit. He added that the great weakness of the proposed reform was that, for many households, the higher rents and confusing overlap of the different in-work benefits will remain in place. Such households, as a result, will be no more likely to take account of the potential for housing benefits to boost their in-work incomes than they are now. For high-cost households, the message will not be effective.

It is little wonder that the Select Committee thought it necessary to issue a stern warning that the Government's reform of tax and benefits would be jeopardised unless housing benefit was fully taken into account. We know from the Chancellor's statement last week that he is actively considering incorporating housing benefit into the working families tax credit to ensure that people in rented accommodation, and owner-occupiers, benefit.

The hon. Member for Northavon referred to leaks in *The Guardian*. He is a sensible chap, and I am sure that he ignores the Sunday newspapers. However, the leaks to which he referred were repeats of previous leaks in Sunday newspapers. *The Independent on Sunday* said:

"Poorest families to be forced to move".

The Sunday Telegraph said:

"Housing benefits to be axed and council rents raised".

We understand that a Cabinet Committee—involving the Prime Minister, the Deputy Prime Minister, the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Secretary of State for Social Security—is determined to cut the £12 billion housing benefit bill. If the Government are sufficiently ready to leak in advance their plans to national newspapers on a Sunday—and to repeat those leaks to other newspapers on a Monday—surely they should have sufficient confidence to bring those proposals to the House today so that we can assess them.

Is it the Government's intention to impose a monthly limit on the amount of rent funded by the Government? Is it their intention to bring in regional levels for housing assistance? Is it their intention to ensure that all tenants contribute towards the cost of their rent? Is it their

[Mr. Pickles]

intention to force tenants out of their homes to find cheaper accommodation? That is controversial. Does that mean that widows who have lived in their homes for many years are to be forced out by the Government?

5.45 pm

Is it the Government's intention to offer cash incentives to attract younger people? It was suggested in the newspapers that nurses and young professionals could move to run-down estates. We might find the yuppies moving into a badly run Labour authority. That will not bring redemption. Is this the final break with the past and with the Labour municipal housing policies that have characterised post-war Labour Governments? The Government have a duty to explain themselves. I am giving the Financial Secretary an opportunity—I know she is a decent person—to come clean, to bare all and to tell us the truth.

Mrs. Roche: It is a pleasure—I use the word advisedly—to appear with the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. Pickles) again. In future, appearing in Committee or a debate will, for me, be like seeing a performance of "Hamlet" without Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.

Mr. Pickles: They are dead.

Mrs. Roche: Only at the end of the play—unless one has seen the shortened version.

I am clearly going to disappoint the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb), although I think that he tabled his new clause merely to probe our intentions. He referred to a discussion with my officials on the subject. It was a useful and helpful discussion, and we thank him for coming in. We understand his expertise, and he is responsible for some of the academic work in the area.

The House will appreciate that the interaction of benefit tapers with the two tax credits produces high marginal deduction rates. That is borne out by some of the work done by the hon. Member for Northavon. However, the new tax credits do two things to help in this area. First, the more generous help that the credits give will help float more people off housing benefit—to use the words of the hon. Gentleman—as a direct result of the measures announced in the Budget. Secondly, the lower taper within the working families tax credit and the disabled persons tax credit will mean that fewer people will see high marginal deduction rates.

As the economic and fiscal strategy report made clear, the Government believe that Britain's current housing system is failing those in need. Our ambition is to modernise housing policy to make the housing market and the labour market fairer to all concerned. In his Budget statement, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor indicated that, over time, he wants the Government's better deal for work to include help with housing costs for renters and home owners going back to work.

The House will realise that personal housing support will need to be reformed gradually. The current system of housing benefit is too complicated to be integrated with the working families tax credit and the disabled persons tax credit. Even if personal housing support were simplified, the systems for administering an element for housing costs in the new tax credits would take the Inland Revenue many years to install. Furthermore, the current structure of social rent would need to be reformed before we could move in that direction.

The Government have begun working in partnership with local authorities to develop proposals for the simplification and improvement of the existing system of housing benefit. For the future, the Government are looking at options for strengthening the link between social rents and the size, location and condition of properties. The Government will consider further reforms over the coming months, and will announce details in a Green Paper on housing policy later in the year. Of course there will be extensive consultation with all concerned.

I hope that, given what I have said, the motion will be withdrawn, but if it is pressed to a vote, I ask the House to reject it.

Mr. Webb: I am grateful to the Financial Secretary for her generous comments, but I am not convinced that she responded to what I said. I pointed out the discrepancy between renters and home buyers, and she did not suggest anything to remedy that. In fact, the Budget took mortgage tax relief away from buyers, so the Government missed an opportunity to give low-income buyers some assistance.

The Financial Secretary said nothing to reassure me about the continuing and absurd overlap between housing benefit and the working families tax credit, to which the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. Pickles) referred. She said that the structure of social rents did not allow the Government to do as we suggested, because it was a mess. I accept that it is a mess, but my proposal is that not actual rents, but an average amount for a family of a particular size and composition be matched with the working families tax credit. If people were paying over the odds, the system would not have to subsidise that.

For all those reasons, my colleagues and I feel that the new clause has merit, and we want to press the motion to a vote.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 39, Noes 303.

Division No. 112] **[5.51 pm**

AYES

Allan, Richard
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Baker, Norman
Beggs, Roy
Brake, Tom
Breed, Colin
Burstow, Paul
Chidgey, David
Cotter, Brian
Donaldson, Jeffrey
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fearn, Ronnie
Forsythe, Clifford
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross Skye)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Livsey, Richard
Maclennan, Rt Hon Robert
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Moore, Michael
Morgan, Alasdair *(Galloway)*
Oaten, Mark
Öpik, Lembit
Rendel, David
Ross, William *(E Lond'y)*
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Taylor, Rt Hon John D *(Strangford)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, William
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Tyler, Paul
Wallace, James
Webb, Steve

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Donald Gorrie and
Mr. Phil Willis.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Ashton, Joe
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Stuart *(Middlesbrough)*
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Rt Hon Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Buck, Ms Karen
Burgon, Colin
Butler, Mrs Christine
Cabom, Richard
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Canavan, Dennis
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbett, Robin
Corston, Ms Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Darvill, Keith
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, John
Dobbin, Jim
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Fatchett, Rt Hon Derek
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Foulkes, George
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hanson, David
Healey, John
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith
Hoey, Kate
Home Robertson, John
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Iddon, Dr Brian
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kelly, Ms Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kingham, Ms Tess
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Linton, Martin
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Lock, David
Love, Andrew
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McDonagh, Siobhain
Macdonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Mrs Rosemary
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall–Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'ld Heeley)*
Mitchell, Austin
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morgan, Rhodri *(Cardiff W)*
Morley, Elliot
Mountford, Kali
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Eddie
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Mrs Diana
Osborne, Ms Sandra
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Quin, Rt Hon Ms Joyce
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Rt Hon Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Miss Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Temple–Morris, Peter
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Vaz, Keith
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
White, Brian
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David

Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)* Wyatt, Derek
Wood, Mike
Worthington, Tony **Tellers for the Noes:**
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)* **Mrs. Anne McGuire and**
Wright, Dr Tony *(Cannock)* **Mr. Greg Pope.**

Question accordingly negatived.

New Clause 4

PAYMENT OF TAX CREDITS TO AGRICULTURAL EMPLOYEES

'.—(1) Section 6 above shall not apply to the payment of tax credits to employees of agricultural trades or businesses.

(2) The Board shall make payments of tax credits directly to employees of agricultural trades or businesses who are entitled to receive such payments.'.—*[Mr. Pickles.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Pickles: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments: No. 9, in clause 6, page 3, line 34, after 'section,', insert

'and subject to the exception provided for in section (*Payment of tax credits to agricultural employees*) below,'.

No. 10, in clause 17, page 8, line 23, at end insert

' "agricultural" has the same meaning as in the Agriculture Act 1947;'.

Mr. Pickles: If there is a common thread running through our deliberations, it is that the loyal Opposition are here to help the Government. This new clause is no different. In many ways, we are making parliamentary history today. I recall that the Modernisation Committee received some interesting ideas on how a modern, thrusting, young Member of Parliament might offer alternative work patterns as we approach the millennium, and I recall the suggestion by a Labour Member of a job-share system. The new clause, as well as helping agriculture, is an attempt to move towards a job share for the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. We know, via *The Sunday Telegraph* on 25 February, that he was deeply concerned about the introduction of the working families tax credit. According to the newspaper, he felt that the Chancellor of the Exchequer had gone too far and had not gone through the proper channels, which is something that we often feel about the Chancellor. The Minister of Agriculture did not feel that there had been enough consultation and he felt that it would be deeply damaging to impose additional regulatory burdens on small farmers and food shops.

We understand that the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry is also concerned by the growing revolt among all businesses at the cost of the new regulations. We have even been told that Downing street is concerned about the effects on middle England and the rural economy. There were plans afoot, apparently, among various Secretaries of State to ambush the Chancellor and try to scrap the Bill in the Budget. Perhaps that is why Report and Third Reading have been so delayed.

As we all know, the Chancellor was triumphant. He beat off all opposition and his flagship continues to sail. However, the problems that will face agriculture and small businesses remain, and that is why we have tabled new clause 4 which would help to rectify the problem. We know that the problems facing farming in Britain today are severe. Farmers face a downturn that is affecting their short-term incomes and their long-term prospects. We know from figures from the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food that all sectors of farming are experiencing a sharp decline.

Some 37 per cent. of farm incomes fell in real terms last year, and if this year and last year are taken together, it is projected that farm incomes will drop by 80 per cent. Farm incomes traditionally fluctuate, but this is the first time that all sectors of farming have faced that problem.

Many sectors of farming have now fallen well below the growth in average earnings. We know from our constituents that farm-gate prices are significantly below the retail prices index. The amount of borrowing by farmers has gone up dramatically, to the tune of £1,000 million since this Government came to power. Agriculture faces compliance costs of an estimated extra £30 million a year in higher regulatory burdens. Farmers face the additional costs of the national minimum wage and the working time directive, both introduced without a full cost assessment from the industry. The Library has suggested that the fuel escalator is hitting rural communities especially hard, and the farming community even harder.

Farmers in my constituency have briefed me on three specific new burdens that agriculture will face this year. Some relate to measures that are welcome in the interests of farming, the environment and good husbandry, but they will all impose an additional regulatory and financial burden on farms. My constituents tell me that the ban on the three main antibiotics, the ground water regulations and the new regulations on stalls and tethers will cost the industry an extra £766 million a year.

The National Farmers Union has expressed several concerns about the working families tax credit and the huge administrative burden that it will place on farmers. It is a matter of common sense that farmers employ mostly seasonal and casual workers, so their workers come and go throughout the year. Paying the working families tax credit through the pay packet will mean that employers will have to keep signing their workers on and off the payroll and, in the words of the NFU, will create "an administrative nightmare".

There are also cash flow problems for farmers. The NFU feels that there is no guarantee that employers will receive an advance payment from the Government to ease their financial burdens. The NFU supports the new clause and the consequential amendments. We know that a substantial proportion of the Cabinet support it, too.

I urge Ministers—I have repeatedly said that they are reasonable people—to spare us the sight of Cabinet Ministers whose hearts are in the right place being mercilessly dragooned through the No Lobby by a Treasury Bench that is deaf to their pleas. We should stand up for the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry by giving them a chance to vote yes, but I hope that the Financial Secretary to the Treasury will accept our amendment.

Mrs. Roche: New clause 4 and amendments Nos. 9 and 10 would exempt employers in agricultural trades and businesses from paying tax credits to their employees through the payroll. Employees would therefore receive their tax credits direct from the Inland Revenue.

I note that the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. Pickles) is making yet another attempt to help the Government. It pains me to be cynical, but I believe that the new clause is yet another attempt by the Opposition to chip away at the principle of employer payment of tax credits by eliminating certain groups of employers from the scheme.

Mr. Pickles: The Minister should be aware that during the Committee stage of the Welfare Reform and Pensions Bill, her colleague, the Minister of State, Department of Social Security, suggested that there should be some exemption for stakeholder pension regimes for small employers. Most farms are relatively small employers, so why does not the hon. Lady follow that lead?

Mrs. Roche: If the hon. Gentleman will be a little patient, I shall come to that point. As Scarlett O'Hara said in "Gone with the Wind", tomorrow is another day.

I must repeat the arguments for employer payment of tax credits, which go to the heart of the Bill. The scheme will reinforce the message that tax credits are a reward for work. It will emphasise tax credits as part of the tax system, and it will help break the links with benefits, thus reducing the stigma of claiming in-work support.

We want all employees—in large and small firms—to enjoy these advantages and we see no reason to exclude agricultural workers, many of whom are on low incomes and particularly in need of encouragement to increase their earnings rather than relying on out-of-work benefits. Tax credits received in the wage packet will show that work pays.

I recognise that the agriculture industry work force tends to include a large proportion of casual, part-time and seasonal workers on fluctuating earnings and short-term contracts. However, that is not in itself a good reason for abandoning the general rule of employer payment of tax credits. As the hon. Gentleman will know from his own constituency, all farmers employing labourers have to operate a pay-as-you-earn scheme for their employees and deduct tax and national insurance contributions from their workers' pay. The same is true of so-called gangmasters, who hire labour for general agricultural work such as planting, picking and packing agricultural produce. Like all other employers required to pay tax credits, employers in the agricultural industry will be able to set off the tax credits against PAYE tax and national insurance contributions deducted.

6.15 pm

It may be helpful if I remind the House of the conditions that must apply before any employer, large or small, will be asked to pay tax credits through the payroll. First, the Inland Revenue will give all employers adequate time to adjust their payrolls before the first tax credit payment is due in the pay packet. The notice period will be 14 days in respect of employees paid weekly and 42 days in all other cases.

Secondly, the Inland Revenue will notify employers to start paying tax credits only if there is enough time before the end of the employee's contract of employment—or the end of the employee's tax credit award period if that is earlier—for the employer to make at least three tax credit payments. In other words, no employer will be asked to pay tax credits and make the necessary payroll adjustments for a shorter time than three pay periods.

Mr. Webb: The hon. Lady is helpfully outlining the way in which the system will be administered through employers. Will she clarify paragraph 35 of the draft regulatory impact assessment, however? It states:

"The Government has decided to exclude those very small employers who do not operate PAYE/NICs schemes because all their employees are below the NICs threshold."

Can she confirm that I am right to understand that payment will not happen through the pay packet for employers, such as agricultural employers, for whom every employee is paid lower than the prospective lower earnings limit of £81 or so?

Mrs. Roche: The hon. Gentleman is right, and I shall probably say something more about that.

The new arrangements are set out in the Inland Revenue booklet, "Working Families Tax Credit and Disabled Person's Tax Credit", and they mean that, wherever practical, even employees on short-term contracts will be able to receive tax credits with their pay, rather than from the Inland Revenue. However, our overriding aim will, of course, be to ensure that tax credits are delivered to people efficiently and on time. Although payment by employers will be the predominant method of delivery after April 2000, it will not be attempted if it would put that aim at risk.

I hope that I have reassured right hon. and hon. Members that employers, including those in the agriculture sector, are not being asked to do the impossible. In practice, because of working patterns in the industry, a fairly high proportion of tax credit recipients may well receive their tax credits direct from the Inland Revenue, because the conditions for employer payment are not met. However, there is no need for a blanket exemption of all employers in that or any other sector. All employers will be treated in the same way.

I hope that my explanation will persuade the hon. Gentleman to withdraw the motion. If he does not, I must ask my hon. Friends to reject it.

Mr. Pickles: I am sad to say that the hon. Lady has uncharacteristically failed to satisfy me on this point. She has tried to palm me off with a concession. I want what the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food wants. In order to stand up for his rights, and for those of his Cabinet colleagues who oppose this part of the Bill, I shall press the matter to a Division.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second Time:—

The House divided: Ayes 167, Noes 300.

Division No. 113] **[6.18 pm**

AYES

Allan, Richard	Beresford, Sir Paul
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael	Body, Sir Richard
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James	Boswell, Tim
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy	Brake, Tom
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*	Breed, Colin
Baker, Norman	Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Beggs, Roy	Browning, Mrs Angela
Bercow, John	Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*

Burstow, Paul
Butterfill, John
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chidgey, David
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Kensington)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rayleigh)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton–Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Colvin, Michael
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Cran, James
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Day, Stephen
Donaldson, Jeffrey
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Evans, Nigel
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Fearn, Ronnie
Forsythe, Clifford
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam
Fraser, Christopher
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gibb, Nick
Gill, Christopher
Goodlad, Rt Hon Sir Alastair
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorrie, Donald
Gray, James
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Harris, Dr Evan
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat–Amory, Rt Hon David
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson Smith, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross Skye)*
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Archy
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
Maclennan, Rt Hon Robert
McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Major, Rt Hon John
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Nicholls, Patrick
Norman, Archie
Oaten, Mark
Öpik, Lembit
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Prior, David
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Ross, William *(E Lond'y)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Faversham)*
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
St Aubyn, Nick
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spicer, Sir Michael
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, Rt Hon John D *(Strangford)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Tyler, Paul
Tyrie, Andrew
Wallace, James
Wardle, Charles
Waterson, Nigel
Webb, Steve
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Willis, Phil
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Woodward, Shaun
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mrs. Eleanor Laing and
Mrs. Caroline Spelman.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Ashton, Joe
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Stuart *(Middlesbrough)*
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Rt Hon Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Buck, Ms Karen
Burgon, Colin
Butler, Mrs Christine
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Canavan, Dennis
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbett, Robin
Corston, Ms Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Darvill, Keith
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, John
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Rt Hon Derek
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Foulkes, George
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hanson, David
Healey, John
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith
Hoey, Kate
Home Robertson, John
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*

Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kingham, Ms Tess
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Linton, Martin
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Lock, David
Love, Andrew
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McDonagh, Siobhain
Macdonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Mrs Rosemary
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'ld Heeley)*
Mitchell, Austin
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Alasdair *(Galloway)*
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morgan, Rhodri *(Cardiff W)*
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Mountford, Kali
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Eddie
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Mrs Diana
Osborne, Ms Sandra
Pearson, Ian
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Rt Hon Ms Joyce
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Rt Hon Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Miss Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Stott, Roger
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Vaz, Keith
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
White, Brian
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, Dr Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Noes:
Mrs. Anne McGuire and Mr. Greg Pope.

Question accordingly negatived.

Clause 6

PAYMENT OF TAX CREDIT BY EMPLOYERS ETC

Mr. Nick Gibb (Bognor Regis and Littlehampton): I beg to move amendment No. 7, in page 3, line 35, at end insert

'except that an employee shall be entitled to make an election to receive payment of the tax credit to which he is entitled directly from the Board.'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss amendment No. 6, in page 4, line 10, at end insert—

'(2A) Regulations under this section shall allow any person who is entitled to a tax credit to elect to receive payment of that tax credit directly from the Board.'.

Mr. Gibb: The purpose of amendment No. 7 is to enable those who are entitled to the working families tax credit to have the choice of whether the payments should be made to them through the payroll or directly to their home by cheque. The Government's proposals mean that a lone parent in work or a couple, both of whom work, have no choice. If they claim and are entitled to working families tax credit, the benefit will be paid through the payroll, whether they like it or not. The only recipients who will have a choice are couples of whom one is in work while the other remains at home to look after the children. The view of Conservative Members is that if that choice is available in those circumstances, it should be available in all other circumstances.

The Government's view is that if all potential claimants of working families tax credit were given the choice of direct payment, too many of them would take that choice, thus undermining the concept of having the benefit paid through the pay packet. Why are the Government so intent on having the payment made through the payroll? According to the Paymaster General on Second Reading, the whole point of the Bill was

"to remove the stigma associated with the current system".—[*Official Report*, 26 January 1999; Vol. 324, c. 153.]

That is odd, because what the Paymaster General means by "the current system" is the family credit benefit, which has a 72 per cent. take-up rate; it has an 85 per cent. take-up rate by expenditure and in the case of lone parents there is a 91 per cent. take-up rate. It is hard to believe that any stigma whatever is attached to a benefit with such a high take-up rate. That is why the Joseph Rowntree Foundation in York said:

"UK research has shown only limited reluctance to claim family credit on the grounds of stigma. Take-up of family credit among eligible families is high and continues to rise."

The main difference between family credit and the new working families tax credit is the delivery mechanism. The calculation of WFTC is almost identical to that of

[Mr. Gibb]

family credit, but with a slightly shallower taper. The real difference is that WFTC is paid through the payroll. The Government's reason for that change, and the explanation for their resolve not to allow couples and lone parents the choice of direct payment, are that the Government genuinely believe that the measure will reduce stigma. By reducing stigma, they no doubt expect that there will be a higher take-up rate, but to date no Minister has said what that take-up rate will be, or whether it will be higher than the very high take-up rates for family credit. If the Government have no confidence that take-up rates will increase, they clearly have no confidence that the working families tax credit will reduce stigma.

What evidence do the Government have for their contention that paying that benefit through the payroll will reduce stigma? Martin Taylor, the architect of the working families tax credit, was asked by the Select Committee on Social Security what evidence there was that paying that benefit through the payroll would reduce stigma. He replied:

"As far as I am concerned, it does not matter whether the body which determines whether or not you are entitled to the WFTC is situated in the DSS or the Inland Revenue. As far as stigma goes, the hard and fast evidence in all these non-financial and psychological matters is difficult to come by."

Mr. Webb: As I said in Committee, we must not traduce Martin Taylor and blame him for being the architect of the scheme. He was told that there would be a tax credit and therefore devoted most of his energies to national insurance reforms, many of which were sensible and welcome. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will agree that the fingerprints of the Treasury are all over that tax credit and that when it goes wrong, we shall know where the blame lies.

Mr. Gibb: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. The Government had the advantage of seeing the transcript of the Social Security Committee report in which Martin Taylor makes the point that there is no academic evidence that there is less stigma when benefits are paid through the payroll. Despite that, the Government went ahead and produced the Bill.

It is not merely that there is no evidence that stigma would be reduced; it is even worse, because there is evidence that stigma will be increased by paying the benefit through the payroll. That is because, for the first time, there is a real risk that fellow workers will find out that an employee is in receipt of a state benefit. The payroll clerk will know and the finance director will know; in a small firm that is a special risk. That risk has been heightened by the fact that the working families tax credit will not—because it cannot—be paid through adjustments to the pay-as-you-earn code. Martin Taylor originally envisaged that that was how the credit would be paid, but when the Inland Revenue tried to implement that system, it failed and produced distorted results. As the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) says, the Government knew that when they designed the scheme, yet they went ahead with the Bill.

Mr. Webb: The problem of delivering the tax credit through the pay packet, which is the subject of the amendment, will presumably be further compounded when the child credit is added. When I asked the Treasury whether the child credit would be delivered through the PAYE code, I was told that the Treasury would let me know when it had worked out the answer. Does that worry the hon. Gentleman?

Mr. Gibb: Of course, it concerns me enormously. The hon. Gentleman makes a good point. If there are difficulties in putting the working families tax credit through the PAYE code without the child care tax credit, I am certain that there is no chance of the child care tax credit being put through the tax code as well. The new child care credit referred to in the Budget will almost certainly face the same problems.

As the payment cannot go through the PAYE code, it must be separately identified as a tax credit on the pay slip. It is now clear that paying working families tax credit through the payroll will increase stigma. That was the view of Bill Knox, of the Federation of Small Businesses, in his evidence to the Social Security Committee—*[Interruption.]* Labour Members should listen. Bill Knox said that

"there could be the added stigma of being an employee who receives, and knowingly receives, benefit within the workplace".

Mr. Alan Johnson (Hull, West and Hessle): Is that all?

Mr. Gibb: The hon. Gentleman should not worry; there is more.

The increased stigma that will inevitably arise is Conservative Members' most pressing concern about the Bill and the reason we have tabled amendment No. 7. If the amendment is not passed, it will be our principal reason for opposing the Bill. The Government believe that the working families tax credit will reduce stigma; we believe that it will increase stigma. The National Council for One Parent Families believes that the working families tax credit will increase stigma:

"Some lone parents may worry that their personal finances are becoming more visible to colleagues and employers causing a disincentive to take up benefit.

Mr. Johnson: Is there more?

Mr. Gibb: There is more. The Confederation of British Industry believes that working families tax credit will increase stigma and I shall quote its words for the benefit of the hon. Member for Hull, West and Hessle (Mr. Johnson). The CBI states:

"Many single parents will wish to have the option of direct payment in order to maintain confidentiality and avoid perceptions of stigma."

The Institute for Fiscal Studies, too, believes the WFTC will increase stigma:

"As employers and, potentially, work colleagues will observe the working families tax credit, it might increase the stigma associated with receiving transfer payments and so decrease take-up".

However, the Government believe—so too, it seems, does the hon. Member for Hull, West and Hessle—that all those groups are wrong. The Government contend that the IFS, the CBI and the National Council for One Parent Families are wrong because employers already know which of their employees receives family credit. The Government claim that the DSS must contact the employer before an employee can qualify for family

credit. That is not true. In many cases, an employee can provide sufficient documentary evidence of pay and hours worked without approaching the employer. In any case, a "once and for all" approach is different from a week in, week out—or month in, month out—notification from the Inland Revenue that an employee is receiving working families tax credit. That is what will happen under the new payment system.

If the Government insist upon claiming that employers must be contacted, I simply refer them to the CBI's brief for this debate:

"At present a significant number of employers may never know that their employees are receiving Family Credit. Up to a third of employees claiming credit do so without their employer's knowledge—either because they provide enough information and their employer does not need to be contacted or because employers provide information without realising that their employees are claiming Family Credit."

This amendment gives the recipient the option of having the benefit paid directly. It is thus for him or her to decide whether having it paid through the payroll will increase the stigma. After all, it is recipients, not Ministers, who will suffer the embarrassment if the Government are wrong and the benefit increases stigma.

That view is shared by the TUC:

"The TUC . . . strongly recommends that choice of payment system should apply to all households, including those headed by lone parents."

The TUC has other concerns that could be alleviated by the amendment. In its Budget representations, the TUC says that family credit has

"by and large, enhanced job security for many people in low paid jobs by delivering financial assistance to them in a direct and timely fashion."

It continues:

"There is a real danger that the working families tax credit will fail to replicate this if the wage packet is to be the primary means of delivering the tax credit."

The concern is that payment may be interrupted if the benefit is paid through the payroll. That is the view of the Low Pay Unit, which says:

"The low paid are least able to afford interruptions or delays in payment of benefits."

When an employee envisages the possibility that his employer may interrupt benefit payment, he should be given the option of having the payments made to him directly by the Inland Revenue. That is a key concern of the TUC, which believes that working families tax credit is

"much more liable to disruption."

It is also the main concern of the National Council for One Parent Families:

"a default option is needed so lone parents can be paid direct rather than through the wage packet if there is a short-term contract, more than one employer, very low wages or the firm is too small to deal with the claim."

The problem of interrupted payments is particularly acute if there is a trade dispute. The glossy document from the Inland Revenue that explains the way the working families tax credit operates explains that if a trade dispute lasts for longer than one pay period, the employer will not be expected to continue to pay the working families tax credit. Instead, the employer should issue a certificate of payment to the employee who must then take it to the Inland Revenue, which will pay the working families tax credit directly.

That is the theory; the reality will be delays. There will be delays when the employer issues the certificate—assuming that he gets round to doing that, as he is in the middle of a trade dispute—delays at the Inland Revenue when the employee hands in the certificate, and delays in payment. Those on very low incomes cannot sustain such delays. That is another reason why we believe people should be given the option of having the working families tax credit paid directly.

6.45 pm

The amendment will also partially—but not fully—solve the problem raised in Committee with which the Government failed to deal. If there is a dispute between a couple, who should receive the benefit? In Committee, the Financial Secretary said that the presumption was that, in the case of a dispute, the money would go to the spouse or the partner with care. The Government also said that the benefit could be claimed with just one signature on the form and that payment would go to the signatory. So whoever grabs the form first will be the winner—and that will not necessarily be the spouse or partner with care.

It would be helpful if the Minister at last clarified the position. If there is a dispute between a couple, who should receive the working families tax credit? If the working spouse completes and signs the form and the non-earning partner does not sign, will the payment go to the working spouse or to the partner at home who takes care of the children?

Dawn Primarolo: I can assist the hon. Gentleman now. When there is a dispute and the form is not completed, the Inland Revenue will establish contact and ask why. That does not happen at present with family credit: if the form is not completed, no payment is made. The Inland Revenue would have to be satisfied that it was not a claim of the type the hon. Gentleman describes—one partner who does not have a caring responsibility is trying to secure payment of the tax credit. A situation in which someone—the man, I presume the hon. Gentleman means—grabs the form, fills it in and receives the tax credit without the mother's knowledge would not arise.

Mr. Gibb: That may be the case during the transition from family credit to working families tax credit, but what about new claimants for working families tax credit? How will the Inland Revenue contact someone who has not returned a form? How will it know that there is a claim to be made? I do not understand how it will work.

Dawn Primarolo: The hon. Gentleman saw the forms in Committee. He will remember that they must be filled in by both parents—except in the case of a single parent—and the details must be included on the form. If the details do not appear, an inquiry will be triggered under the new and the transitional rules.

Mr. Gibb: We shall see how the hon. Lady's explanation works in practice. We were told in Committee that the claim could be processed with just one signature and that payment would go to the person who signed the form—that is, whoever filled in the applicant box. The form states that the payment will be made to the person who completes the left-hand, not the right-hand, column on the form.

Dawn Primarolo: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way again, because this is an important point.

[Dawn Primarolo]

One signature will be accepted only in extremely exceptional circumstances, such as in the case of a violent relationship. For example, if the man refused to complete the form—that is, sign it—but his partner was able to supply the details of his earnings, that information could be cross-referenced in the Inland Revenue to confirm that the details were correct. The partner would be the only one to sign the form, but in those circumstances, the claim would be categorised as low risk. We would rule that the claim was correct and the benefit would be paid to the partner. That is what would occur if there was only one signature on the form but two parents in the family.

Mr. Gibb: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for clarifying the situation.

The amendment will help the new benefit to be administered in a way that is responsive to the concerns of low income families. It will deal with the Bill's fundamental flaw: increased stigma. The hon. Lady did not address that issue in her comments. Increased stigma is a real concern, and I urge the House to support the amendment in an effort to remove the stigma that many low income families and lone parents, who are struggling to make ends meet and to bring up families while working, will face if the Bill reaches the statute book unamended.

Mr. Webb: Grouped with amendment No. 7, which the hon. Member for Bognor Regis and Littlehampton (Mr. Gibb) has just moved—I agreed with many of his comments—is amendment No. 6. As far as I can tell, it would have identical effects, but mysteriously, it relates to a few lines later. Both amendments are concerned with election to receive tax credits directly from the Inland Revenue.

The present proposal is that the Government will force lone parents to receive their benefit in a particular way—through the pay packet. Governments should force measures on people, possibly against their will—a lone parent might prefer to receive the money another way—only with very good reason, and we have been given no compelling evidence that lone parents should be forced to receive the money through the pay packet.

Paragraph 21 of the draft regulatory impact assessment states:

"The Government believes that employer payment of the tax credits is of crucial importance in helping to reinforce—and demonstrate—the link between receipt of the tax credits and the rewards of work."

One might paraphrase that as saying that the Government believe that lone parents are so stupid that they cannot grasp the fact that they receive family credit when they work, but not when they do not; and they must receive the credit through the pay packet so that they understand that it is something to do with them working. That is absurd, patronising and insulting.

There is no reason to demonstrate to lone parents the merits of work because, I assume, they are capable of adding up two numbers and, in any case, both payments—salary and tax credit—might come through giro credits, so that would demonstrate that both were coming from work. What, then, would be another argument for the proposal?

The hon. Member for Bognor Regis and Littlehampton has mentioned that there is apparently a need to reduce stigma. Yet as we have heard, the take-up rate on expenditure for lone parents was 91 per cent. in 1995-96. One can scarcely imagine a system with 100 per cent. take-up because there will always be people who have just fallen into the relevant circumstances for eligibility, but have not yet made a claim, so 91 per cent. is as near 100 per cent. as we are ever likely to get. That implies that there is virtually no stigma for lone parents who are the subject of the amendments. Almost all of them claim family credit, so why must they be forced to take the working families tax credit through the pay packet?

Another way of considering the issue is to ask whether there is any problem in forcing the payment through the pay packet. There are three main problems. The first is the administrative burden on business. That is the subject of the next group of amendments, so I shall not dwell on it. If half of all family credit recipients are lone parents, half of all tax credit recipients will be credited through the pay packet, and that is a large number of people whose employers will have to administer the scheme. If the amendments are made, and many lone parents opt for direct payment, there will be a greatly reduced burden on business.

Dr. Nick Palmer (Broxtowe): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that if the employer has to set up any procedure at all for coping with payment, he will do most of the work anyway?

Mr. Webb: I am not sure that I understand the hon. Gentleman's question. Under the proposed regime, someone who employs a lone parent will be obliged by the Government to implement the scheme and deliver the credit. There will be a fixed charge for doing that for the first person and a variable charge for additional or subsequent employees. I certainly accept that there will be a fixed start-up cost, which is why there is no reason for employers to have to bear that cost in the first place, but there will also be a variable cost, as the regulatory impact assessment points out.

The second problem is that the palaver created by people who change jobs will be extraordinary. A lone parent who moves from welfare into work—he or she is the apple of the Government's eye—will start a job and notify the Inland Revenue, or their employer will do so. Initially, the money will be paid by the Inland Revenue to the employee, to give the employer time to make arrangements. The employer will then begin to pay the credit directly through the pay packet.

If the lone parent then changes jobs, the original employer must tell the Inland Revenue that the employee has stopped working for him. The Inland Revenue will tell the employer to stop paying the credit and begin to pay the lone parent directly until the new job starts. If the lone parent has been claiming for almost six months, the payment might go direct to the claimant or through the new employer—I am not sure which.

All that is unnecessary. At the moment, lone parents receive family credit monthly through an order book or direct into their bank account. That is not a problem. If they change jobs, the credit continues. Given that we are dealing with a section of the labour market where job turnover is common, why are the Government introducing all that complexity?

The final problem is the loss of privacy. There are two important aspects to that. If anything will stigmatise people, it is loss of privacy. The hon. Member for Bognor Regis and Littlehampton quoted the CBI's comment about employers' present lack of awareness about family credit. As the hon. Gentleman is no doubt aware, that is not only a CBI point but a Government point.

The Department of Social Security commissioned research into the effects of employer attitudes to family credit. DSS research report No. 32, "Employers and Family Credit", says:

"Only about two thirds of employers who employ Family Credit recipients know that they do so".

The employers of one third—hundreds of thousands—of family credit recipients do not know that they receive that benefit. When the Government force employers to deliver the credit through the pay packet, every employer will know. That may be damaging to the employee because employers might take such people on a short-term contract, but if they pose a serious administrative burden because of all the extra paperwork, they might think twice about renewing the contract. That would clearly be detrimental to the people whom the Government supposedly want to help.

There is a loss of privacy also because the employer will know how much credit the employee is receiving. Given that about one third of recipients will get the maximum credit, the number and age of their children will be fairly obvious. It is also apparent that when someone's circumstances change, the employer will know because he will be told to vary the amount of family credit and will know that the salary has not changed. It must follow that the domestic circumstances of the lone parent must have changed; for example, someone has moved into the home.

Mr. Gibb: Is there not also an additional point—that when an employer knows that an employee receives family credit, he does not often receive information? A renewal claim for family credit, which lasts for six months before it changes, requires no contact with the employer, so employers will be contacted probably no more than once a year. There is a difference between that and the employer having monthly or weekly information from the Inland Revenue with the daily rates included.

Mr. Webb: The hon. Gentleman is right. The proposal is to force employers of lone parents to be intimately involved in their personal circumstances and changes to those circumstances. That is wholly unnecessary.

The measure tries to solve a problem that does not exist. It will force lone parents, against their will, to receive their benefits in a particular way. If the measure is not against their will, why do not the Government let them choose? If the Government are happy to let them choose and think that lone parents want that measure, the outcome will be the same. If lone parents do not want the measure, the Government are imposing it on them to teach them, as far as I can tell from the Government's rhetoric, that work pays and that they receive something when they are in work that they do not receive when they are out of work. They are doing so by delivering the credit through their pay packet instead of by a credit to their bank account.

That is patently absurd, unnecessary, bureaucratic for employers, patronising to lone parents and intrusive on their privacy. I therefore encourage the House to back amendments No. 7 or No. 6.

Mrs. Lait: We get the same pleasure in the House as we do in Committee when we find ourselves agreeing with the Liberal Democrats. It is an unusual circumstance, but we are as one on the amendments.

We all find it difficult to understand the Government's insistence on the proposal. The Financial Secretary's mantra is that

"it reinforces the connection with work."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee D*, 9 February 1999; c. 111.]

I should have thought that anybody in work would know and appreciate the fact that they are in work, and would realise the benefits of that at the end of the week or the month. People who are out of work tend by and large not to have to deal with the Inland Revenue and fill in PAYE forms and other communications. It comes as a bit of a shock to some people when they have to fill in those forms. People know when they are in work, earning money and dealing with the Inland Revenue.

If people receive their tax credits from the Inland Revenue rather than through a pay packet, they will realise that it is an acknowledgement of the fact that they are in work. They do not need to have that fact acknowledged by the payment of tax credits through their pay packet. The more we have examined the proposal, in Committee and again today, the more we have realised that, although the Government think they have taken a simple line, the practical difficulties outweigh the pay packet argument and bring into play the role of the Inland Revenue.

Several hon. Members have outlined the issues clearly. I shall not repeat the arguments about stigma, with which I thoroughly agree. Nor shall I take up the arguments about privacy and confidentiality, which relate particularly to small businesses but are equally valid as they apply to larger businesses. With the best will in the world, and however many strictures are directed to employees in payroll departments to the effect that they should not talk or gossip, they are aware of other employees' circumstances. It is amazing how little bits of information can percolate, so that by the time the information has emerged, it is often too late to deal with the problem of confidentiality and privacy having been breached.

7 pm

I strongly support the argument about potential delay in payments of working families tax credits in certain circumstances. I accept that the efficiency of the Inland Revenue has improved over recent years, but various circumstances will have an impact on payments. Bankruptcy is the most extreme example, but there others, such as strikes, and circumstances where people work part-time for a number of different employers. Such people are not necessarily employed in agriculture; more and more people work in a number of part-time jobs, even during the course of a week.

The Government's faith in the speed with which the Inland Revenue can react is, to say the least, touching. Most of us who deal with the Inland Revenue—I imagine that most of us in the Chamber have had to come into

[Mrs. Lait]

contact with it at some stage—know that, however hard and efficiently the staff of the Revenue work these days, they cannot deliver money within a week, which is what many claimants of working families tax credit will need. I do not want to stray out of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but on a previous amendment we talked about child care tax credit—

Mr. Pickles: My hon. Friend is talking about delays in payment, and people working in different jobs. Does she agree that privacy is an equally important point? Many people who have part-time jobs do not want their main employer to know. Employers will be interfering in every aspect of family life. They will know how many children their employees have and all their sources of income.

Mrs. Lait: I can only agree with my hon. Friend. In certain circumstances it may be difficult for an employer to accept that his employee has a part-time job—even though that may be necessary to the employee given his or her family circumstances. If an employee's work requires a high level of concentration, for example, an employer may feel that when he is not working he should be taking time off rather than working elsewhere.

If the high-quality child care from which we all agree children will benefit is to be provided, child care tax credit will often have to be paid week by week. Child minders do not tend to have large incomes and will not have the savings or resources to allow them to cope with delayed payments through the Inland Revenue where an employee or parent suddenly experiences a break in the payment of working families tax credit.

We are talking about nurseries and after-school kids' clubs. Do I surmise that the Government are prepared to subsidise nurseries and all the various clubs so that they have a cash cushion and can sustain a parent who has fallen into cash-flow difficulties caused by an employer's difficulties?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael J. Martin): Order. Perhaps it is me, but I am at a loss to understand what the hon. Lady's remarks have to do with the amendments.

Mrs. Lait: The Bill indicates that the Revenue should pay into the pay packet except in exceptional circumstances. I am saying that, however efficient we believe the Inland Revenue to be, it cannot guarantee to get the money into an employee's pay packet. We believe that an employee should be able to opt for the Inland Revenue paying him week by week or month by month so that he can maintain his cash flow. There is a difficulty with the interaction between employment and the Inland Revenue when it comes to the payment of working families tax credit.

The payment of the tax credit is a burden on employers. The compliance cost assessment is about £37 for a company employing up to four people. By definition, large employers will probably pay a smaller sum proportionally. However, those figures indicate the drain on the national economy overall. If the Revenue were able to pay more people, it would probably reduce the cost to the overall economy. Given that, within the Budget, the Government have offered the new Small Business Service specifically to help small employers with compliance with regulations, it would seem that the cost could be cheaper if the Revenue were to make the payments.

I ask the Government to accept the amendment, which would allow employees more readily to elect for the Inland Revenue to pay working families tax credit. It would make life easier for them and their employers and would reduce stigma and problems of privacy and confidentiality. That is extremely important when people are trying to regain their self-esteem after it has been battered because they have been out of the work market for so long.

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough): In a way, it is a pity that there is a convention in the House that Back-Bench Members have to speak before the Minister intervenes. Such a devastating case has been made in favour of the amendments—not least by the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb), who always speaks very well on these matters, and by my hon. Friends the Members for Bognor Regis and Littlehampton (Mr. Gibb) and for Beckenham (Mrs. Lait)—that it is difficult to know what possible argument the Minister can advance against them. Anyone would think that we were trying to drive a coach and horses through the concept of working families tax credit.

Dawn Primarolo: That is what the Opposition are doing.

Mr. Leigh: That is an interesting admission. The Minister says that we are doing that. Why does she take that view? Surely we are only saying that people should be given a choice. If the Government are saying that the family credit system does not work; that it entails enormous stigma; and that they want to move on to a much more modern system, so be it. If I am in receipt of family credit, I can agree with the Minister and choose, if I am a lone parent, to receive the money through my pay packet. But why should I be forced to do so?

Why do we legislate in this place? Do we legislate as part of the Government's programme to make the Government look good in the national press, to tell the country that they are taking people off social security, reducing the social security bill and getting people back into work? Is that why we are legislating in the Chamber? Or are we trying to legislate to help ordinary people in low-paid jobs, who, for their own reasons—for reasons of privacy or convenience or for any other reason, such as the fact that they are changing their job or have several jobs, or because they do not trust the people in the accounts department not to talk—want to choose to receive payments at home as they have always done? Some of those reasons may seem trivial, but they are important to the people involved.

I serve on the Select Committee on Social Security, which has taken a considerable amount of evidence on these matters. We have taken evidence, as we heard, from Martin Taylor, the Federation of Small Businesses and others; written evidence from the Trades Union Congress; and evidence from the National Council for One Parent Families. If the Committee had had an overwhelming sense from the evidence that family credit did not work—that people did not want to make use of it, or felt ashamed, or felt that they were living off the state if they drew it—our all-party Committee, which generally tries to

approach such matters in a non-partisan spirit, would have included that in our report. Our report would have made it clear that family credit had failed.

We studied working families tax credit in other countries, including the United States. I went up to Preston. In the DSS office I stood behind the assessment officer as she was going through the simple forms to work out whether family credit should be paid in a particular case. She was a conscientious civil servant, going through the mechanics and working out the figures quickly and easily, ensuring that for someone who had a family and was in a low-paid job, it was made worth his while to work.

I can speak only from my practical experience. We have heard many statistics cited tonight, but speaking to people on the ground is equally important. Practical experience could be wrong, however. If I am wrong, why is the take-up rate of family credit so high? A figure of 91 per cent. was bandied across the Chamber. If there is such a stigma attached to family credit, why is the take-up rate so high—and why not give people the choice?

What is the hidden agenda? Are the Government genuinely concerned about ordinary people, or is there another agenda? I believe that there is. If people could choose to receive working families tax credit at home, what would be the effective difference between working families tax credit and family credit? Virtually none. A great part of the Government's propaganda machine would be demolished at a stroke. People would say that the only difference was the change of name. That is what this debate is about.

The Government are trying to convince the country that, by a series of schemes, they have reduced the welfare bill, got people off benefit and back into work, and got the economy moving. The truth is that if people are getting back into work, they are doing so because the economy is growing, not because of the working families tax credit, the minimum income guarantee or anything else. Of course, if the Government made that admission, and if people were allowed to receive benefit at home, the Government's great fabric would fall apart.

That is why I support the amendments. I support them also because of the burdens on business, especially on small companies, about which we have heard. I hope that the Minister can convince us that all our arguments are wrong.

7.15 pm

Dawn Primarolo: The hon. Member for Gainsborough (Mr. Leigh) complimented the staff at the family credit unit in Preston. He commented that they were excellent civil servants, as indeed they are. He should be confident of the work that will be undertaken to introduce the working families tax credit, because it will be done by the same diligent, hard-working, precise civil servants as the family credit unit transfers to the Inland Revenue. The hon. Gentleman spoke on the same themes as other Opposition Members—stigma and privacy.

I should say at the outset that I shall disappoint the Opposition again by asking the House to reject the amendment—although, as the hon. Member for Bognor Regis and Littlehampton (Mr. Gibb) gained a concession in Committee when the position of the apostrophe in the word "families" was corrected, we will be even stevens after this.

Although I shall deal with the issues relating to stigma, I should remind hon. Members that the benefit is intended to reinforce work incentives and to reward work. The hon. Member for Gainsborough said that there was no evidence of stigma, but he went on to say that he had evidence. That consisted of what various organisations believed might happen.

Mr. Gibb *rose—*

Dawn Primarolo: I want to quote some research findings, because the hon. Member for Gainsborough asked about that. I refer him to a paper by Jeffrey Liebman for the Rowntree Trust, who quotes a study undertaken by McKay and Marsh entitled "Why didn't they claim?," carried out on behalf of the Department of Social Security. Liebman states:

"McKay and Marsh's interview study of family credit claimants reports that few families were entirely comfortable with the idea of claiming income-related in-work benefits."

The hon. Gentleman conflates take-up and stigma. Take-up is determined by need. Stigma is a feeling imposed on people when they make their applications.

In a paper entitled "Lessons about tax-benefit integration from the US earned income tax credit experience", which was also published by Rowntree, Liebman states in relation to credit administered through the tax system:

"The advantages of such a reform . . . are that workers would be freed from the stigma of the welfare system".

He goes on to say that

"removing stigma could be an important advantage of integrating in-work benefits into the tax system—in particular, workers who see themselves as self-sufficient and free of Government handouts may be less likely to go back on welfare in the future."

That deals with the Opposition's comments about stigma.

Mr. Leigh *rose—*

Dawn Primarolo: I must make progress. The hon. Gentleman had a note passed to him about sitting down, so he will understand that progress needs to be made this evening.

We also heard about privacy and the fears that people's private concerns would be disclosed. The hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) said that two thirds of employers verify the earnings of family credit claimants.

Employers are already under a common law duty to maintain the trust and confidentiality of their employees. That is potentially a wide duty, and the Data Protection Act 1998 will extend the protection of personal information. Itemised pay statements are already prepared by some employers, and they are treated as confidential matters between the employer and the employee. There is no reason, and none was advanced, why that tried and trusted system would fall apart as a result of the working families tax credit.

Opposition Members have a perverse view of the world. They believe that employers will do their utmost to frustrate the payment of benefit, to undermine their employees, to disregard instructions from the Inland Revenue and to make the lives of lone parents a misery and their workers' lives impossible. I do not dispute that there are some employers who may behave in that way, but the overwhelming majority do not. There is no reason

[Dawn Primarolo]

to believe that they will do so in future, because that would be bad for their relationships with their employees, on which their firms depend.

Under the working families tax credit provisions—this goes to the heart of the amendments—the major payment will be made through the pay packet. The application forms are straightforward. I know that Conservative Members have seen those forms and I have to tell them that anyone who thinks that a family credit form is easy to fill in has clearly never attempted to complete one—they are complex and very long. To the credit of Inland Revenue officials, the new forms are more straightforward and open.

A lone parent in paid employment will receive the payment through the wage packet. If both parents are working, one will receive the payment through the wage packet, and they will be able to choose which. When one parent is working and one is not, they will be able to choose which receives the payment. The form makes it clear that there is no pressure about who should receive the payment; it will be up to the couple to decide. I have every confidence in the maturity of couples; they will be able to take that decision about managing their household finances.

It is nonsense to use strong language about lone parents being forced into doing something when the working families tax credit will give them such enormous benefit. Conservative Members describe the system as impossible to operate, but they have failed to read and understand the Bill and they have failed to understand the powers that will protect the employee and ensure that the employer delivers the tax credit.

I ask the House to reject the amendment and support the Government in introducing the Bill.

Mr. Gibb: The Minister forgets that the overwhelming majority of employers in this country are small employers. More than half the employees in this country are employed by people who employ fewer than 50 people. In small companies information spreads by word of mouth. Conservative Members have tried to explain that problem to the Government, but it seems that what we have said has landed on deaf ears.

The Minister asked what evidence we have that the working families tax credit will increase stigma. I cited in evidence a number of organisations—the National Council for One Parent Families, which represents lone parents; the CBI, which represents employers; and the TUC, which represents a large number of employees. If they do not know whether people will be stigmatised under the Minister's scheme, who does? I believe that the views of those organisations provide ample evidence to show that stigma will increase.

The Minister talked about take-up being a measure not of stigma but of need, but what measure would she use to determine whether stigma had increased or decreased under the new working families tax credit system? A 91 per cent. take-up rate is, to anyone with any common sense, a clear indication that people do not mind claiming family credit. If she has a better measure for judging whether the working families tax credit will increase or decrease stigma, let us have it. Let us have target rates for take-up and other objectives that the Government could set out to determine whether stigma has increased.

The Minister's response will disappoint not only me. It will disappoint many thousands of lone parents and working people on low incomes who have to work hard and struggle to make ends meet as they bring up a family. The hon. Lady will inflict on them embarrassment and stigma because she misunderstands the real world of work.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 164, Noes 296.

Division No. 114] **[7.24 pm**

AYES

Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Baker, Norman
Ballard, Jackie
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Body, Sir Richard
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Brake, Tom
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burnett, John
Burns, Simon
Burstow, Paul
Butterfill, John
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chidgey, David
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rayleigh)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton–Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Colvin, Michael
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Cran, James
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Day, Stephen
Donaldson, Jeffrey
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Evans, Nigel
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Fearn, Ronnie
Forsythe, Clifford
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fraser, Christopher
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gibb, Nick
Gill, Christopher
Goodlad, Rt Hon Sir Alastair
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorrie, Donald
Gray, James
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Harris, Dr Evan
Harvey, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat–Amory, Rt Hon David
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson Smith, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross Skye)*
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Archy
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
McIntosh, Miss Anne
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Maginnis, Ken
Major, Rt Hon John
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Moore, Michael
Morgan, Alasdair *(Galloway)*
Moss, Malcolm
Nicholls, Patrick
Norman, Archie

Oaten, Mark
Öpik, Lembit
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Prior, David
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Faversham)*
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
St Aubyn, Nick
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'rns)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spicer, Sir Michael
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, Rt Hon John D *(Strangford)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thompson, William
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Tyler, Paul
Tyrie, Andrew
Wallace, James
Wardle, Charles
Waterson, Nigel
Webb, Steve
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Willis, Phil
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Woodward, Shaun
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Sir David Madel and
Mrs. Caroline Spelman.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Stuart *(Middlesbrough)*
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Rt Hon Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Buck, Ms Karen
Burgon, Colin
Butler, Mrs Christine
Cabom, Richard
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Canavan, Dennis
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pen'tlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbett, Robin
Corston, Ms Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Darvill, Keith
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, John
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hanson, David
Healey, John
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith
Hoey, Kate
Home Robertson, John
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kemp, Fraser
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kingham, Ms Tess
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Linton, Martin
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Lock, David
Love, Andrew
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McDonagh, Siobhain
Macdonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Mrs Rosemary
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michie, Bill *(Shef'ld Heeley)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morgan, Rhodri *(Cardiff W)*
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Mountford, Kali
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Eddie
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Mrs Diana
Osborne, Ms Sandra
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pope, Greg
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Rt Hon Ms Joyce
Rapson, Syd
Reid, Rt Hon Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Roy, Frank

Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Miss Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Vaz, Keith
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
White, Brian
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, Dr Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Jim Dowd and
Jane Kennedy.

Question accordingly negatived.

Mr. Gibb: I beg to move amendment No. 8, in page 3, line 35, at end insert

'provided that the employer has more than 9 employees'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments: No. 1, in page 3, line 37, after 'employers', insert

'who employ at least 21 workers'.

No. 5, in clause 17, page 8, line 30, after 'employer', insert

'shall be construed in accordance with section 6 above but excluding employers with fewer than ten employees'.

Mr. Gibb: The amendment would exempt employers who employ fewer than 10 people from having to administer the working families tax credit. Thus, employees in such businesses could have their tax credit paid directly to them at home.

Businesses in this country have accumulated a huge regulatory burden. Although any regulation on its own tends to add just a small burden—20 minutes a week, an hour, a month, or a few minutes here and there—when it is added to the hundreds of regulations already on the statute book, it soon becomes clear that regulation is stifling business and strangling small businesses.

The administrative burdens that the Bill imposes on business, and the raft of regulations that are spawned by it, are an unwelcome exception to that principle because the regulations, by themselves, impose a significant burden on business. The regulatory impact assessment estimates that £103 million a year of recurrent administrative costs will be imposed on business. That is in addition to £43 million in one-off set-up costs arising from the Bill.

It is clear from the draft regulations on tax credits payment by employers how burdensome the rules are. First, employers must calculate the amount of working families tax credit or disabled persons tax credit to be paid by multiplying the daily rate, which is notified to them by the Inland Revenue, by the number of days in the period. That must then be added to the employee's net pay, after deducting PAYE and national insurance contributions. Next, the employer must enter that figure on the employee's pay slip and record it separately as an item entitled "tax credit". That must then be totalled, and a separate tax credit figure recorded on yet another form. Total tax credits paid to each employee must be entered on Inland Revenue forms P14 and P60. At the end of the tax year, another form—a P35—must be filled for all employees, including the total amount of any Inland Revenue funding for the year. Finally, the employer must produce certificates of payments for leavers.

All that places a huge extra burden on small businesses. Most of the work is carried out by the boss at the kitchen table, using up time and energy—[HON. MEMBERS: "On-message."] Absolutely on-message: kitchen-table conservatism. That uses up time and energy which should have been devoted to running and developing the business.

The amendment specifically excludes employers with fewer than 10 employees. The regulatory impact assessment says that there are 835,000 such businesses in Britain out of about 1.2 million. However, they employ only about 100,000 individuals, out of a total of 730,000 people who will eligible for working families tax credit which will be paid through the payroll. Therefore, the amendment would take out of the system just 14 per cent. of the total number of people who are eligible for working families tax credit.

The regulatory impact assessment says that employers of fewer than 10 employees will incur costs of £35 million a year, out of total costs of £103 million. That is equivalent to some 35 per cent., so exempting all businesses with fewer than 10 employees would lift a huge administrative burden from 60 per cent. of employers. Such an exemption would save 35 per cent. of the estimated costs by removing all relevant costs from the employers, yet it would mean just 14 per cent. of employees who were likely to receive working families tax credit through the payroll, would not do so.

Despite the exemption, the Government would still be able to pursue their policy—however misguided—to pay through the payroll the majority of the recipients of the working families tax credit—86 per cent. would still be eligible under our amendment—but a huge burden would be lifted from 835,000 employers, who represent some 60 per cent of all employers.

Mr. Robert Syms (Poole): In my experience, many small businesses, particularly those trying to get started, are husband-and-wife teams. In many instances, one or other partner works for nothing to get the business going. Will not all those regulations add another burden to that business?

Mr. Gibb: My hon. Friend makes a valid point. Many Ministers do not realise that running a new business is a dangerous, difficult and risky operation. The difference between success and failure is very fine. One extra

regulation, particularly the burdensome regulation of paying tax credits to employees, could be the final straw that prevents the business from getting off the ground, or sinks it into bankruptcy.

The Government seek to change the behaviour of employees and potential employees, not employers. Therefore, the fact that the amendment takes 60 per cent. of employers out of the ambit of the Bill should be a good thing, and should not be a reason for Government opposition to the amendment.

The amendment has the support to the Confederation of British Industry, which has said in a briefing that was prepared specifically for the debate:

"Payment of WFTC via the wage packet will entail additional costs for all employers but particularly for small firms who are particularly adversely affected by compliance costs. The CBI therefore supports those amendments that propose an exemption for very small firms from administering the credit."

Mr. Brian Prime of the Federation of Small Businesses has said that the working families tax credit

"would mean another administrative burden placed upon small business owners, who are already the unpaid tax collectors on behalf of Government for income tax, NICs and VAT, and who also fund such benefits as Statutory Sick Pay, Maternity Pay and redundancy pay."

That is why the federation opposes the whole Bill.

7.45 pm

Similar concerns have been raised by Taxaid, a charity which helps individuals who cannot afford an accountant to guide them through the minefield that has become our tax legislation. It is concerned that the

"implementation of an untested and unfamiliar scheme will impose considerable stresses on employers and we have serious concerns about the ability and willingness of smaller firms to deliver the new tax credits, because of the additional compliance burdens that will be imposed upon them."

The Institute of Taxation has said:

"We are concerned that overall the extra burden on employers may end up as disproportionate to the benefits gained."

Conservative Members fear how small businesses will cope with a regulation that is particularly difficult and cumbersome, and so important to their employees. As my hon. Friend the Member for Bromsgrove (Miss Kirkbride) said in Committee, most small businesses, like the small jeweller's shop in Bromsgrove, are simply unaware of the impending additional burden. When it hits them, they will be angry and for many small businesses, it will simply be the final straw.

I draw to the House's attention the deceptive way in which part of the draft regulatory impact assessment has been worded. I am grateful to Roger Cockfield, a reader in taxation at De Montfort university, for drawing that to the attention of hon. Members.

Paragraph 56 of that assessment refers to the fact that the administrative cost to employers with fewer than five employees will be £24 million. A total of 70,000 employers of that size of work force are likely to administer working families tax credit and about 70,000 employees will receive the benefit. That would work out at an average administrative cost of about £342 per year per employer. Paragraph 56, however, has averaged the £24 million over all 670,000 employers with fewer than five employees, giving an administrative cost of just £35 per employer per year.

That is just not on. Government-funded documents must not be used deliberately to mislead. I urge Ministers to amend the draft regulatory impact assessment before it is finalised. If the Government are confident that their policy on working families tax credit is right, they should not need to manipulate the evidence.

The amendment will save some 835,000 small businesses from a huge and intolerable administrative burden. It will not have an impact on the thrust of the Government's policy plans because 86 per cent. of those employees who the Government estimate will be paid working families tax credit through the payroll will continue to be so paid. Therefore, I urge the House to support the amendment.

Mr. Webb: Amendment No. 1 would exempt firms that employ fewer than 20 people from the requirement to pay the tax credit. Many of the arguments that have been eloquently expressed in favour of amendments Nos. 8 and 5, which would limit the measure to firms employing 10 or more, apply to firms with 20 or more employees. The hon. Member for Bognor Regis and Littlehampton (Mr. Gibb) made a convincing case for the modesty of his proposal. The Government could still force payroll payment on most of the employers at whom the measure is directed, with minimal impact on small firms, so I have much sympathy with his point.

How might one seek to alleviate the burdens on small businesses? There are alternative models to those proposed in the amendments. One is the statutory maternity pay route, where employers are asked to deliver cash from the state to the employee. In return, small firms are given reimbursement and a contribution towards costs.

One would have welcomed the Government's saying that the working families tax credit was exactly analogous to statutory maternity pay. The measure is a request by the state for employers to deliver cash to their employees. Therefore, employers should be compensated for doing so. We would have welcomed such a measure, but regrettably the Government have not gone down that route. I would be interested to hear from the Minister why they have rejected that approach. Because they have rejected it, we have had to look at exempting small firms.

As the hon. Member for Bognor Regis and Littlehampton has pointed out, the total administrative burden of delivering the tax credit will be £100 million. That is a £100 million bet on a hunch. The Government have a hunch that payment through the pay packet will be more effective than payment direct to recipients, but it is not just a Government bet of £100 million; it is a Government bet of £100 million of other people's money. It might almost be described as a £100 million bet on a non-runner. The Government are saying that businesses will have to find the money to back the Government's hypothesis—their social experiment, of whose success, depressingly, we have seen no evidence. Indeed, the hallmark of our debates on the Bill has been the lack of evidence to support the Government's case.

Inevitably, small firms—the subject of the amendment—will be hardest hit. Larger firms may be able to absorb the costs, but, as the regulatory impact assessment points out, firms that employ one or two

[Mr. Webb]

people and have manual payroll systems will suffer. The Inland Revenue itself says that smaller firms are more likely to pay low wages, and are therefore disproportionately likely to be affected.

Things could get worse for small firms. If they do not pay much employer or employee national insurance or income tax in the first place, they could end up having to give their employees more in the form of working families tax credit than they take from them in tax and pay to the Government. They could be out of pocket. Moreover, it seems to me that the Chancellor's announcement in the Budget last Tuesday of a child tax credit will make matters even worse: presumably employers will have to deliver that as well, and will therefore be even more out of pocket.

Either small firms will have to sub the Government if they do not spot this coming, or they will have to plan a month early, work out that they will have to pay their employees more than they have to pay the Government and apply for a sub from the Government—which, of course, will mean extra bureaucracy. Whatever happens, they will lose the benefit that they currently gain from the PAYE income tax and national insurance that sits in their bank accounts until they have to hand it over. If they have to hand it over at the point in the month when they pay employees' salaries, they will lose interest. All that is part of the £100 million cost to which the Inland Revenue has admitted.

Clause 6 will impose costs on businesses, and will impose particularly acute costs on small businesses. The Government have not chosen the statutory maternity pay route of refunding employers for their costs, which would have been perfectly reasonable. That is why we need amendments to exempt small firms with 10 or 20 employees. I would prefer 20, but I am more than happy with 10. The Government have produced no justification for imposing such a burden on employers.

Mr. Syms: My speech will be short, but I hope Ministers will accept that it is heartfelt. I have been a small business man for nearly 25 years, and some Governments—even those whom I have supported—have not been sufficiently aware of the burdens that law-making places on small businesses.

Inevitably, the administration and employment costs of running a small business will be high. I am not talking about large businesses with personnel departments and, perhaps, professional managers; I am talking about small firms dealing with a small number of people, while also dealing with a range of problems, trying to acquire customers, trying to get the money in and trying to keep going. The most difficult bit, I think, is getting the money in. Some of the administrative burdens placed on small businesses cause a real problem, distracting those who run such businesses from the important process of doing the work, getting the money in and ensuring that they stay in business.

I have always believed that the future of this country lies in nurturing and supporting small business. If every business employing five, 10 or 15 workers could take on one or two more, our chances of lower unemployment would be immeasurably greater, and we would have a dynamic impetus in the economy. As a matter of policy, we as a country ought to do what we can to support, sustain and encourage small business. If anything, however, the Bill will increase the number of burdens that we already have in the form of the working time directive and many other European regulations. It will make it far more difficult for small businesses to remain a profitable entity, continuing to employ people, to grow and to provide services for the community.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bognor Regis and Littlehampton (Mr. Gibb) made a convincing case for the amendment, to which I listened carefully. I also listened carefully to the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb), who expressed a preference for 20 employees. I would like the figure to be even higher. I am not sure that it is fair to shift the burden from the state to private companies, and to allow those companies to cover the cost. No doubt the private companies could do it a little more efficiently, but it would involve a tremendous burden of work.

I made an important point in an intervention on my hon. Friend the Member for Bognor Regis and Littlehampton. Many people who set up small businesses are husband-and-wife teams, or partners. The business may be run by a husband or wife who may, while doing another job, have to come in and deal with the books and the administration. That imposes an extra burden—a burden, perhaps, on the marriage.

This measure will cost £103 million, which is a huge amount. It will impose a terrific burden on small businesses. It is unacceptable for a Government who are currently enjoying surpluses because of what is happening in the economy to shift the burden of state regulation on to small businesses.

The Federation of Small Businesses says that the Bill

"would mean another administrative burden placed upon small business owners".

The federation would know. Here is another view:

"The result of any new burden, combined with the impact of the minimum wage, could be to discourage companies from taking on low-skilled or semi-skilled employees . . . It is not the job of employers to administer the benefits system".

That is what was said by Tim Melville-Ross, director general of the Institute of Directors, and reported in the *Financial Times* on 14 January 1998.

"I wonder whether government advisers have any real concept of what it is like to run a small business. It's a recipe for disaster".

That was said by Michael Snyder of Kingston Smith management consultants, and quoted in *The Sunday Telegraph* on 25 January 1998.

Those people run businesses. They know business. A Government who are supposed to be business friendly ought to take their advice. I hope that the Government will consider the amendment very carefully.

"From a purely business standpoint there are major administrative concerns about the complexity of the administration, especially if, in order to pay the credit, employers have to inquire into employees' family circumstances in much more detail than is needed today. This will be especially burdensome for small firms".

That was said by the CBI, and reported in the *Financial Times* on 14 January 1998.

I have run a small business, and I know that those who run such businesses have a close relationship with those who work with them. They are employees, but many are also friends. Inquiring into their personal background is

difficult: it changes the relationship. I do not want employers whose businesses have five, seven or 10 employees to have to sit outside people's homes to see who they are sleeping with, but the Bill may well mean that. I do not think that such matters are the legitimate concern of employers. They might be a legitimate concern if they conferred a benefit, but small business men should not have to take on that task when they should be going out to find custom, ensuring that the money comes in, keeping the business going and creating wealth.

Mr. Webb: I sympathise with what the hon. Gentleman is saying. A moment ago, we discussed privacy. Does that not apply in spades to small businesses? The Minister has said that privacy is not a problem, because employers are under a common-law duty of secrecy which prevents them from telling everyone else in the firm certain facts, but, in small firms, the employer is everyone else in the firm, and the employer will know. Is that not undesirable?

Mr. Syms: It is a slippery slope. There must be a proper relationship between employer and employee. Some years ago, if an employer had started asking whom his employees were sleeping with, he would have been told to mind his own business. I thought that we had left behind the old days when landowners lorded it over the people and told them how to live their lives. I do not want employers to be peeking into their employees' bedrooms. Ministers may laugh, but this is a serious point. I think that the amendments would improve the relationship between small businesses and the dynamics that are so important to our economy.

8 pm

Mrs. Roche: At the end of his speech, the hon. Member for Poole (Mr. Syms) had the good grace to laugh himself—because his comments were plainly ridiculous. It would be a different matter if the previous Government, whom I am sure he would have supported, had not landed regulation upon regulation on small businesses. Opposition Members failed also—because of a fundamental misunderstanding of the advantages of employer payment of tax credits—to recognise the provision's positive aspects for small business.

I should give a little credit to the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. Pickles). Just a few weeks ago, in our d[illegible]n the Bill in Committee, he came up with the phrase "[illegible] kitchen table". Clearly, the Leader of the Opposition listened to him and developed a new policy. It was all due to the hon. Gentleman, and my hon. Friends and I were there when it happened.

The Government firmly believe that payment of tax credits by employers—which, from April 2000, will be the predominant method of delivering tax credits—will unambiguously demonstrate to employees that tax credits are a reward for work. Businesses themselves—small, large and medium-sized businesses—will have the advantage not only of reinforcing that fact, but of adding to the loyalty that employees feel towards a firm, thereby aiding productivity.

Showing credits on the pay slip, as an increase in net take-home pay, will emphasise the place of tax credits in the tax system, thereby helping to break any perceived link with benefits and to reduce the stigma of claiming in-work support. My hon. Friend the Paymaster General quite rightly referred to the academic work on the subject.

For those reasons, we should not be looking for ways of excluding large numbers of employers from the scheme—as this group of amendments would do—and thereby depriving many thousands of employees of their right to receive their tax credits through the payroll.

About 925,000 employers—more than 80 per cent. of all employers—employ fewer than 21 people. Excluding them would be wholly inconsistent with our objectives. Excluding employers with fewer than 10 employees would not be much better, as 825,000 employers—about 70 per cent. of the total—would be outside the scheme.

Mr. Webb: I mention the precedent of statutory maternity pay. A previous Government said, "We shall ask employers to handle the administrative burden of paying money from the state to the employee. However, as it is a cost on them, we shall reimburse them for that cost and for the statutory maternity pay itself." Why do the Government reject reimbursement in the one case but not in the other?

Mrs. Roche: I understand the hon. Gentleman's point. Although I do not blame him for making it, it is exactly the same one that he made in Committee. The difference is that maternity pay is a benefit, and this is a tax credit, which is being made using a different system. I think that his question exposes the fundamental political and philosophical differences between the attitude of the Liberal Democrats and that of Labour Members.

Mr. Webb *indicated assent.*

Mrs. Roche: He agrees.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green): Will the Minister, having read the Committee proceedings, again confirm that the Government recognise that, with the Bill's passage, they will be placing another burden on small businesses?

Mrs. Roche: If one considers everything that the Government are doing to help small businesses—in the Budget, by establishing the Small Business Service and setting the lowest-ever corporation tax levels, with our better regulation task force and unit, and in the positive help that will be provided in the Bill's provisions—one cannot accept the hon. Gentleman's comment.

I wonder whether Opposition Members have thought through the practical difficulties of implementing their amendment No. 8 or any other provision that would exempt employers by reference to their number of employees.

In making assessments for tax credits and deciding whether payment through the payroll is appropriate in a specific case, the Inland Revenue will have to rely on information given on the application form. The only other possible source of information is the annual returns provided by employers who operate the PAYE scheme. It would not be a simple matter to identify from an employee's application form the total number of employees working for the same employer, and trying to do so would cause real difficulty—possibly causing delay for applicants and requiring further involvement by employers. Therefore, all the burdens described

[Mrs. Roche]

by Opposition Members would increase if their amendment were passed. In all doubtful cases, the Revenue would have to check the facts with employers.

As we have repeatedly stressed in debates on the Bill, we are committed to keeping to an absolute minimum any additional burdens on employers. With that mind, we have given careful thought to the position of employers who do not deduct PAYE or national insurance contributions from the wages they pay because none of their employees earns above the threshold for national insurance contribution. Those employers currently have no dealings with the Inland Revenue in their role as employers. Without an exemption, they would be brought into the Revenue's employer database, simply because they have an employee who receives tax credit. As they have no PAYE tax or national insurance contributions out of which to pay tax credits, they will always have to be funded by the Inland Revenue—in many cases, on a weekly basis.

For all those reasons, we have decided that employers who do not deduct PAYE tax or national insurance contributions from the pay of any of their employees will be exempt from paying tax credit through the payroll. The exemption will remove from the scheme about 80,000 employers. That is absolutely targeted action. I hope that that answers the question of the hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr. Duncan Smith)—or is he right hon.?

Mr. Duncan Smith *indicated dissent.*

Mrs. Roche: I am always anxious to assist the promotion prospects of Opposition Members—*[Interruption.]* No, I should not go as far as that; just wait and see.

The provision is clear, targeted and makes absolutely good sense. The exemption is also clearly stated in published regulations.

I am sure that the hon. Members who tabled this group of amendments are genuinely concerned about the matter. However, they have not mentioned all the steps that the Government are taking to design a scheme that is as employer friendly as possible—which is why we have been consulting, and continue to consult, representatives of employers and payroll software suppliers, many of whom have provided valuable contributions to designing the scheme. I am very grateful to all those employers organisations who have assisted us in the matter.

We have also started an education programme for all employers that will operate both before and after April 2000. We shall pay very close attention to providing information. The plan is that employers' information packs will be issued next January and will include detailed tax credit examples, showing employers exactly what they have to do.

I am glad to see that Opposition Members are paying attention to the important information that I am giving them. [HON. MEMBERS: "We are."] I just wanted to ensure that they were still with us.

The Revenue is planning, from July 1999, to hold seminars for employers, which will be backed up by trade press advertisements and feature link promotions in the regional press. I would have thought that Conservative Members would be interested in measures for business. They claim to support business, but their conduct this evening shows why they lost the small business vote at the general election.

The amendments clearly do not make sense and I urge my hon. Friends to reject them.

Mr. Gibb: The hon. Lady has just accepted that 70,000 employers with employees who are paid less than the national insurance threshold can easily be taken out of the system. She accepts that the system will be a burden for them. Why will she not extend the exemption to all employers who employ fewer than 10 employees? If she can do it for one group, why not for the other?

Mrs. Roche: The hon. Gentleman clearly has not read all the material properly. If he had, he would understand. How could the tax credits system be implemented without a PAYE system through which it could operate?

Mr. Gibb: The hon. Lady is right to exempt those 70,000 employers from the system, because it would be an intolerable burden on them. It will also be an intolerable burden on the 630,000 employers who employ fewer than 10 employees. She has just admitted that. She has talked about the proportion of businesses that would be taken out of the working families tax credit system if our amendment was accepted—70 per cent. if the threshold was 10 employees. That is a plus point, because the purpose of the Bill is not to change the behaviour of employers, but, in her words, to change the behaviour of employees. The amendment would take only 14 per cent. of eligible employees out of the system, leaving 86 per cent.

In view of the hon. Lady's inadequate answer, I shall press the amendment to a vote.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 150, Noes 291.

Division No. 115] **[8.12 pm**

AYES

Allan, Richard
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Baker, Norman
Ballard, Jackie
Beggs, Roy
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Body, Sir Richard
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Brake, Tom
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burnett, John
Burns, Simon
Burstow, Paul
Butterfill, John
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chidgey, David
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rayleigh)*
Clifton–Brown, Geoffrey
Colvin, Michael
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Cran, James
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Day, Stephen
Donaldson, Jeffrey
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan Smith, Iain
Evans, Nigel
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Fearn, Ronnie
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam
Fraser, Christopher
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gibb, Nick
Gill, Christopher

Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorrie, Donald
Gray, James
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Harris, Dr Evan
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat–Amory, Rt Hon David
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson Smith, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Keetch, Paul
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Archy
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
McIntosh, Miss Anne
McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maginnis, Ken
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Norman, Archie
Oaten, Mark
Öpik, Lembit
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Faversham)*
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
St Aubyn, Nick
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, Rt Hon John D *(Strangford)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Tyler, Paul
Tyrie, Andrew
Wallace, James
Wardle, Charles
Waterson, Nigel
Webb, Steve
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Willis, Phil
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Woodward, Shaun
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mrs. Eleanor Laing and Mr. Tim Collins.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Stuart *(Middlesbrough)*
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Buck, Ms Karen
Burgon, Colin
Butler, Mrs Christine
Cabom, Richard
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Canavan, Dennis
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbett, Robin
Corston, Ms Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Darvill, Keith
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, John
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Eagle, Angela *(Wallas[illegible])*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Foulkes, George
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hanson, David
Healey, John
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith
Hoey, Kate
Home Robertson, John
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kemp, Fraser
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kingham, Ms Tess
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Lock, David
Love, Andrew
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McDonagh, Siobhain
Macdonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Mrs Rosemary
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Merron, Gillian
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'd Heeley)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Alasdair *(Galloway)*
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*

Morgan, Rhodri *(Cardiff W)*
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Mountford, Kali
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Eddie
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Mrs Diana
Osborne, Ms Sandra
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Rt Hon Ms Joyce
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Rt Hon Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Miss Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Stott, Roger
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Vaz, Keith
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
White, Brian
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, Dr Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Noes:
Jane Kennedy and
Mr. Jim Dowd.

Question accordingly negatived.

Clause 16

FINANCIAL PROVISIONS

Amendment made: No. 14, in page 8, line 17, after 'Board', insert

'or the Secretary of State'.—*[Dawn Primarolo.]*

Schedule 2

TRANSFER OF FUNCTIONS.

Amendments made: No. 11, in page 16, line 26, leave out 'Paragraphs (a) and (b)' and insert

'Sub-paragraphs (i) and (ii) of paragraph (a)'.

No. 12, in page 16, leave out lines 29 and 30.—*[Dawn Primarolo.]*

Schedule 6

REPEALS.

Amendment made: No. 13, in page 26, line 12, leave out '165(1)(a) and (b)' and insert '165(1)(a)(i) and (ii)'.—*[Dawn Primarolo.]*

Order for Third Reading read.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord): I must remind the House that Madam Speaker has selected the reasoned amendment in the name of the leader of the Liberal Democrat party.

8.26 pm

Dawn Primarolo: I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

I am pleased to open this debate on the Bill. I rise with some trepidation, in that my hon. Friend the Financial Secretary to the Treasury and the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. Pickles) have managed to refer in their speeches to films, television programmes and to Shakespeare. I wait with bated breath to see what the hon. Gentleman will come up with in this debate.

We have had very interesting—and I think, on the whole, constructive—debates, both on Second Reading and in Committee. It was a wide-ranging discussion, covering a variety of issues of concern and interest to hon. Members. No doubt many of those points will be revisited during this debate.

Since those debates, the Chancellor has delivered his Budget statement, which builds on the foundations that the Bill puts in place. My right hon. Friend announced an increase in the value of the basic tax credit of £2.50 per week, and an increase in child tax credit of £4.70 from October, and another £1.10 from April 2000; a new fast-track gateway to the disabled persons tax credit from October 2000 to help people who become long-term sick or disabled while working to retain their jobs; and a new income support run-on for lone parents moving into work. Payments for lone parents will continue for the first two weeks at the out-of-work rate to help people bridge the difficult period when they first go back to work.

Mr. Tim Collins (Westmorland and Lonsdale): In the calculation of the figures that she has just quoted about the difference between being in work and out of work, has the hon. Lady assumed whether people have to drive to work?

Dawn Primarolo: There is no calculation for people receiving benefits anywhere in the tax system in respect of travel to work—however short or far the distance. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is conversant with how the tax system deals with him as a Member of Parliament, and he will know that that cost is not tax-deductible.

From October 1999, the working families tax credit will provide a minimum income guarantee for families with a full-time earner of £200 per week—up from £190 per week—which is over £10,000 per year. It will mean that no family with children will pay net income tax until their earnings exceed £235 a week, or more than £12,000 a year. On average, the working families tax credit will give families an extra £24 a week, or £1,248 a year, as compared with family credit.

It may be helpful to all present if I describe formally what the Bill does. In doing so, I will be able to explain how the various concerns have been met. There are three major planks to the Bill: the conversion of family credit and disability working allowance to tax credits; the administration of the tax credits by the Inland Revenue; and the payment of the tax credits through the pay packet. Those three planks establish the fundamental policy and objectives of the introduction of the tax credits. As tax credits, within the tax system, administered by the Inland Revenue and paid through the pay packet, they will clearly demonstrate the rewards of work.

As I have already explained in earlier debates, the tax credits build on and replace two existing benefits: family credit and disability working allowance. To achieve that in the most efficient way, the Bill builds on existing social security legislation. It does that by providing that the main features of family credit and disability working allowance will apply to working families tax credit and disabled persons tax credit. The functions and responsibilities affecting the benefits being replaced will be transferred to the Inland Revenue and the Treasury.

Much of the detail of the existing system is in secondary legislation, which has been a point of contention for Opposition Members.

Mr. Pickles: This may be a convenient point at which to ask a relatively technical and non-controversial question. The Paymaster General says that the credits have the principal characteristics of the benefits to be replaced. There is concern among disabled groups that no guarantee has yet been given that certain benefits—in particular, prescriptions, dentistry and eye tests—that were previously triggered by disability working allowance will be transferred to the disabled persons tax credit. Will they be passported across?

Dawn Primarolo: Discussions are still taking place about prescriptions, and the matter will need to be followed up. We are aware of the concerns that have been expressed.

There were some regulation-making powers associated with family credit, and we have followed that up in the working families tax credit. The Inland Revenue has published all the major regulations in draft, including those setting out the broad structure of the working families tax credit and how it is made up, with the important addition of the new child care tax credit.

The Inland Revenue has also published the regulations giving the details of payment through the wage packet. The full details of the scheme are available and can be clearly seen. I fully appreciate that some Opposition Members have fundamental disagreements with the principles in the regulations, but the details are there. Indeed, many organisations representing business and payroll managers, and individuals have already provided input and comment to the Inland Revenue as we developed the scheme, and consultation continues. The Inland Revenue also intends shortly to publish revised drafts of the regulations for comment, to give any interested parties who have not yet commented the opportunity to do so.

I have already highlighted the improvements announced by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor last week. Let me remind the House of those improvements already announced for working families tax credit. The new child care tax credit will give extra help with child care costs. Earlier today, we added new clause 5 to extend the range of child care for which help can be given, which will increase the affordability of child care and help to promote good-quality child care for eight to 14-year-olds, in line with our national child care strategy.

There will be a full disregard of maintenance payments in the calculation of income for working families tax credit. That is a significant contribution to tackling child poverty, as maintenance payments will be able to be used directly for the children. I know that the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) welcomed that in Committee.

As we all know, the tax credits will be part of the tax system administered by the Revenue. The staff currently employed by the Benefits Agency dealing with family credit and disability working allowance will transfer to the Inland Revenue, building on their experience and expertise. The hon. Member for Gainsborough (Mr. Leigh), who visited the family credit unit in Preston, commented earlier today on the excellent standards and diligence of the staff. They are the people who will continue to administer the credit.

The Bill provides for those members of staff to become fully integrated into the Inland Revenue, and in particular to be subject to the same strict confidentiality rules that apply in the rest of the organisation. That is an important provision to protect the information.

From April 2000, the tax credits will normally be paid through the pay packet. That is a fundamental part of the tax credits system. I understand that Opposition Members reject that principle, but it is fundamental to the Government's strategy. The Bill contains the regulation-making powers to establish that part of the scheme.

We had numerous discussions in Committee on this part of the scheme, some of which were repeated on Report, and it became very clear that the Opposition did not fully understand it. I would like to take this opportunity to try to allay some of their fears and perhaps—dare I say it?—put right some of their misunderstandings.

Couples will be able to choose which of them receives the tax credit. I have tried to put that delicately so that I will not be accused of anything. It is important to remember that, in the majority of cases, purse to wallet transfers are not even an issue, because of the profile of those who claim family credit and who will form the majority of those who claim the working families tax credit. Some 50 per cent. of current family credit claimants are lone parents in any case, and of the other 50 per cent., 23 per cent. have a female main earner. It is clear that the money will continue to go to them and, in other cases, couples will be able to choose.

Employers will not have to assess working families tax credit awards. Time and again, Opposition Members have talked of the burden on businesses and the need for them to calculate the payments, but I hope that it is now accepted that the Inland Revenue will do that and inform employers how much to pay, when to start payment and when to stop.

Employers will be given only the information they need in order to pay the tax credit to the right person. The Inland Revenue will step in to pay the tax credit when a job comes to an end or there is a breakdown in the arrangement. The first priority—as hon. Members

[Dawn Primarolo]

would expect—is to get the tax credit to the employee on time. The Bill provides powers to ensure that that happens.

During our debates, hon. Members have expressed some concern about fraud and its history in the payment of family credit. We are determined—as the House would expect—to fight fraud in the payment of the working families tax credit and to ensure that it does not develop. That is why we have included in the Bill several provisions that make up a package to deter fraud and encourage compliance. Those substantial measures include information powers to allow the Revenue to obtain the information it needs to verify claims. That power is not available for the payment of family credit, but it will apply to the new credit. Also included are powers to recover overpayments through the tax system directly and penalties to deter non-compliance and fraud. That package will help to secure the system, and will make it clear that applications for tax credits, and the operation of payments through the pay packet, must be carried out honestly, to ensure that the right amount of tax credit goes to the right people. The concerns expressed in reports by the Social Security Committee have been of great assistance to us and we have built on the experience of the family credit unit.

The working families tax credit is targeted at families with children, and on low to moderate earnings, for whom the unemployment and poverty traps are especially severe. We owe it to them to provide a system that genuinely helps them and they can trust. I am sure that given the concern expressed by Opposition Members about fraud, they will support those measures. The Inland Revenue will consult on a code of practice that will describe how it intends to use those powers, so that there are no mistakes by employers.

It is worth also reminding the House that all the penalties in the Bill can be appealed against to an independent tribunal. Appeals about tax credit claims will be heard by new unified appeal tribunals set up under the Social Security Act 1998. That is because those tribunals will have the experience to deal with the type of cases that will come to them. Applicants are likely to be more familiar with that process.

Appeals against a penalty charged in connection with an employer's obligations will be heard by the tax appeal commissioners. That is because employers' obligations in relation to tax credits are very similar to their obligations to operate the pay-as-you-earn scheme and appeals on those penalties are already heard by the tax appeal commissioners. In the long term, as the new tax credits evolve, we intend to pass jurisdiction on appeals on decisions on entitlement or award of tax credits to the tax commissioners so that they will hear all appeals on tax credits.

The Bill is a significant demonstration of the Government's real commitment to supporting families by making sure that work pays and encouraging people to move from welfare into work. That will not be compulsory, but the Bill will ensure that those who want to work will be better off in work and will be supported in their efforts. It shows that we do indeed believe that the value and dignity of work are all important, and that we are prepared to do something about it. Anybody who has had conversations with lone parents will know that many of them want to work, but find that the barriers of child care or the poverty trap mean that they are no better off in work.

Miss McIntosh: Will the Minister help me on one point? She accepts that there will be a great administrative burden on businesses, particularly small businesses. Is there any way in which the Government could provide an exemption for very small businesses?

Dawn Primarolo: We had the debate on exemptions for small businesses earlier, and I do not intend to go over it again. We did not accept the idea outlined by the hon. Lady, and my hon. Friend the Financial Secretary made it clear that small businesses that do not collect on the PAYE system or collect NICs would not have to pay the tax credit. It is obvious that businesses that do not collect any money cannot deduct the tax credit in order to pay it to their employees.

When the hon. Lady has read *Hansard*, I shall be happy to write to her on any further points that she may wish to take up with me. I shall write back as quickly as I can, subject to the thousands of letters that I receive.

Working families tax credit delivers the promise that the Chancellor made to working families and to disabled people in the Budget of 1998. We are improving work incentives still further by increasing support for working families through the Budget measures that the Chancellor announced last week. The benefits, particularly to working parents, of access to a child care tax credit will ensure that many more parents are able to have quality child care and to receive support towards paying for it. I commend the Bill to the House.

8.47 pm

Mr. Pickles: The Minister said that the Bill was built on the foundation laid by the Chancellor's move towards tax credits in the previous two Budgets. I have to agree with her. The Bill increases dependency, spreads income further down the economic scale and ensures that the lower paid will have to pay more.

My hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Collins) has made the good point that people on lower incomes will have to shell out because they happen to own a car. In rural areas, cars are the only practical means that low-paid workers have of getting to work, and they will have to find an extra £183 a year so that they can go to work. The Minister suggested that the point is not relevant, and that that amount cannot be claimed in tax or benefit. In fact, my hon. Friend's point was precisely that: the Government give with one hand and take away with the other.

Mr. Collins: There was a perfect illustration of that point earlier. Does my hon. Friend recall that we are supposed to be grateful because people in rural areas will receive £20 million in rural transport initiatives, but the total taken from rural areas in increased petrol duties will be £1 billion?

Mr. Pickles: I was not aware of that figure, but I know that my hon. Friend takes a close interest in the matter. Perhaps he will consider this point: there has been much moving around of the standard rates of income tax, but the increase in the fuel escalator, which directly affects

people on low incomes, is worth slightly more than 1p on the standard rate. The Budget was merely about moving taxation around.

I am going to agree with the Paymaster General again.

Mr. James Cran (Beverley and Holderness): Hey, wait a minute!

Mr. Pickles: No, I must. The measure takes on the main features of family credit and disability working allowance—and makes them worse. It takes all the worst features and adds to them. The hon. Lady gave a pretty clear indication of that when I intervened. I thought that by now the issue would be non-controversial and that we would have had a view about passporting benefits. We are about to send the Bill to another place. Without the passports, people who are receiving family credit will be materially worse off under the new system. Unless their lordships know that, I cannot understand how they can come to a reasonable decision.

The Paymaster General says that the regulations are available—she says that she has produced them. That is true—we have had reams of them on a take it or leave it basis. My hon. Friend the Member for Bognor Regis and Littlehampton (Mr. Gibb) went without sleep two nights running to go through the regulations so that we would be on line with working the issues out. A new clause has been produced today, with no regulations. There is a promise of regulations to come: they will be in another place when the matter is considered there. Here we are, the people's representatives, trying to reach a reasonable decision when the details are in the regulations and the House has not even been shown the courtesy of being given the most cursory glance at those before this most important legislation is read the Third time.

The hon. Lady makes great play of the increase in the child care cost. She says that that will tackle child poverty, yet we have still not had answers to the basic question of how much is in the kitty for child care. When you can consult *Hansard* tomorrow, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you will notice the repeated attempts to find out exactly how much the child care element will be and the Government's repeated stonewalling, to prevent us from knowing that sum.

We have presented some conclusive arguments and evidence to suggest that, while we agree that the Institute for Fiscal Studies may be a little way out in its suggestion that the cost will be £4 billion, it is not that far out. Probably, the cost will be nearer £3 billion, but even if that estimate is wrong, it will certainly not be less than £2 billion. If that is the case, it will be £2.5 billion more than the Government have allowed for in the Bill. That additional sum of money—the £1.5 billion—will disappear in an escalation of the child care tax element, which will be available further up the income scale. We understand that people earning as much as £37,000 will be entitled to receive that element.

Before the hon. Lady reached her final peroration, we heard her say that payment through the pay system is fundamental—she used slightly sweeter words when we were discussing the matter a few moments ago on Report. That will involve a fundamental shift of resources from women to men. At the moment, the majority of such payments are made to women, but the Bill will result in a substantial shift towards men.

The hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb), said on Second Reading—I am sure that we will have the opportunity of hearing his wise words in a moment—that roughly 300,000 couples receive family credit, where the man is the principal breadwinner.

Mr. Webb *indicated assent.*

Mr. Pickles: Under WFTC, that will mean that £900 million will be going to men rather than women, which is a fundamental shift.

We know from all the surveys and studies that if the money goes to the woman, there is a greater chance of its being spent on child care than if it goes to the man, because then it will merely be subsumed into family income. Some people might say that we are implying that the money will be spent on cigarettes, alcohol, lottery tickets and the like.

Mr. Greg Pope (Lord Commissioner to the Treasury): Good.

Mr. Pickles: We have just heard a most interesting intervention from the duty Whip, and I am sure that you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, heard the hon. Gentleman say, "Good." There is lots of tax paid on those items, after all.

Mr. Cran: He is the Government Whip.

Mr. Pickles: I do not know what is happening—Whips are supposed to be silent, but they are breaking that silence. My hon. Friend is absolutely right.

Both the Bill and the Chancellor's Budget mean that we shall be paying people working families tax credit so that they can pay tax. Under the Chancellor's system, people will not be spending the money on their families, or on lottery tickets as the Government Whip wants them to, but on paying extra taxes. If the Chancellor really wants to do something to help families on lower incomes, he should simply take them out of tax altogether.

The Paymaster General spoke about fraud and how she would deal with it. It is only reasonable that we should judge the Government on their record; unfortunately, the Government's record on fraud since coming to office is abysmal. Across the board, the Government are winding down their benefit fraud prevention operations. The London organised fraud investigation team was mysteriously shut down in October for six weeks, despite having increased its success rate month on month. During that period, all operations were suspended and evidence pertaining to pending cases was corrupted, thus threatening the successful prosecution of those cases. The team is now to be wound up by the end of this month.

In September 1998, local authority fraud investigation units received internal Department of Social Security memorandum F12/98, which has the effect of making it much harder for local authorities to begin proceedings against fraudsters. It is no longer worth their while to make the attempt. The money lost to fraud being recouped has fallen by up to 60 per cent. in some local authority areas. Last year, the total savings derived from the activities of those local investigation units was £342 million; the savings lost by preventing their activities might be up to £200 million this year.

[Mr. Pickles]

I could go on with a whole catalogue of examples of the Government failing on fraud. The Paymaster General says that we should trust the Government, because they are going to deal with fraud, but I have to tell her, despite my personal admiration for her, that we cannot trust the Government on fraud, because the Government's fraud has been abysmal.

Mr. Webb: Surely the Government have been very consistent in their fraud.

Mr. Pickles: I got carried away, and the hon. Gentleman is quite right to pick me up. I am so disgusted by the Government's lack of attention to fraud and to recovering the money that is robbed from taxpayers that I got emotionally carried away. I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for reminding me of that.

The reason why the Paymaster General suggests that the Liberal Democrats are on our side is that the Bill is such an appalling measure. The Government have simply taken the key elements of the previous Conservative Government's measures, made matters worse, put a spin on them, put them in a different package and then pretended that something has happened.

There can be no excuse for what has happened because we had the benefit of a Select Committee report. Select Committees have been the subject of much comment in the Chamber in recent weeks. I have in front of me the Select Committee report about tax and benefits and implementing tax credits. So far as I can see, it has not been nobbled: it seems to be a good, hard report. If the Government had taken heed of that document, we would not be faced with this mess.

There was a time when the Government could have pulled back. It is clear from the evidence that, until quite late in their deliberations, the Government thought that changes could be made through the tax code. If the Government had chosen that option, I do not think our opposition would be quite so strong. We would still have many problems with the legislation, but I suspect that we could be much more helpful. As soon as it became clear to the Select Committee that there could be no regulation through the tax code, the Government should have abandoned the whole idea. However, they could not abandon the measure because it is a flagship.

Hon. Members will remember that I referred to some concerns about the Bill expressed by the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry. An unnamed Minister talked about the Chancellor and his flagship in *The Sunday Telegraph*, and said:

"The trouble is Gordon has got to realise that even flagships have to obey the rules of the sea."

It is painful to me to hear the Chancellor referred to so discourteously behind his back, but it is a sentiment which I endorse entirely.

From that point on, tax credits became an administrative burden on business and embodied the pursuit of a social agenda through stealth. Thanks to the Chancellor, the low paid will receive extra benefits in their pay packets so that they can pay extra tax. The cost—an extra £1.5 billion—will be felt further up the income scale.

I do not believe that that was the Government's intention. I was not invited to the Labour party gathering at Church house—I did not need to be there as the Prime Minister's comments on that occasion have been well reported. He said:

"I have asked the Ministers at the Department of Social Security to look in detail at how we can make far-reaching reforms that will tackle insecurity and poverty as well as reducing social security bills."

Yet Treasury and Social Security Ministers are running amok and reneging on the Prime Minister's promise. The child care element will ensure that social security bills rocket. Who will benefit? It is likely that there will be no significant increase in the job market. That is the reported view of both the Bank of England and the Institute for Fiscal Studies—two very respected organisations. Julian McCrae, an analyst with the IFS, has said:

"in terms of cost per job it does not look very sensible."

I am sure that he is right.

The Bill is about an increase in dependency by pushing means testing further and by catching people firmly in the means test dependency straitjacket—a full metal jacket, if you like.

Perversely, the proposals' effect on marginal tax rates may create a disincentive to work. According to the Institute for Fiscal Studies, almost 1 million men and women in two-earner couples will find that their financial returns from employment will fall directly as a result of the working families tax credit.

We have dealt at length with stigma. We understand that family credit is popular and virtually stigma-free, and has a high take-up rate. It is viewed by many as an extension of child benefit. As interventions on the Paymaster General have demonstrated, there will be greater knowledge in the workplace about who is claiming tax credits. On Second Reading and in Committee, there seemed to be a misunderstanding of how family credit worked. We were repeatedly assured by Ministers that there would be no difference whatsoever between family credit and working families tax credit concerning confidentiality in the workplace.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Bognor Regis and Littlehampton will recall, we clearly demonstrated that once an employment record has been established, pay-slips are acceptable under family credit, but that will not be the case under working families tax credit. Every six months, employers will be reminded that their employees are beneficiaries of working families tax credit. That will undoubtedly increase stigma.

As we were beginning to realise during earlier consideration of amendments, the proposal will be intrusive. Employers will be placed, without wanting to be, in the same position of patronage as 19th-century mill owners in that they will know exactly what is going on in their employees' families. Employers and senior staff will know how many children there are in those families, who is sleeping with whom, who is about to get divorced, who is getting another job, who is engaged and who is moonlighting. The Chamber should not impose obligations on employers or invade the privacy of our citizens.

We know that the measure will impose on businesses set-up costs of £43 million a year, and recurring costs of £103 million a year. There are many reasons to oppose the Bill. Money will be frittered away further up the

income scale. People on higher incomes will be pulled down into dependency. People will be stigmatised. There will be an enormous increase in the opportunity to commit fraud. The right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) said that the measure will offer a huge bonus to dishonesty. It will strengthen employers' hand over working people. It will draw employers into a web of dishonesty and corruption and reward those who pay low wages.

For all those reasons, we shall oppose the Third Reading. It is such a bad Bill that we shall support the reasoned amendment in the name of Liberal Democrat Members. We want to send a clear message to another place—which does not have the crowd of Back Benchers who will vote through any measure introduced by this Government—that this is a dangerous Bill which will cause problems for the liberty of our citizens and impose burdens on our businesses. It will require intense scrutiny and amendment, and we hope that it will not return from another place too soon.

9.10 pm

Mrs. Louise Ellman (Liverpool, Riverside): The Bill must be supported because it is a significant step towards alleviating poverty by giving help to working families on low incomes in a way that removes stigma. The first and foremost thing to note about the Bill is that it will assist more people. In fact, 400,000 additional families in need with children will be assisted by it.

The Bill is part of an important package of help which increases child benefit by record amounts and to record levels, and which introduces a national minimum wage. Taken together, that package means that there is now, or there will be, a guarantee of a minimum income to working families of at least £200 a week, and no family earning less than £235 a week will have to pay tax. The package is a significant move away from the disgrace of families working for low pay being required to pay tax.

Child care tax credit is an important part of the Bill. It delivers real and significant benefits of up to £100 a week for the first child and up to £150 for two children, and more than that. These elements put together—significant cash support for families with low income and significant assistance with child care—mean that the Bill will be delivering real and significant help to those who need it most. Indeed, it has been calculated that the average family receiving support through these measures will be about £17 a week better off. That is real assistance which will make a real difference.

According to the Library, it is estimated that there will be an increase in take-up by families of about 27 per cent., and for disabled people an increase of between 10 and 15 per cent. That is extremely important in terms of increased benefits for those already receiving them at a lower level, and important for those who are not receiving benefit now but who will be able to receive their credits through the new system.

The method of payment is also important and part of the new move by the Government to recognise support for those in need as a matter of right and to try to remove stigma as far as it is possible to do so. That is what lies behind the policy direction in favour of tax credits rather than benefit.

The suggestion that there should be tax credits comes from the report on tax and benefit systems by the tax and benefits task force, which was chaired by Martin Taylor and which considered these matters in depth. The decision to go ahead with tax credits in this instance stemmed from that report.

It is important that work be rewarded, that it be seen to pay and that it does pay. The linking of credit with work, particularly work that is lower paid, is extremely important. It is important, too, that the minimum wage is part of the package. I note that the Conservatives opposed the minimum wage as much as they oppose the tax credit system.

I have listened this evening, and before in Committee, to the views expressed by Opposition Members. I say to the Conservatives that I rather think that they protest too much. I feel that they shed crocodile tears when they express their concerns about how the scheme will be implemented and how they think it will make things worse, along with their concerns for business. That is rather hard to swallow from the Conservative party, which when in government cut the standard of living of those who needed help most and rewarded most those who needed help least.

Conservatives tell us that they have decided to repent of their past. Perhaps their statements now, and even those before their public pronouncements of repentance in Committee, are part of their effort to reconstruct the past and become new people and a new party. I doubt very much whether they will be successful in that effort.

The Conservatives should remember the Lawson Budget of 1988—the famous tax-cutting Budget—as a result of which 50 per cent. of the tax cuts went to the richest 10 per cent. of the population, and compare it with what has happened in the first three Budgets of the Labour Government. The main beneficiaries have been the bottom 5 per cent. of the population—a significant difference which, perhaps, marks out the two Governments.

The Liberal Democrats seem to have got caught up in their own cleverness. It was not long ago that the attempt to unify tax and benefit was a Liberal Democrat policy. It was seen as the way forward, by removing stigma from giving support to those who needed it. However, as soon as there is a proposal to move forward on tax credits, the Liberal Democrats, so anxious to find something wrong with almost everything that the Government do, align themselves with the Conservative party to vote against it. Not only are the Liberal Democrats not to be trusted; they cannot see where they are heading.

The Bill is greatly to be welcomed. It is part of a significant package of support for those who need it most, especially working families on low pay. It rewards work for low pay and provides support in a way that is stigma-free, will increase up-take and brings benefit in the form of credits that translate into cash. It provides support for child care in a way that will change people's lives for the better.

I hope that the Bill is the first in a series of measures that will be introduced in future years to show the Government's concern for those who are struggling, often against the odds, to earn their living and to build a good life for their family. We must support the families who struggle day by day in work to make life better for themselves and their children.

[Mrs. Louise Ellman]

It is to the shame of the Conservatives that they oppose the Bill, just as they opposed the minimum wage. I wonder whether they also oppose the increase in child benefit, as it is so contrary to what they did when they were in office—but I notice that they are rather silent.

The Bill is part of the change of tone and the change in reality that the Government will bring about through help for those who need it most, support for those in work, support for families and support for children.

9.18 pm

Mr. Webb: I beg to move,

That this House, whilst welcoming additional money for lower paid workers and for disabled people, declines to give a Third Reading to the Tax Credits Bill because it considers the proposed Working Families' Tax Credit to represent a highly inefficient way of spending public money; believes that the Government has provided no evidence that paying the credit through the paypacket will bring benefits commensurate with the £100 million annual cost which will be imposed on businesses; believes that payment through the paypacket will adversely affect recipients at times of family or job change and will increase the scope for fraud; believes that the Bill represents a missed opportunity to tackle the particular incentive problems faced by low-paid homebuyers; and believes that the proposed childcare tax credit is poorly targeted.

I shall begin by responding to some of the points made by the hon. Member for Liverpool, Riverside (Mrs. Ellman). She said that in the past the Liberal Democrats and predecessor parties had supported tax credit schemes. Indeed we have, and if we were offered one, we might well support it.

However, the Government's proposal, far from being a tax credit, is not even integrated into the PAYE tax code. It is simply social security as a line on a pay slip. It is in no sense integration of the income tax and social security systems. It is not a genuine tax credit scheme at all. The Government are famous for using labels that bear no relation to reality. That is why we oppose the Bill.

The hon. Lady opposed the Lawson Budget of 1988. She seemed to object to a 40p top rate of income tax and a 25p standard rate of income tax. Are we to infer that she will vote against the Chancellor next year, when he cuts the standard rate to 22p? Are we to infer that she has had a private audience with him, in which she told him that 40 per cent. is too low and that she wants it raised to 60 per cent., as it was before the 1988 Budget? I think not. The hon. Lady makes a cheap point about 1988, but has no desire to return to it.

Mrs. Ellman: I am surprised that the hon. Gentleman thinks that it was a cheap point to emphasise that Conservative Budgets gave most to those who were already the best-off.

Mr. Webb: I think that the hon. Lady was saying that there is something wrong with giving large tax cuts to those on the highest incomes, which is what the 1988 Budget did, but she has no proposals to reverse those measures.

I had hoped that the reasoned amendment would get me off the hook with my colleagues, but I have had some complaints. They have asked, "Why do we have to keep voting with the Tories all the time?" I said, "You don't have to worry. At 10 o'clock I am sure that we will be able to sort that out for you." I was rather taken aback, therefore, when the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. Pickles) said that we will renew that close companionship at 10 o'clock. None the less, it is very welcome.

We covered some specific areas on Report, but in this more general discussion of the Bill I want to raise no fewer than half a dozen issues that remain outstanding following our deliberations and on which the Bill falls down. First, and most important, are the Bill's effects on children. All the rhetoric assumes that the Bill is good for children, but it will take money away from mothers and give it to fathers.

The Government keep assuring us that, somehow, that does not matter, but they have blown the gaff, for two reasons. First, I knew that if I tabled a question to the Treasury, I would receive a holding answer and then a further, rather evasive answer about a month later. Instead, I tabled a question to the Department of Social Security, which tends to answer questions. I am sure that it will get into trouble for that and will soon change things.

I asked why there is a presumption that child benefit will be paid to mothers rather than to fathers. The answer was that

"where couples live at the same address a wife has priority over a husband".—[*Official Report*, 12 March 1999; Vol. 327, c. 392.]

Why does the Department of Social Security presume that, in a couple, the wife should have priority over the husband? Because it knows that money is more likely to get through to the child if it goes to the mother. If that Department thinks that it is better for money to go to mothers rather than to fathers, why does not the Treasury think that? There is some disagreement, I feel—but it gets worse.

Secondly, I was browsing through the Red Book, as one does. After browsing for some while and reaching page 68, I came across a rather astonishing diagnosis of where the Government are heading in the medium term with their tax credit strategy. They are moving from the rather messy system that they propose, involving child tax credits, child care tax credits, child benefit and the working families tax credit—no fewer than four different mechanisms for supporting low-paid families—to what they describe as a single, seamless system. That system is called—wait for it—an integrated child credit—but it gets worse.

The Red Book states:

"Such an integrated child credit, for those in and out of work, could be paid to the main carer, complemented by an employment tax credit paid through the wage packet to working households, with or without children."

In other words, the Government's big vision for the future is a world in which all the support for children goes not through the wage packet, but to the "main carer", which is as it should be. However, if that is where they are heading, and if that is desirable and for the benefit of children, why do we have to go through the messy business of taking the money from the mothers—and, hence, from the children—before giving it back to them?

The Government have revealed their long-term strategy—I have a lot of sympathy with it, because the logic is that children should get the benefit of the money—but if that is where they are heading, why do not we move directly to such a system? Why do we have

to take the money from the children in the first place? The prejudicing of children—the purse to wallet issue—causes grave concern.

The hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar saved me a few moments by repeating my argument about the £900 million that currently goes to those couples in which the man is the principal breadwinner. A large chunk of that money will go to men rather than to women. The Child Poverty Action Group has been cited as a defender of the tax credit, but it does not like the requirement for money to go to fathers. It has recognised that the Government will steamroller the measure through, but it has said that there should be three safeguards.

First, both partners should be notified of the award. If only one partner claims it, both partners should have been told what is going on so that the mother at least has some opportunity to see the money. Secondly, the application form should be explicit about the implications of the choice—a person who has not signed the form will not get the cash. Thirdly, there should be clear rules for arbitrating disputes; I am still not convinced that we have them.

Given that the new Labour Government have more than 100 women Members of Parliament, it is bizarre that they should introduce a policy that will take money from women and give it to men, which will prejudice children. I find that astonishing.

The second issue is that of passported benefits, which the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar mentioned. This matter gets more bizarre by the minute. The Government have clearly not thought it through. At present, family credit and disability working allowance recipients are "passported" various benefits—low income benefits, social fund grants, and so forth.

We tried to find out from the Government what their plans are on this issue, so I rather foolishly tabled a question to the Treasury. On 16 February, I asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer to which passported benefits recipients of working families tax credit and disabled person's tax credit would be entitled. A few days later, I received the answer, "Wait a bit; we'll let you know." Two days ago, I finally received an answer. This is a classic example of Sir Humphrey-ese at work. It said:

"The Government are committed to ensuring that Working Families Tax Credit . . . recipients who need it continue to receive the help provided by passported benefits".—[*Official Report*, 16 February 1999; Vol. 327, c.*517*.]

Thus it will be those who need it who get it. Who are they? We do not know. The Paymaster General could not tell us, and when the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar intervened to say that disabled people were particularly concerned about health benefits, she said that the Government did not know who would get the tax credit.

The Government have not decided—they are in discussion. When will they make up their minds? How long does it take them to decide those matters? They are embarrassed because in Committee I pointed out that if they passported everybody who was on family credit through to the working families tax credit, higher rate taxpayers would get social fund grants. That is absurd. The Government realise that it is absurd, but they have not thought of a way out of it. No doubt the benefit will cease to be automatic and there will be some sort of claims procedure which will wreck the take-up of those benefits. The whole business is a complete mess.

The third substantive problem is the reform's failure to link in with the other bits of the tax and benefits system. The hon. Member for Riverside picked us up on not supporting a tax credit scheme. We have pressed for an integrated scheme, bringing all the taxes and benefits together, but this reform is piecemeal, which is why we object to it. Eventually, the working families tax credit will be part of a streamlined system, and that may well be welcomed, but, as we heard on Report, at the moment there is no integration with housing benefit and the Budget has added yet more complexity, with the new child care tax credit.

If the Government had not been in such a hurry—the hallmark of this Bill is that it is hurried legislation—we could have had "the big vision". Why must we have bad interim policy? Why could not the Government have sat down and said, "It will take us another year to think this through, but we shall then go straight to a system that has uniform child support for those in and out of work, and in-work tax credits for adults"? Why do we have to go through bad legislation to get to a possibly better system?

The fourth issue is the disabled persons tax credit. I was going to call this the dog that did not bark, but if I may mix my metaphors, I shall call it the dog's breakfast that did not bark. The disabled persons tax credit is a laudable aim—helping disabled people who want to, to get back into work. How many extra people will be helped? The Government are fond of saying that a million disabled people want to get back to work, so how many extra people will the disabled person's tax credit help—500,000 or 100,000? No—6,000. That is pathetic.

I have a lot of respect for the Financial Secretary, but in Committee, she said:

"We anticipate that 6,000 more people will be able to take up the credit—a not inconsiderable figure."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee D*, 11 February 1999; c. 188.]

Dare I venture to suggest that it is a very inconsiderable figure?

May I explain to the House how that happened? The Government were obsessed with family credit—with working families without disabilities—and they thought that the tax credit idea would be a good wheeze. Then they suddenly noticed a funny little bit of the system called disability working allowance, which has been a complete flop. I used to be a social researcher and some of my colleagues researched disability working allowance. At that stage, so few people were claiming the benefit that they interviewed everyone who received it. That is how small scale and ineffective it has been. Even now, only some 16,000 people receive it.

Essentially, disabled persons tax credit is an afterthought. It was not discussed in Committee because nobody really cares about it. It is a waste of time. Until the Government have a serious strategy for helping the million disabled people whom they say want to work, little gestures like this will be largely irrelevant.

The fifth issue, which has been discussed briefly, is fraud. The right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) made some telling points about that on Second Reading which I shall not repeat. The Government should design fraud out of the tax and benefits system. They should not design it in. They should not let money go through employer systems. We have heard that good employers—small firms—will be penalised by an administrative burden, but that bad employers will have a blank cheque for fraud.

[Mr. Webb]

The final point in the litany involves married and cohabiting couples. It is not an issue that we have talked about much. The charity CARE—Christian Action, Research and Education—has written to hon. Members to raise one specific concern. I should be grateful if the Minister responded to the point when summing up. CARE has pointed out that a lone-parent family and a two-parent family on the same income and with the same child care costs receive the same amount of money, but that a two-parent family have an extra mouth to feed. There are additional costs.

The disabled persons tax credit recognises that. It has an additional credit for a second adult, but the working families tax credit does not. Why do the Government think that, of two families on exactly the same income and with the same costs, the one with an additional adult to feed has no need for additional working families tax credit? What is the rationale behind that?

I have a confession to make. Before we decided some weeks ago which way to vote on the whole Bill, the Liberal Democrats had a debate; I know that Labour Members may find that a strange concept. We had a difference of opinion and we had to reason it through. Some of my hon. Friends said, "We are vaguely in favour of such measures, so let us vote in favour." I said, "The measure is not what it seems. It is labelled a tax credit, but it is not." Payment through the pay packet, which is almost the only thing in the Bill, is the fundamental flaw and will do more damage than good.

During the many happy hours that we spent in Committee and in the House this afternoon, I have become more and more convinced that we did the right thing. So much of the good in the Bill, or at least so much of the good in the working families tax credit, which is all in regulations, could have been achieved by reforming family credit. For lower tapers, use family credit. For higher credits, use family credit. To reform child care subsidies, use family credit. What is the one thing that the Bill does?—payment of credits through the pay packet, which, as we have heard, causes many problems.

The low paid need additional help and support. Our reasoned amendment welcomes that, but the Bill is riddled with holes. It is the sign of a Bill which has been put together in a hurry. Bills that are put together in a hurry Governments repent of at their leisure.

9.32 pm

Miss McIntosh: I put on record my opposition to a bad Bill, which should be opposed. It is bad for families and for business and it could prove open to fraud.

I regret the tendency in the Bill and in other measures that the Government are seeking to put through to put details in secondary legislation, rather than primary legislation. That is a negative tendency. My hon. Friend the Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. Pickles) referred to the specific burden on agriculture that will arise from the proposals. I regret that his plea for special consideration to be given to that industry appears to have fallen on deaf ears.

I regret, too, that the Government have rejected the proposed exemption for smaller firms. The administrative burden of paying credit and claiming funds in advance will be great. The Government recognise that and claim to be business friendly, but they have rejected the possibility of an exemption from administering the credit for very small firms.

The Government fail to realise that the working families tax credit on its own will be very bad for business, but the cumulative effect of the tax credit, the minimum wage and the working time directive will be especially bad for all British businesses. The burdens of all three will hit small businesses particularly hard.

In my constituency, the fact that those eligible for tax credits have to travel particularly long distances will be compounded by the hike in petrol and diesel prices. I refer to the remarks by my hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Collins) in an intervention. Constituencies such as Vale of York and Westmorland and Lonsdale are deeply rural, with sparsely populated areas for the most part. In many of those areas, there is virtually no public transport. How are my constituents supposed to welcome the tax credit, when most of the benefit will be soaked up by the fuel increase?

Yet again the Government seem incapable of considering how to deliver policies in rural areas. If I have touched a chord with the Financial Secretary, perhaps she will deal with that point, if no other.

I want to talk about fraud, and to associate myself particularly with the Liberal amendment. I congratulate the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) on an eloquent, well-thought-out and well-researched speech. On the question of fraud, Ministers must balance the options: they must decide whether to place the emphasis on prompt payment or on rigorous checking of eligibility. Regrettably, the Paymaster General has failed to put my mind at rest, and to allay my fear that the potential for fraud will be greater under the working families tax credit than under family credit.

The proposed arrangement for payment of tax credits is highly complex, whereas the arrangement for family credit is relatively simple. As has been said, the question of passporting of various credits and benefits has not yet been clarified, which is particularly regrettable given that we are now on Third Reading. All that complexity will increase the likelihood of fraud in the administration of tax credits.

I still feel the concern that I expressed on Second Reading about the potential for breaches of confidentiality between employer and employee. The Bill could jeopardise previously good employer-employee relations. In numerous briefings to us, employees of large, medium-sized and small firms have expressed their opinions forcefully. Employers would prefer not to become too involved in employees' personal situations, as we have heard. Payments of tax credits through pay packets will reveal to employers exactly who on their payroll is receiving such credits. Previously, that information remained confidential.

For those and many other reasons, I oppose the Bill, and I hope that the House will reject it.

9.37 pm

Mr. Collins: It is a tribute to the Paymaster General that I overheard her saying earlier that she is a fan of "Star Trek". She must recognise, however, that the Bill is in no way logical, Captain.

My hon. Friends have explained the problem clearly, but it is important for us to understand exactly why the Government are introducing the changes. The reason is simple. The Government must fulfil a difficult pledge—to try to reduce the nation's welfare bill. The Bill will enable them to shift a chunk of social security spending from the Department of Social Security's budget to other measures, such as tax changes. As the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) said, that does not mean that the money is suddenly a tax credit; it will still be social security expenditure, but it will not be social security expenditure honestly admitted and honestly declared.

The Bill also enables the Government to claim that they are making progress with their delivery of the Prime Minister's pledge not to increase taxes. They will try to say that this social security expenditure is a negative tax change, that it is therefore a tax reduction, and that they can offset it against all the tax increases that they have announced in successive Budgets. They will then be able to say that they have delivered on their pledge not to increase the overall tax burden. That is not a pledge on which they will deliver, even with these funny figures, but I must say that I admire their cheek in trying.

The Government made another key economic pledge: they promised faithfully that they would not seek to impose additional burdens on business. We were told that that was central to the new Labour project, that the Government had recognised the value of enterprise, and that they were now the pro-business party—the party in which British entrepreneurs of all sizes could place absolute confidence. But what is the one clear effect of the Bill? It will transfer a £100 million administrative burden on to British business. That is the Government's figure. It is their own assessment of the cost. However—on the basis of most of the Government's own assessments of the likely implications of their policies on British business—that figure is likely not to be accurate but to be a gross underestimate.

What do we know about the Bill? Ministers tell us that the staff—the current family credit unit—who will be working on the tax credit are extremely hard-working and dedicated. I agree with them on that. I have no doubt that those who are currently working on family credit and will seek to implement the working families tax credit are extremely hard-working officials, and that they will seek to accomplish their task in the best way possible. However, let us remember the time scale in which they are being asked to operate. As the Paymaster General said in her speech, the new system is to be fully up and running in April 2000.

I know that hon. Members, like the rest of the nation, are excited about the on-rush of the millennium. Nevertheless, it is only one day since the House had a statement on the implications of the millennium bug for all of British business and all of British public service. The bug is likely to kick in at the end of December 1999.

One does not have to be a master of mental arithmetic of such great dimensions—a day or so ago, one could have shown the Secretary of State for Education a thing or two on the "Today" programme—to work out that April 2000 is only three months after 31 December 1999. Yet that is precisely the time scale in which Ministers propose to move a huge, complicated system from one part of the civil service to another.

Is the system being moved from a part of the civil service in which there is a reputation for brilliance in computer management? No. The NIRS2 computer is not working very well.

Mr. Pickles: Is my hon. Friend aware that, in the Standing Committee considering the Welfare Reform and Pensions Bill, the Minister of State, Department of Social Security was asked if he could give a cast-iron guarantee that the computer system would be sufficient to cope with stakeholder pensions—which are being introduced in a similar time frame—and refused to give such an undertaking?

Mr. Collins: I am shocked by that news, although—given what the Government have been up to—I am not surprised by it.

Today, another matter has caused me shock, surprise and not a little disappointment. Hon. Members have been told that the Bill is flagship legislation of which the Government are hugely proud and the Chancellor is the father. One might therefore have thought that the Bill would cause Labour Members to break down the doors of the Chamber in their eagerness to participate in our debates on it. For most of Third Reading, however, only two or three Labour Back Benchers have been in the Chamber—although I am delighted to see that that number has now rocketed to five.

For much of the debate, more Conservative Back Benchers, and even more Liberal Democrat Back Benchers, have been in the Chamber than Labour Back Benchers. There are 418 Labour Members—at least on the payroll. The Fees Office is paying 418 Labour Members of Parliament, but where have they all been during our consideration of this flagship Bill? We heard one speech by a Labour Back Bencher, and a handful of Labour Members wandered into the Chamber.

Could it be that Labour Members are embarrassed by the Bill? If so, they have many reasons to be embarrassed by it. It is a bad Bill which will impose burdens on business, although Ministers say that they do not want to do that. It will betray the interests of low-paid employees by flagrantly violating any possible interpretation of confidentiality. It will also break successive Labour pledges not to increase the tax burden, and to reduce genuine welfare bills. The Government are really only in the business of performing the odd accountancy fiddle.

I am sure that, at 10 o'clock, my hon. Friends—having listened carefully to the debate, and participated in it in much greater numbers than Labour Back Benchers, who call the Bill flagship legislation—will, with one heart and one mind, vote against the Bill.

9.45 pm

Mr. Gibb: The Bill is an act of wanton vandalism that even the Klingons would be proud of, if I have to continue the wretched television analogy. The Government have replaced family credit, which is a highly successful benefit with a high take-up rate of 72 per cent., rising to 85 per cent. by expenditure and 91 per cent. for lone parents—a relatively simple benefit, as my hon. Friend the Member for Vale of York (Miss McIntosh) has said, which is paid promptly and usually to the mother—with the more complex working families tax credit. The disability working allowance is being replaced by the disabled persons tax credit.

[Mr. Gibb]

The Government call it a tax credit, but it is nothing of the kind. It is simply a benefit paid through the payroll. Huge burdens will be imposed on businesses, which, from next April, will have to administer the benefit, as my hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Collins) has just said. It will cost business £103 million a year to run. It will increase the stigma for those claiming it, who will find that their work colleagues suddenly become aware of the fact that they are claiming a state benefit—a fact which most proud people wish to keep confidential. We believe that such matters should be confidential. Designing a system that is likely to undermine that principle is heartless, uncaring and, I believe, an example of new Labour dogma stamping on the feelings of people who are struggling hard to make ends meet.

The benefit is hugely costly. The Government's figures show that it will cost £1.5 billion a year. The Bank of England calculates that it will generate no more than 40,000 jobs, at a cost of £35,000 per job. The Institute for Fiscal Studies has calculated that, rather than the Government estimate of £200 million, the child care element will cost £4 billion as people are given a cash incentive by the Government to move their children from informal child care arrangements to formal, paid child care.

In Committee and on Report, no statements were forthcoming from Ministers to reassure hon. Members and those outside the House that the forecast higher public expenditure would not be necessary. Today, the Government have added a new clause to the Bill providing for yet another type of paid child care for those aged eight to 14, making it more likely still that informal arrangements will be replaced by paid arrangements.

The scope for fraud is colossal. That was the principal concern of the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field), who has said that the whole venture was fraught with great dangers and offered huge bonuses for dishonesty. He would have been a welcome member of the Standing Committee, had the tight grip of the Government Whips Office allowed him to be. Labour members of the Social Security Committee would also have been welcome, but none was appointed. Perhaps they were too busy drafting and redrafting their reports.

The Bill spawns reams of regulations with which business will have to deal. Without the regulations and the glossy document from the Revenue, one would not even be able to work out the structure of the benefit from reading the Bill.

The Government seem determined that as many people as possible should have the benefit paid through the pay packet, despite the associated problems of stigma. That is why they failed to support any of our amendments that would have given people a choice of how to receive the payment. As an inevitable consequence of that determination, there will be a huge shift of benefit payments from purse to wallet. As the Minister knows, there are currently 300,000 couples in which the man is the principal breadwinner, receiving a total of £900 million in family credit. Most of that money will shift from purse to wallet. That is an important concern. As the Joseph Rowntree Trust has concluded, money paid to the spouse with care is more likely to be spent on children.

It is odd that a Government elected on a pledge to reduce social security spending should introduce a Bill that will add £1.5 billion to social security spending on the Government's figures—£5.5 billion on the IFS figures. Hiding those numbers in an obscure line in the Red Book does not change the fact that it is a spending increase.

It is odd that a Government who pledged to reduce dependency should propose a Bill that will enable 400,000 more families, who were previously regarded as too wealthy to qualify, to claim benefits. The hon. Member for Liverpool, Riverside (Mrs. Ellman) trumpets that figure, but it is odd that a Government who pledged to reduce benefit dependency and social security spending should extend the availability of benefit up the income scale to families on £38,000.

At the lower end of the income scale, there is real concern that benefits that used to flow automatically to families who qualified for family credit—such as free prescription charges, eye tests, dental work and social fund grants—may not continue to do so when those families qualify for working families tax credit and disabled persons tax credit. Astonishingly, the Paymaster General still cannot give an answer on that. To extend benefit up the income scale, the Government are cutting benefits at the bottom of that scale.

The Government talk about wanting to improve productivity. If they read the McKinsey report on UK productivity—instead of commissioning more reports—they would realise that the biggest cause of the difference between our productivity rate and that of the United States is that, in the US, small businesses are exempt from the majority of the most burdensome regulation. Yet this Government keep piling it on. The regulatory impact assessment calculates that the Bill will cost business £103 million each and every year—and that will be an underestimate of the real cost.

The Bill will do nothing to achieve any of the objectives set by the Government. It will increase the stigma of claiming in-work benefits, rather than reduce it. It will—on the basis of the experience in Canada—increase the likelihood of fraud, not reduce it. It will increase dependency, not reduce it. It will increase social security spending, not reduce it. It will result in less money being spent on children, not more money. It will increase the burdens on business and thus hinder employment opportunities, not create them.

Through the Bill, the Government will replace a successful in-work benefit, family credit, with one that they insist, for dogmatic, ill-thought-through and misguided reasons, should be paid through the payroll. That will cause discomfort and embarrassment for many thousands of lone parents and working couples on low incomes, struggling to bring up a family in difficult circumstances. It is a bad and uncaring Bill, which I urge the House to oppose.

9.52 pm

Mrs. Roche: This has been an enjoyable and lively debate. Such was the good feeling in Committee that even during the speeches of the hon. Member for Bognor Regis

and Littlehampton (Mr. Gibb), I never thought, "Beam me up, Scotty." I thank Members from both sides of the House for their contributions tonight.

The working families tax credit and the disabled persons tax credit are key elements of the Government's strategy to make work pay and to help people move from welfare to work. The present system is failing hundreds of thousand of families. Moving into a job from unemployment can often leave people little better off, and people cannot improve their income by working more because of absurd high marginal tax rates.

The system fails to recognise properly the in-work costs of child care. Under the Conservative Government, there was a growing division between working and non-working families. The Government think that one of the best ways of tackling poverty is to help people into jobs, and that is why we are reforming the tax and benefits system. By making work pay and by helping people move from welfare to work, we are starting to tackle the legacy of failure that we were left by the Conservative party, as was pointed out, in an excellent speech, by my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Riverside (Mrs. Ellman).

As a tax credit—rather than as family credit paid by the Inland Revenue—the measure will demonstrate clearly, through the pay packet, the rewards of work. It will remove the stigma associated with claiming benefit.

We do not simply talk about welfare reform as the previous Government did: we are actually delivering. From what he said, the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. Pickles) and I might have been in two different places when my right hon. Friend the Chancellor delivered the Budget last week. More than 20 million households will gain. On average, families with children will be £740 a year better off; and 700,000 children will be lifted out of poverty.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold) *rose—*

Mrs. Roche: I will not give way as I have very limited time, but I am delighted to welcome the hon. Gentleman to the Chamber. It is very kind of him to join us.

The hon. Members for Brentwood and Ongar, for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Collins) and for Northavon (Mr. Webb) spoke about the transfer from purse to wallet. That will not happen. Couples will be able to choose which partner receives the credit. It is important to remember that, in the majority of cases, purse to wallet transfers are not even an issue.

Fraud has rightly been mentioned. It is the reason for our introducing new powers for the Inland Revenue to get the information that it needs to verify claims and to recover overpayments through the tax system, as well as directly, and new penalties to deter non-compliance and fraud.

My hon. Friend the Member for Riverside rightly drew attention to the Liberal Democrat U-turn on tax credits. That ought not to come as a surprise to anyone, because in Committee the hon. Member for Northavon, very honestly, said:

> "I have an alarming tendency to believe the last person I heard. That is probably why I am in the party I am".—[*Official Report, Standing Committee D*, 9 February 1999; c. 113.]

It should also come as no surprise that the Tories are supporting the Liberal Democrats tonight, in a Lib-Tory pact.

The hon. Member for Vale of York (Miss McIntosh) spoke about regulation. We will take absolutely no lessons from the Conservative party. Before the general election, they removed 3,000 regulations from business; but they introduced 10,000 new ones.

The hon. Member for Bognor Regis and Littlehampton spoke, rightly, about the American example, but he failed to say that in the United States there is a minimum wage, which is good not only for the employer but for employees and everyone else, as it increases productivity and gives everyone a stake.

The Bill is a major reform of the tax and benefit system. It will deliver real benefits to those families who most need help, with a minimum income guarantee and proper child care support. *[Interruption.]* I notice that Liberal Democrats are sneering, just as the hon. Member for Northavon sneered at the tax credit for those with a disability. We are determined to deliver for people with a disability.

The Bill is an excellent piece of legislation and I commend it to the House.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 164, Noes 295.

Division No. 116] **[9.59 pm**

AYES

Allan, Richard
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Baker, Norman
Ballard, Jackie
Beggs, Roy
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Body, Sir Richard
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Brake, Tom
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burnett, John
Burns, Simon
Burstow, Paul
Butterfill, John
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chidgey, David
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Kensington)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rayleigh)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Colvin, Michael
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Cran, James
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Day, Stephen
Donaldson, Jeffrey
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Evans, Nigel
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Fearn, Ronnie
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam
Fraser, Christopher
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gibb, Nick
Gill, Christopher
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorrie, Donald
Gray, James
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Hancock, Mike
Harris, Dr Evan
Harvey, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson Smith, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross Skye)*
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Archy
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui

Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
McIntosh, Miss Anne
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Nicholls, Patrick
Norman, Archie
Oaten, Mark
Öpik, Lembit
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Prior, David
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Faversham)*
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
St Aubyn, Nick
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, Rt Hon John D *(Strangford)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thompson, William
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Tyler, Paul
Tyrie, Andrew
Wallace, James
Wardle, Charles
Waterson, Nigel
Webb, Steve
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Woodward, Shaun
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Paul Keetch and
Mr. Phil Willis.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Stuart *(Middlesbrough)*
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Berrningham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Buck, Ms Karen
Burgon, Colin
Butler, Mrs Christine
Cabom, Richard
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Canavan, Dennis
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Darvill, Keith
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, John
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Foulkes, George
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Healey, John
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith
Hoey, Kate
Home Robertson, John
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Ms Jenny *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kelly, Ms Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kingham, Ms Tess
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Linton, Martin
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Lock, David
Love, Andrew
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McDonagh, Siobhain
Macdonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'ld Heeley)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Alasdair *(Galloway)*
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Mountford, Kali
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Eddie

Oiner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Mrs Diana
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Rt Hon Ms Joyce
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Rt Hon Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Miss Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Stott, Roger
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Vaz, Keith
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
White, Brian
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, Dr Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Kevin Hughes and
Mr. Clive Betts.

Question accordingly negatived.

Main Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 62 (Amendment on Second or Third Reading):—

The House divided: Ayes 297, Noes 161.

Division No. 117] **[10.13 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Stuart *(Middlesbrough)*
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Buck, Ms Karen
Burgon, Colin
Butler, Mrs Christine
Cabom, Richard
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Canavan, Dennis
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Darvill, Keith
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, John
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Foulkes, George
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Healey, John
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith
Hoey, Kate
Home Robertson, John
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Ms Jenny *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kelly, Ms Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kingham, Ms Tess
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Linton, Martin
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Lock, David
Love, Andrew
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McDonagh, Siobhain
Macdonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mahon, Mrs Alice

Mallaber, Judy
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michie, Bill *(Sheffld Heeley)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Alasdair *(Galloway)*
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Mountford, Kali
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Eddie
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Mrs Diana
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Rt Hon Ms Joyce
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Rt Hon Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Miss Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Stott, Roger
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Vaz, Keith
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
White, Brian
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, Dr Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Kevin Hughes and Mr. Clive Betts.

NOES

Allan, Richard
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Baker, Norman
Ballard, Jackie
Beggs, Roy
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Body, Sir Richard
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Brake, Tom
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burnett, John
Burns, Simon
Burstow, Paul
Butterfill, John
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chidgey, David
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Kensington)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rayleigh)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Colvin, Michael
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Cran, James
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Day, Stephen
Donaldson, Jeffrey
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Evans, Nigel
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Fearn, Ronnie
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fox, Dr Liam
Fraser, Christopher
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gibb, Nick
Gill, Christopher
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorrie, Donald
Gray, James
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Hancock, Mike
Harris, Dr Evan
Harvey, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson Smith, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross Skye)*
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Archy
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
McIntosh, Miss Anne
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Nicholls, Patrick
Norman, Archie
Oaten, Mark
Öpik, Lembit
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Prior, David
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Faversham)*
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
St Aubyn, Nick
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shepherd, Richard
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'rns)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spicer, Sir Michael
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thompson, William
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Tyler, Paul
Tyrie, Andrew
Wallace, James
Wardle, Charles
Waterson, Nigel
Webb, Steve
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Willis, Phil
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Woodward, Shaun
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mrs. Caroline Spelman and Sir David Madel.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill read the Third time, and passed.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

RATING AND VALUATION

That the draft Railways (Rateable Values) (Amendment) Order 1999, which was laid before this House on 24th February, be approved.—[*Mr. Betts.*]

Question agreed to.

Rural Services

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Betts.]*

10.24 pm

Mr. John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings): I am delighted to have obtained this Adjournment debate, not only because of my deep interest in the welfare of people in rural Britain, but particularly because of my passionate commitment to my constituents in rural South Holland and The Deepings.

I make no apology for adding that I feel I have a disproportionate responsibility to represent those in most need in my constituency: the elderly, the disabled, the poor and those in remote communities, who are most isolated from public services. Nor is there any contradiction in my making a fierce defence of the gentle, or passionately advocating the case for quiet, unassuming, unchanging rural Britain. It is in that crusading spirit that we should approach the delivery of public services in rural communities.

Rural Britain has felt besieged since Labour came to power. It may be true that new Labour, with its assumptions about modernity, its fascination with everything new and its metropolitan culture, is particularly hostile to rural traditions. It is certainly true that the Government have treated rural Britain relatively badly. Evidence of that can be found in the on-going crisis in agriculture, but I particularly want to concentrate on public services and the Government's settlements for local authorities. *[Interruption.]* Perhaps I should wait a moment while the Minister takes her seat. Rural communities have fared badly in those settlements.

I have figures from the House of Commons Library that reveal that in the two years in which the Government have made local government settlements, most of Britain has received an increase of 8.2 per cent., while shire districts and counties lag behind on 7.7 per cent. Rural services have, therefore, suffered as a result of inadequate financing from the Government. That may be partly because the Labour party has so little rural representation. Despite its extravagant claims, only 19 of the 100 most rural seats in Britain are held by the Labour party. In England alone, the party fares even worse, holding only 17 of the 100 most rural constituencies.

I do not want to be unnecessarily ungenerous to the governing party. There are times when it is necessary to be ungenerous, but, on this occasion, I do not want to give in to temptation. However, the services that are so essential to sustaining rural communities have certainly been neglected. The Government will undoubtedly talk about the extra support that they have provided for rural transport, but I have to tell them that it is not enough for the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody), who, when serving on the Environment Sub-Committee of the Select Committee on Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs, said that as the Government grant additional money to rural bus services, they are disappearing. She stated that

"even though the Government has put up a lot extra money, that may not be anywhere near enough to even begin to reverse the existing decline."

Frankly, even if one totalled the money that the Government have allocated to rural transport, it would not be enough to solve the problem in even one part of Great

[Mr. John Hayes]

Britain. Many rural communities have almost no public transport services, and the car is the only way that people can get around.

Mr. Owen Paterson (North Shropshire): Will my hon. Friend note that in rural areas such as Shropshire, 67 per cent. of the work force go to work in a private car, and the swingeing increase in diesel and petrol duties is the equivalent of 1p on income tax in the course of this Parliament?

Mr. Hayes: I am extremely grateful to my hon. Friend for drawing that to the attention of the House. He is the personification of Housman's "A Shropshire Lad", and a staunch defender of all things rural and, in particular, the interests of his constituents.

My hon. Friend mentioned the increase in diesel duty, which was a particular blow to the haulage industry. People such as Jim Welch of Fowler Welch in my constituency viewed that as a slap in the face, given that the information that the Government had received from the industry had made it clear that any further increase would endanger the future growth of that industry and even its maintenance. Haulage is an important rural employer, as I am sure the Minister is aware.

We should not be too ungrateful because we have, at long last, the beginnings of a White Paper on rural affairs. That is not the White Paper itself, which is very late, but a precursor in the form of a discussion document, which says that the Government are committed to providing rural services that are accessible for the whole community. It questions what mechanisms are necessary to ensure that rural issues are considered in policy making. I can tell the Minister that such mechanisms are not regional development agencies or regional assemblies. There is a fear that a regional authority dominated by Derby, Leicester and Nottingham would forget the needs of rural Lincolnshire. The equivalent must be true for many parts of Great Britain.

The answer to question 10 in the discussion document—how we connect consumers and what farmers produce—is certainly not supermarkets. As my hon. Friend the Member for North Norfolk (Mr. Prior) said in an Adjournment debate last Thursday, it is local suppliers who most often forge productive links with local producers. They purchase their products from the local area, whereas large supermarkets tend to buy nationally. The expansion of supermarkets will do nothing in rural communities to maintain the link between farmers, consumers and retailers.

So we have the precursor to the White Paper. It is rather late and slightly thin, but at least it is a step in the right direction.

I shall refer particularly to the latest attack on the countryside and public services, by which I mean the Budget. My hon. Friend the Member for North Shropshire (Mr. Paterson) has mentioned haulage, but we should not ignore the effect of increased petrol costs on individuals, which once again will be felt disproportionately by rural motorists. The Government's national traffic survey, combined with road traffic statistics, suggests that rural dwellers typically travel about 2,500 more miles a year than their metropolitan equivalents. This is about not just the availability of local services, but access to them.

Figures from the Library suggest that the total extra annual cost of the Budget in terms of fuel costs to rural dwellers is £350 million, and Lincolnshire's share of that is about £10 million. It is inequitable to introduce additional taxation that affects rural motorists in this way, especially when we consider that the luxury of a car in London is the necessity of a car in rural Lincolnshire. That is why car ownership as a universal measure of deprivation, or of the lack of deprivation, is such a misleading criterion.

When Mr. John Edwards of the Rural Development Commission gave evidence to the Select Committee on Agriculture, he said:

"We certainly have concerns that a number of formulae and systems"—

for example

"the SSA for local government finance . . . are picking up urban disadvantage much better than they are rural . . . For example, if you want to measure poor access to services, what you need to do is find out those areas which do not have a shop and . . . do not have a regular bus service and then count the number of people there"

who cannot find easy access to local community facilities.

The knock-on effect from private motorists' problems reaches the public services. We know already, for example, that the national health service will be £1.5 million poorer because of extra fuel tax. Once again, the burden will fall unequally because of the higher level of transport costs in rural communities.

Figures from the Library show that police spending on transport is greater in rural communities. For example, 2.4 per cent. of the budget for non-staff transport costs is allocated in rural areas, compared with 2.2 per cent. in metropolitan areas and 1.5 per cent in the Metropolitan police force area. In Lincolnshire, that means that £60,000 will have to be devoted from a scarce police budget solely to fund the increase in petrol tax that has arisen as a result of the Budget.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): Does my hon. Friend agree that one of the categories of people who will suffer as a result of the swingeing increase in the price of petrol is those who work voluntarily for charities, including Mrs. Zettl, an 81-year-old lady living in the high street in Buckingham? She is of modest means and working for two local charities. She cannot contemplate with equanimity the savage increase in the cost of petrol that she will have to face.

Mr. Hayes: I am looking forward to meeting my hon. Friend's constituent and discussing these matters in greater detail, no doubt over a cup of tea.

The fire service is even worse affected. Fire services in rural areas spend an even greater proportion of their budgets on transport. Social services, refuse collection and a panoply of other local authority services display a similar difference between metropolitan and rural spending patterns.

The Minister will claim that standard spending assessments are adjusted to take account of sparsity, but with regard to the police, for example, she will know that there has always been criticism of the formula that was introduced in 1995-96, which led to the allocation formula working group. Questions about the particular difficulties of policing rural areas have not been satisfactorily

resolved. Although a research project was set up by the Government, we need assurances that it will report speedily.

Surprisingly, there is no adjustment in the SSA to take account of the additional costs of the provision of rural services by fire brigades. For only three other local authority services are there adjustments in the SSA to take account of sparsity, although I admit that one of those is social services. That adjustment was introduced by the Government this year. I welcome that warmly—well, fairly warmly.

When the Minister responds, there are some particular assurances that I hope she will give us. First, what progress can we expect on the research on the additional costs of rural policing? Secondly, the fire brigade must be included in the estimates of additional costs for rural provision. Thirdly, the sparsity variable in the cost adjustment of the general allocation for health and ambulance services must be revised upwards.

Fourthly, other local authority services must be studied to ascertain the effect of sparsity and rurality in their delivery. Fifthly, the differential cost of transport, petrol and diesel in particular must be an identified separate factor in the funding of local authority and Government services.

The sixth point is that there must be additional support for areas with scattered populations, and those with sparse populations, which are not the same thing—for example, there may be a rural area in which there are many villages and not much in between, or there may be a fenland area in which the population is thinly spread.

Given that the Minister is so highly regarded in all parts of the House, expectations will be high tonight that, having thought on her feet, she will agree to all that I have suggested. If she does not, she should be aware in her comfortable and privileged Hampstead and Highgate constituency that there are those of us who will fight and campaign unstintingly for the interests of the countryside and rural areas.

Dr. George Turner (North-West Norfolk): Problems similar to those that the hon. Gentleman describes have existed in my part of rural England for the past 20 years. Why do the Conservatives suddenly feel the need to campaign, when they could have done something about the problems during all those years?

Mr. Hayes: We must concede and move on. There is no doubt that all Governments make mistakes. It is fair to say that previous Conservative Governments could have done more in some of those areas. The Labour Government were elected with a great fanfare. However, the rural citizens of this country are bitterly disappointed with what they have seen over the past two years.

We will fight unstintingly. We will crusade and campaign for the interests of rural Britain. We will be inspired in that campaign by our reverence for the England of Chesterton and of Betjeman, and for the British Isles of Buchan and of Yeats, where

"midnight's all a-glimmer, and noon a purple glow,

And evening full of the linnet's wings."

10.38 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Ms Glenda Jackson): I begin by apologising to the hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Mr. Hayes) for not being present in the Chamber at the start of the debate. I was attempting to fight my way through the mass exodus from the Chamber.

I congratulate the hon. Gentleman not only on securing the debate, but on ensuring so much support when he presented his case. Given the direction from which he is coming, the amount of protection that he brought with him is warranted.

The hon. Gentleman was clearly much concerned about the most recent standard spending assessment. That was the best local authority settlement for seven years. There has been an increase of £2.6 billion in the sum that has gone to local authorities. I was somewhat surprised at his tone, considering that Lincolnshire has an SSA of 5.7 per cent., whereas the average is 4.2 per cent. The SSA for his constituency is 3.9 per cent., although the average is 3.2 per cent.

The hon. Member for North Shropshire (Mr. Paterson) referred to increases in fuel duty. I point out to Conservative Members that the fuel duty escalator was introduced by the previous Administration at 5 per cent. In effect, we have put it up by 1 per cent. However, the debate this evening is about the delivery of public services in rural areas.

The Government's election manifesto included specific pledges to recognise the special needs of rural areas, not to allow rural transport and other public services to deteriorate, to give greater protection for wildlife and to give greater freedom for people to explore the open countryside.

Our vision for the countryside has five strands: a living countryside, with thriving rural communities where public services are properly supported; a working countryside, with a balanced mix of homes and jobs; a countryside in which the environment is properly protected and conserved; a countryside for all, where there is genuine access so that the beauty and tranquillity of the countryside can be enjoyed widely; and a countryside in which the Government recognise the interdependence of town and country and wish to strengthen the relationships between the two.

The Government have already achieved much for rural areas, such as extra funding for rural public transport, rate relief for village shops, extra support to the farming community and the creation of a new Countryside Agency.

As the hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings said, the Government are to produce a White Paper for rural England later this year. It will consider how the prosperity and competitiveness of the rural economy can be strengthened, how development and regeneration policies can help those areas that are in need and how we can make sure that all people in rural communities have opportunities to participate fully in society.

We issued a discussion document on 17 February, setting out key themes and inviting comments by 30 April. We will also continue to talk to many interested people and organisations. We will be looking closely at

[Ms Glenda Jackson]

how the urban and rural White Papers can complement each other, to build a clear and comprehensive strategy for the future.

The rural White Paper will be produced by my Department and the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. We will work together closely, and many other Departments and agencies, whose responsibilities have a bearing on rural England, will be involved. We have an important opportunity to look at a range of policy and delivery issues afresh and we are confident that the White Paper will set out a clear and comprehensive strategy for the future.

Transport, or rather the lack of it, and the accessibility needs of rural areas were a major considerations in our review of transport policy. Local transport plans and legislation to provide for bus quality partnerships provide a much sounder base for local authorities to develop more effective strategies in rural areas.

The Rural Development Commission's 1997 survey of rural services showed that only 25 per cent. of parishes had a daily bus service. In contrast, car ownership is comparatively high—only 22 per cent. of rural households do not have access to a car, compared with 34 per cent. of households in urban areas. The poor level of public transport means that car ownership is often a necessity in rural areas, but a significant minority has no access to a car. Regrettably, if people do not have a car and there is no public transport, it is extremely difficult for them to get to services such as shops and hospitals, or even to visit friends. We need to provide our rural communities with more choice in transport.

The Government have already taken action. In March last year, we announced an additional £50 million a year for rural public transport. That injection of funds is one of the positive steps that we are taking to assist rural communities and it reflects our wider commitment to improve public transport services for the benefit of all sectors of society.

Mr. Hayes: As I have said, the problem is that public transport that satisfies the needs of scattered communities can never be provided. A bus would have to stop in hundreds of places all over my constituency to pick people up from isolated areas—not even hamlets, but places where there is just a house. The car will always be a necessity for such people. Are not increases in fuel duty indiscriminate because they affect the poor just as they affect the rich? It is most cruel to say that, although fuel duty is being increased, people have the choice of using public transport. That fiction will never become reality.

Ms Jackson: I am somewhat surprised that the hon. Gentleman is not aware of the rural bus challenge competition, which was put in place specifically to introduce innovative services that will begin to meet the needs of the sparsely populated and scattered communities to which he referred. Lincolnshire has done extremely well from the rural bus challenge—it received £1,219,990 for a package entitled, "Making the connection", in addition to the £1,194,385 that it received from the new money found specifically to provide bus services in rural areas.

Bus services have a crucial role to play in providing precisely the sort of transport choices to which the hon. Gentleman referred. They can offer flexible, adaptable ways of meeting rural needs. That is why the majority of the additional funding—£32.5 million in a full year for each of the next three years—is being used to support such services in England. In many cases, that has doubled the existing subsidy from local authorities. The details and allocations to local authorities were announced in June. I have told the hon. Gentleman how well his county has done from that. We selected an excellent range of schemes for the rural bus challenge—large and small; simple and technically more advanced—from all over the country. Lincolnshire put in an exciting and interesting plan and received more than £1 million.

We have also set aside £4.2 million of the additional funding to support the new rural transport partnership scheme, administered by the Rural Development Commission. The overarching aim of the RTP is to improve the accessibility of jobs, services and social activity for rural communities.

The resources for those new initiatives are additional to, and separate from, the assistance that the Government provide for transport in rural areas. Last week's Budget provided a further £10 million a year for the next two years to assist rural public transport. One of the key proposals in our integrated transport White Paper is for new five-year local transport plans. There will be more resources—an extra £700 million over three years—and significantly greater local discretion over their allocation. We want to ensure that local transport plans recognise the needs and particular issues that rural communities and businesses face.

The package approach has been very successful in urban areas, and we are encouraging local authorities to use their local transport plans to develop a more strategic approach for rural areas as well.

Many Opposition Members have expressed concern—usually from a sedentary position—about the Government's fuel duty strategy. I have already pointed out that the fuel duty escalator was introduced by the previous Administration at 5 per cent; this year it is 6 per cent. It is crucial that CO_2 emissions from road transport are reduced if we are to achieve our Kyoto climate change commitments. The fuel duty escalator is the most important existing measure to reduce those emissions and to encourage the efficient use of road transport. The inefficient use of road transport costs this country £20 billion a year. The impact of that is felt as much in rural as in urban areas. Pollution, which causes deaths, illness and disease, is a burden which the whole country has to bear. It affects rural as much as urban areas.

Mr. Hayes: I know how deeply compassionate the Minister is in her approach to these matters. Does she not understand that to talk in that ethereal way about world pollution is of no great comfort to the elderly lady or disabled person in a remote part of my constituency when she cannot get to a hospital, to any social activity or to the shops? I had a meeting only last week with a local bus company in my constituency, because bus services are diminishing, not growing. I hope that the Minister will look particularly at how bus services in my constituency can be improved and extended.

Ms Jackson: I am happy to look at the hon. Gentleman's constituency in the light of the information that he has given me. I have told him of the large amount

of money that is going into Lincolnshire. There is no reason why the services to which he has referred, and which are vital, cannot be delivered.

Of course, many of the difficulties that are being experienced by people in rural communities have to do with the decisions of the previous Administration. I admire the fact that the hon. Gentleman has taken his leader's advice and chosen to acknowledge that mistakes were made.

Reducing the need to travel is important. The hon. Gentleman touched on the difficulty because of the fact that so many supermarkets have been built. Again, that followed a decision by the previous Administration. They denuded small market towns by giving permission for large supermarkets and shopping centres to be built far out on the edge of urban areas.

There was also a drastic decline in the number of village shops. It was one of the most noticeable and regrettable trends in rural areas, but the work of the Village Retail Service Association and the village shop scheme that is administered by the Rural Development Commission have been invaluable in halting and reversing that decline. Again, the Government are playing their part in ensuring that those successes continue. The introduction of rate relief at 50 per cent. for single village shops or post offices in villages of under 3,000 people, should help towards that objective.

Mr. Peter Luff (Mid-Worcestershire): Tory policy.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord): Order. The hon. Gentleman must listen to the Minister's reply to the debate and not shout from a sedentary position.

Ms Jackson: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mrs. Angela Browning (Tiverton and Honiton): Will the hon. Lady concede that the policy to reduce the rates on village shops came out of the rural White Paper that was introduced by the last Conservative Government? It is something that her Government have inherited.

Ms Jackson: It may be something that the Government have inherited, but they have given a clear commitment to continue that policy. I ask the hon. Lady and other Conservative Members why they cannot continue to support the other policy that was introduced by her Administration—the fuel duty escalator.

The village school continues to play an important part in many rural communities. They were often the centre of villages. Great concern was expressed at what seemed to be the inevitable demise of village schools under the previous Administration. However, the present Government have made it clear that, under both present and future arrangements for decision-making on rural schools, the presumption will be against closure.

The Government are taking action on health care. We are continuing to support the essential small pharmacies scheme, giving support to the dispensing services of pharmacies that are more than 1 km from another such outlet. We have introduced health action zones to tackle a range of health problems in some of the most deprived areas. Eleven zones were selected initially and a further 15 have been added in a second wave.

Three of those health action zones are in predominantly rural areas: north Cumbria, Northumberland and Cornwall. A total of £5 million is available in 1998–99 to promote better working on health issues. A further £30 million will follow for the first 11 zones in 1999–2000, with £15 million for the second wave.

Mr. Hayes: That is the third time that the hon. Lady has given way. She is satisfying my desire to prove that she is compassionate and generous, as I described earlier.

In my constituency, local hospitals are threatened with closure. The policy among health authorities throughout the country seems to be to invest in large urban centres of excellence that are very distant from remote rural communities. In many parts of my constituency, to get to one of those centres of excellence, people have to travel 40 or 50 miles—to Lincoln, Peterborough—

The motion having been made after Ten o'clock, and the debate having continued for half an hour, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned at six minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 18 March 1999

The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

The Secretary of State was asked—

Education SSA (Cheshire)

1. **Mrs. Ann Winterton** (Congleton): What recent representations he has received on the education standard spending assessment for Cheshire. [75574]

The Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Mr. David Blunkett): I have received a number of representations from Cheshire welcoming the £13.8 million increase in standard spending assessment and the fact that, this year, the revenue support grant matches that increase. That was never true of such allocations under the previous Government.

Mrs. Winterton: Although I welcome any increase in real terms in education expenditure in Cheshire, does the Secretary of State accept that the present flawed methodology disadvantages shire counties such as Cheshire—compared with London and the south-east—in respect of area cost adjustment and pupil weighting? Will he introduce a reform of that methodology rather than leaving it to fossilise for a further three years?

Mr. Blunkett: I can promise that my right hon. and hon. Friends in the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions will not leave the methodology to fossilise for 18 years, and that will make a difference. The area cost adjustment and the additional educational needs element are serious issues and we accept that there is a requirement to get them right. The problem was that the Local Government Association and others could not come up with an agreed programme of change in time. I would very much welcome the hon. Lady's contribution in that matter.

Our allocation of money under the standards fund—from which Cheshire has already received £8 million—and of direct funding for class size reductions and nursery expansion is being undertaken fairly, and that funding is in addition to the standard spending assessment announcements.

School Building Programme

2. **Dr. George Turner** (North-West Norfolk): If he will make a statement on measures to tackle the backlog in the school building programme. [75575]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Mr. Charles Clarke): The Government have made significant extra resources available to help local authorities and school governing bodies tackle the backlog in the school building programme. In July 1997, we introduced the £1.085 billion new deal for schools. The comprehensive spending review has provided an additional £1.5 billion for schools capital, and a further £660 million to support private finance initiative projects. In total, we estimate that some £5.4 billion will be available for investment in school buildings over the next three years. In respect of this year's new deal for schools round, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State hopes to be able to announce the outcomes before Easter.

Dr. Turner: I thank my hon. Friend for that response. Having seen the backlog build up in Norfolk over 20 years, I appreciate the Government's making that matter a priority. Does my hon. Friend agree that it is important that, as we enter the next millennium, our teachers should feel that their workplaces are suitable for it? The bids received by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will include many categories, but does my hon. Friend agree that we have been making do with mobile classrooms in Norfolk for far too long? He will be aware that, at Smithdon county high school in Hunstanton, far too many teachers have had mobile classrooms as their workplace for far too long. Will he ensure that careful consideration—and, it is to be hoped, a positive answer—are given to the part of the £32 million bid for the county of Norfolk that relates to that problem?

Mr. Clarke: My right hon. Friend will have heard my hon. Friend's reference to the school in Hunstanton. I acknowledge that standards are driven up by good-quality provision of school building and that teachers need to be able to teach in good, healthy working environments. We inherited a substantial backlog from the previous Government and we are now investing at a much higher level than they ever did; by the end of this Parliament, we shall be investing twice as much every year as they invested in any year during which they were in power.

Mr. Roy Beggs (East Antrim): The additional money for education is appreciated throughout the United Kingdom. Does the Minister agree that many public bodies, including education authorities, own a great deal of property and assets which are underused and could be sold to raise funds? Will he encourage the raising of money to be reinvested in new building and to upgrade the school estate?

Mr. Clarke: I agree with the hon. Gentleman; that is why we are encouraging local education authorities to develop asset management plans in which they consider all the schools in their area and make a planned assessment of the maintenance, replacement and new investment that is needed for each school. Those plans

will set out locally agreed priorities for capital expenditure and the approach proposed for tackling them. For that reason, we are holding consultations on the overall capital strategy and have provided a small amount to help local education authorities to develop those plans. We believe that that will lead to rational decisions on resources and better value for money for the teachers and pupils in the constituencies that we all represent.

Literacy Hour

3. **Fiona Mactaggart** (Slough): What is his assessment of the effectiveness of the literacy hour in primary schools; and if he will make a statement. [75576]

The Minister for School Standards (Ms Estelle Morris): Almost all schools are now teaching the daily literacy hour, which is having a positive impact on teaching methods and organisation of lessons. The literacy hour has already raised standards in schools that took part in the pilot national literacy project. Evaluations of the project, published in December by Ofsted and the National Foundation for Educational Research, show that, in less than two years, children who started some way below the national average in their reading scores made progress of between eight months and a year above what would normally be expected.

Fiona Mactaggart: I thank the Minister for that reply. Is she aware of the Scottish Office-funded research into synthetic phonics? That research showed not only that children taught by that method were nine months ahead in their reading ability but that less than 10 per cent. had reading ages more than 12 months behind their chronological age, as compared with nearly a third of children taught by the analytical phonics method? Does the Minister agree that, in this era of national targets and nationally agreed teaching strategies, the Government have a duty to ensure that classroom teachers are aware of the most recent research so that they can improve and develop their teaching methods and achieve the demanding targets for success in reading at key stage 2?

Ms Morris: I think perhaps we should not pick arguments with our Scottish colleagues when no arguments exist. My hon. Friend's comments show that the Government have succeeded in getting phonics accepted as a good way of teaching children to read. That is the focus of her question. We shall always reflect on the evidence about which phonics are best. However, synthetic and other phonics are included in the national literacy strategy that is taught to children in England.

I believe that the research conducted in Scotland involved between eight and 12 schools, whereas the national literacy strategy is based on good-quality evidence gathered from the national literacy project. As always, we shall base our policies on good evidence to ensure that children are taught to read and write in the most effective manner. That is our standard.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): Does the Minister agree that the best step that could be taken to improve literacy in primary schools would be to publish the results of the tests that children take at seven as well as the average amount of money that is spent on each child and the average class size in each school? We could then see whether there is a correlation between money spent, class sizes and performance or whether the correlation is between performance and the persistent use of out-dated self-discovery teaching methods in too many schools.

Ms Morris: One wonders why the Conservative party did not do any of those things when it was in power.

Dr. Lewis: I wasn't here.

Ms Morris: The hon. Gentleman will not be here much longer if he tries to wriggle out of any responsibility for the previous Government's actions.

There is nothing more important than ensuring that youngsters between five and seven learn to read and write as effectively as possible. If they do not learn those basic skills by that age, they will not be able to access the rest of the curriculum and they will become disaffected and disillusioned. The Government have already taken action not only on the literacy strategy but on class sizes. We have also ensured that information is available to parents. We have acted speedily to ensure that the information that is available to the public and to the wider community is more meaningful in terms of value added and can be measured from baseline assessments.

There is already evidence that small class sizes in the important first year make a real difference. The Government are definitely taking credit for the fact that all the essential elements are in place. We will ensure that today's youngsters aged five to seven get a chance that their predecessors did not enjoy under the previous Government.

Mr. Malcolm Wicks (Croydon, North): I have attended four or five literacy hours, and already my spelling is showing some improvement—although there is no room for complacency. More important, I have found that children enjoy literacy hours, which are becoming a popular feature of primary school life. Does the Minister have any observations to make at this stage about the applicability of the literacy hour—particularly the reading of text at the beginning—to the most able children, who may want to turn to the next page or even the next book, and to those who are struggling with literacy and who may need more intensive support on a one-to-one basis?

Ms Morris: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for those comments. My experience of visiting primary schools in September was that children welcomed the literacy hour. Children like the sense of order, the pattern and the pace, and they know that they are improving. I take seriously my hon. Friend's points about our most able children and those who learn less quickly. He will be pleased to hear that the evidence demonstrates that all children, whether the most able or those with special needs, make progress under the national literacy strategy. That is good news for all children.

We shall reflect on further advice to make sure both that the hour is used to the best effect for more able children and that those with special educational needs are properly supported. The Government will base our proposals on evidence of what works and will return to the matter in the near future.

Mr. David Willetts (Havant): The Minister will know that that is not the evidence of the recent survey by the

Association of Teachers and Lecturers, which revealed that 80 per cent. of teachers questioned believed that the literacy hour was not helping pupils with special educational needs and that 60 per cent. thought that it was not helping especially gifted children. Do not the questions of the hon. Members for Croydon, North (Mr. Wicks) and for Slough (Fiona Mactaggart) provide two examples of the rigidity and inflexibility of the hour, which does not properly take account of synthetic phonics teaching methods or the needs of gifted children and those with special educational needs?

Ms Morris: The hon. Gentleman must decide when he would prefer to believe. If he wants to believe the evidence of the ATL and teacher unions, let him do so, but I would sooner believe the evidence of Ofsted, NFER and independent research, which demonstrates that the literacy strategy works for all children. That is the bottom line. The policy is not about what teachers think; it is about which strategy the evidence demonstrates works with pupils. Pupils' reading standards are crucial.

Primary Schools (New Classrooms)

4. **Helen Jackson** (Sheffield, Hillsborough): How many primary schools will be acquiring new classrooms in the current academic year. [75578]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Mr. Charles Clarke): That information is not collected centrally, but we expect that the key stage 1 class size initiative will fund additional classrooms at 600 schools in the current financial year and at a further 909 schools in 1999–2000. Funding continues to be available to meet agreed local priorities for school premises including new classrooms through the annual capital guidelines, the new deal for schools and local education authorities' own funds.

Helen Jackson: I thank the Minister for that answer. He will know about and not be surprised by, the huge welcome in Sheffield for the Government's funding for the reduction in class sizes to 30 in primary schools, which is beginning to be put into practice. He will also be aware that the money is scheduled to fund 45 extra teachers—which is most welcome—and three capital allocations for extra classrooms, one of which, at Marlcliffe, has been particularly welcomed in my constituency. However, consultations with primary school head teachers in my constituency have revealed that many want to reduce class sizes to 30, but will experience huge difficulties because of the shortage of rooms to accommodate children. The class size pledge has a knock-on effect on classrooms, not only on the staff who teach the classes.

Mr. Clarke: I thank my hon. Friend for her remarks. I know what a welcome our programme has received in Sheffield and elsewhere in the country. I am particularly aware, as any Minister in my Department must be, of the contributions being made in Sheffield. I want to highlight the number of extra teachers who have been employed as a result of the initiative to reduce class sizes. On top of the extra 1,500 teachers in 1998–99, there will be an extra 2,500 teachers from next September to help to reduce class sizes. That is a long-term programme. I hope that my answer addresses the points that my hon. Friend made about the need to keep striving to reduce class sizes and raise educational standards.

Mr. Don Foster (Bath): Does the Minister recall that before the last general election, the right hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett), now the Secretary of State, was told that the cost of meeting the class size pledge would be £60 million? Is the hon. Gentleman aware that the budget now stands at £627 million and rising, which is 10 times more than the original estimated cost?

Following the question of the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Helen Jackson), is the hon. Gentleman further aware that local authorities, not only in Sheffield, but throughout the land, now estimate that for the next two years, they need not 1,500, but 2,300 additional teachers and classrooms, at a cost of £159 million more than the Government are allocating? Does that not demonstrate that the Government have got their sums wrong yet again?

Mr. Clarke: The hon. Gentleman must have misheard what I said. I said that we have spent enough money on the initiative to employ an extra 1,500 teachers in 1998–99 and an additional 2,500 in 1999–2000 from September, which more than meets his point. We have allocated resources; we have fulfilled our pledges. I should be a little disturbed if the Liberal Democrats joined the Conservatives in taking the view that class size had no impact on educational performance.

Mr. Jonathan Shaw (Chatham and Aylesford): One of the schools in my constituency that will be receiving a new nursery classroom is Ridge Meadow county primary. The building of the new classroom has been delayed because the school is in special measures. However, I am delighted to say that the hard work of Sue Robertson, the governors and all the teachers has meant that the school is now out of special measures. Will my hon. Friend assure me that, as soon as the inspectors' report hits his desk, he will quickly give Medway education authority and the school the green light to build the new classroom, to celebrate everyone's hard work in raising standards and the fact that the school has come out of special measures?

Mr. Clarke: I join my hon. Friend in congratulating everybody associated with the school—the head teacher and the governors—on driving forward to take the school out of special measures. I am glad to say that that is characteristic of a number of schools which have found themselves in special measures. I can give my hon. Friend the assurance that he requests. I shall consider very carefully the specific proposals for new capital spending at the school, and recognise its achievement in reaching this point.

Mrs. Theresa May (Maidenhead): In addition to the provision of classrooms to reduce class sizes in primary schools, how many extra primary school classrooms have been brought into use to accommodate four-year-olds as a result of the Government's policy on early-years education? Will the Minister take this opportunity to accept the figures of the Pre-School Learning Alliance, which show that 1,500 pre-schools have already closed as a result of Government policy, and that more will close

because primary schools are being encouraged to take four-year-olds and because extra costs are being imposed on pre-schools owing to the Government's policies on the minimum wage, holiday pay and national insurance?

Mr. Clarke: As a matter of fact, I do not accept the figures of the Pre-School Learning Alliance. In fact, I discussed them in great detail at an event that the alliance organised just a couple of weeks ago. The figures that the hon. Lady has cited are not reliable. I recall that, in my county of Norfolk, the voucher scheme which her Government introduced created exactly the drama and worry about which she is concerned. We are looking—and continue to look—at demand for class size at all ages. We shall continue to review the matter and make statements as appropriate.

Further Education Colleges

6. **Mr. Phil Hope** (Corby): What support he is providing to further education colleges to raise standards. [75580]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Mr. George Mudie): We are determined to ensure that standards are raised in further education colleges. To sustain that, we established a standards fund of £35 million this year and £80 million next year.

Mr. Hope: I thank my hon. Friend for his reply. Young people and mature students alike in my constituency are very much looking forward to the planned growth in further education. The Tresham institute, which serves many people in Corby, wants to play its part in raising skills and standards. It is concerned, however, about the pressure on it. As my wife, a senior lecturer at the institute, tells me every Friday when I go home, the institute has made 30 per cent. efficiency improvements in the delivery of further education. Will quality be maintained during such growth, and will the pressure on staff to deliver be too great? Will my hon. Friend assure me that growth will not be at the expense of quality and that the contribution that staff make to delivering that increase in standards will be recognised?

Mr. Mudie: As one who is married to a head teacher, and given that the banning of the subject of education in the household adds to domestic bliss, I sympathise with my hon. Friend. We are very determined on standards. We shall unashamedly maintain pressure on further education colleges. We are intent on widening participation. We have a national target of an additional 700,000 students in higher and further education by 2002. We do not accept that the introduction of more people will lead to a drop in standards.

When I met some college principals yesterday, I refused to accept that standards are affected by widening participation. We do understand that many people will come in with needs and problems, and that those must be accommodated, but the funds that we have put in to facilitate access and the money that we have put into the support fund will help further education colleges in that task.

New Deal (West Sussex)

7. **Mr. Tim Loughton** (East Worthing and Shoreham): How much has been spent on the new deal in West Sussex to date. [75581]

The Minister for Employment, Welfare to Work and Equal Opportunities (Mr. Andrew Smith): To the end of January £206,538 had been brought to account in the West Sussex coastal plain unit of delivery on the new deals for young people and those over 25.

Mr. Loughton: I am grateful for that answer, but is the Minister aware that Employment Service figures show that, in the West Sussex coastal plain unit of delivery, only 68 new-dealers have secured unsubsidised employment? I am sure that the Minister's maths are better than mine, but does he think that that represents good value for money?

Given the announcement yesterday that my local electricity company has created 500 new real jobs in my constituency alone, will he admit that the windfall tax raid to create jobs might have been better deployed if the money had been left with the utility companies?

Mr. Smith: Not at all, not least because those 68 people who have got the unsubsidised jobs might well not have done so without the new deal programme and the windfall levy. What the hon. Gentleman does not mention—I am surprised that he does not pay tribute to the achievement of his constituents in this respect—are the other 51 people who have got subsidised jobs through the new deal for young people. Is the hon. Gentleman not including them in his figures? They are in employment; they are in work, earning money. They would have been on the dole under the Government whom he supported.

New Deal (Young People)

8. **Mr. Lawrie Quinn** (Scarborough and Whitby): How many young people in *(a)* Scarborough and Whitby, *(b)* North Yorkshire and *(c)* the United Kingdom have obtained employment through the new deal to date. [75582]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Ms Margaret Hodge): New deal has made an encouraging start and in the North Yorkshire unit of delivery, which covers Scarborough and Whitby, 385 young people have found employment. In Great Britain, 58,500 have found employment.

Mr. Quinn: My constituents and everyone in the country will be pleased to know that 385 people in the North Yorkshire delivery unit have found work. However, may I gently ask the Department whether, in an area such as my constituency, where there is a discrete travel-to-work area and where unemployment is more than 40 per cent. higher than the national average, it would be possible to focus on the actual area where there is most concern? A needs-driven agenda would enable us to do more work not only to give more help to the youngsters who have benefited from the new deal but to extend that to people over 55 who could benefit from it. We welcome the progress that will be made for those

people. Many people in my constituency are looking to the Government to deliver in this area. I believe that we can, and I should like to have the statistics to prove it.

Ms Hodge: I congratulate my hon. Friend on the work that he is doing on behalf of his constituents and I know of the work that he is doing with my colleagues on linking educational standards with employment opportunities. He is right to point out that there are concentrations of unemployment in large units. I know that unemployment is 6.6 per cent. in Scarborough and Whitby, whereas it is 3.3 per cent. in the whole North Yorkshire unit of delivery. Obviously, the programme is designed to meet the needs of people who find themselves unemployed, and the purpose of the new deals, for the young unemployed, the long-term unemployed and—when it comes into being—for those over 50 is to focus on areas of greatest need.

Mr. Owen Paterson (North Shropshire): How much taxpayers' money has been spent on each of the young people who have obtained a full-time job through the new deal?

Ms Hodge: The hon. Gentleman will know that it is far too early to make a rigorous assessment of the cost per job, but he will know that, for the first time, the Government are making a completely transparent and thorough assessment of our investment into all the new deals. We believe at this point that the figure per job is about £1,000.

Ms Candy Atherton (Falmouth and Camborne): Will my hon. Friend send a message of congratulation to the Employment Service in Cornwall? Does she agree that it has been particularly successful and innovative as a pathfinder of the new deal?

Ms Hodge: I congratulate my hon. Friend and the people working in her local employment office on the excellent work that they have done. It is our view that they have been one of the most successful employment offices in finding jobs for unemployed people in that area. It is interesting to note that 18 per cent. more young people are moving off benefit in the pathfinder areas than in the non-pathfinder areas. That is further evidence, for those who still require it, that our new deal for young people is working.

Mr. Damian Green (Ashford): The Minister's complacency about the new deal flies in the face of the evidence. Will she confirm that yesterday's unemployment figures reveal that, since the national introduction of the new deal for young people, unemployment among young people has risen by 22,000, and has risen every quarter? Does she not recognise the plain truth that, in its first year of operation, the new deal is proving an expensive failure?

Ms Hodge: It is typical of the Opposition—who never did anything to tackle unemployment—to criticise a programme that is demonstrating great success, even in its early days. Unemployment among young people has dropped by 50 per cent. since May 1997. That demonstrates the success of our programme.

Individual Learning Accounts

9. **Mr. Michael Jabez Foster** (Hastings and Rye): What role individual learning accounts will play in the university for industry. [75583]

The Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Mr. David Blunkett): Many account holders will want to access the advice, guidance and tailored material that the university for industry will provide, precisely because it targets individual companies and the needs of individuals. Today we have launched the development plan for the university for industry. We have announced the board membership, including the chairman, Lord Dearing, and the vice-chairman, Tony Greener, who is chairman of Diaegio plc.

Mr. Foster: Given the welcome tax incentives for individual learning accounts that were announced in the Budget, what message would my right hon. Friend send to businesses in my constituency and elsewhere to encourage them to contribute to individual learning accounts for their employees?

Mr. Blunkett: The message was a strong one: if businesses are prepared to invest in individual learning accounts, neither they nor the recipient will have to pay tax or have it counted for tax purposes against them. There will therefore be a substantial incentive for the individual—and encouragement for trade unions, through their bargaining-for-skills programme and similar initiatives, to make the development of negotiations over skills and the investment in the skills needs of the future a crucial part not merely of modernising our economy, but of their contribution to ensuring the well-being and security of the work force in the years ahead.

Mr. Phil Willis (Harrogate and Knaresborough): We were delighted when the Government accepted the Liberal Democrat proposals for individual learning accounts. We are pleased that they have also rolled out the issue of tax relief for students and their families, and also from employers. Will the Secretary of State tell us, first, whether there will be limits on those contributions; secondly, when individual learning accounts will be available to all students; and thirdly, whether that will mean that, in the payment of tuition fees, money put in by individuals or employers will attract up to 40 per cent. tax relief?

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): If it's your policy, what are you worried about?

Mr. Blunkett: My hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) puts it succinctly. If it is the Liberal Democrats' policy, I should be asking the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis) the question.

I announced the policy of individual learning accounts three years ago. We have been working with local partners and with training and enterprise councils to ensure that, when the accounts are launched, they are a great success. The first million will be available by next year, funded by £150 million of public money. There is a £500 cap. The standard rate of income tax is applied. As we shall see when the Moser report is published, this is a policy for

investing in the basic skills needs of the vast majority of people who have few—or, in many cases, no—qualifications and skills.

This is not a policy, unlike the previous vocational tax relief, to encourage people to follow, at public expense, leisure courses such as the piloting of aircraft and deep sea diving.

Mrs. Anne Campbell (Cambridge): I warmly welcome the recent announcement about individual learning accounts and the way in which they will encourage individuals to take responsibility for their own learning. Will they be available to right hon. and hon. Members and their assistants, and, if so, would my right hon. Friend encourage us to take advantage of them?

Mr. Blunkett: I have been hoist by my own petard. Yes, I would encourage all hon. Members to take advantage of them, and I would encourage people to ensure that those who do not have basic skills can take up the scheme in a new and imaginative way. I had better stress once again that individual learning accounts will not be available for diving courses here or anywhere else in the world.

New Deal

10. **Mr. Chris Mullin** (Sunderland, South): What assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the new deal programme; and if he will make a statement. [75584]

The Minister for Employment, Welfare to Work and Equal Opportunities (Mr. Andrew Smith): The new deal has made an encouraging start. More than 230,000 young people have started on the programme and more than 50,000 have already found jobs. A comprehensive programme of evaluation is under way, much of it being undertaken independently of Government. Four reports have already been published, more are on the way, and we shall release detailed information in May on how each area is doing against core performance indicators.

Mr. Mullin: Has my right hon. Friend noticed that we have succeeded in attracting only about seven Tory Back Benchers to our deliberations this morning, and does he think that there is scope for a new deal programme to reintegrate some Tories back into the world of work?

Does my right hon. Friend see any scope for allowing new deal steering groups greater flexibility to adapt their programmes to local conditions—for example, by awarding recognition to in-house training that does not necessarily produce a national vocational qualification but that may be every bit as relevant to job prospects?

Mr. Smith: I know the close personal interest that my hon. Friend takes in the new deal in his constituency, and that is greatly appreciated by all those responsible for the programme locally. As to the challenge of what the new deal could do for the Conservative party, I have always been careful about the claims that I make for the new deal and even I would not suggest that the new deal would be capable of bringing indolent Conservatives into the Chamber, even at this late hour in the morning.

The programme is giving young unemployed people in my hon. Friend's constituency and elsewhere the chance—for many of them for the first time in their lives—to obtain rewarding work. I agree that we must develop the flexibility to ensure that the gateway and other training support can equip people to fill the vacancies that are available. The increase to £5 million for the innovation fund for the new deal in the Budget will enable us to carry forward precisely the sort of initiative for which my hon. Friend argues on behalf of his local partnership and others.

Mr. David Willetts (Havant): I do not recall seeing the hon. Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin) in the House last week in the Budget debate on education and employment, or the week before that, and what about the week before when we debated education in schools, when more Conservative Members were present than Labour Members?

The Minister talks complacently about the new deal, but is he aware of what *Personnel Today* has called a crisis of confidence in the new deal among employers? Can he confirm that Allied Carpets is pulling out of the scheme and that Dixons, Bass and Marks and Spencer are finding it difficult to meet their recruitment needs through the new deal? Is it not a fact that no extra young people are finding jobs through the new deal compared with what would have happened anyway?

Mr. Smith: No to all of it. First, the hon. Gentleman should use one of his brains at least to apologise to my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin), who was in the Chamber on the occasions to which he referred. Secondly, Lucy has had to be left outside the Chamber today, in case the hon. Gentleman's intemperate remarks should provoke her as they so evidently did during the education debate. Finally, it is not true that those companies have pulled out of the new deal. For example, Marks and Spencer has reported to me positive experience of the people that it has recruited and the progress that it is making on the programme. He is wrong, wrong, wrong.

New Classrooms

12. **Charlotte Atkins** (Staffordshire, Moorlands): If he will estimate the number of new classrooms to be provided by September 1999. [75587]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Mr. Charles Clarke): I refer my hon. Friend to my earlier answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Helen Jackson). We estimate that the key stage 1 class size initiative will fund an additional 600 classrooms in the current financial year and a further 900 in 1999–2000.

Charlotte Atkins: I thank my hon. Friend for that answer. In Staffordshire, in January 1998, nearly 8,300 pupils were in classes of over 30; by September 1999, that figure is likely to be under 500. Does he recognise the particular problems of rural schools operating with mixed-age classes in buildings of limited size?

Mr. Clarke: I thank my hon. Friend for her question. The kind of change that she has seen in Staffordshire is

happening throughout the country, to the great benefit of educational standards. We are extremely conscious of the importance of the local school to rural communities, such as those in her constituency. Our policy is designed to raise standards in all schools, wherever they are situated. We have made it clear that no child should have to travel an unreasonable distance to school because of the class size limit and we are prepared to consider providing extra funding for an extra teacher when no alternative school is available within a reasonable distance.

Mr. Nick St. Aubyn (Guildford): Whatever importance is attached to lowering class sizes to below 30, surely it is even more important to reduce the number of children in classes of over 40. Will the Minister confirm the figures from his own Department stating that, in the first year of this Government, the number of children in classes of over 40 doubled? Why has that happened and when will he manage to get the number of children in classes of over 40 in primary schools back to the level that he inherited from the previous Government?

Mr. Clarke: I can confirm that our plans will reduce the number of children in infant classes of over 30 from 485,000 in January 1998 to under 200,000 in September 1999—a drop of over 285,000. By September 2000, we expect fewer than 50,000 children to be in large infant classes. I am not aware of the particular school to which the hon. Gentleman referred, but its budget for the first year of this Government was inherited from the previous Administration. Thanks to this Government, substantial extra resources are going into schools to address precisely the issue about which he is concerned, and all the other issues of educational standards.

Ms Joan Walley (Stoke-on-Trent, North): May I give credit where credit is due and say how pleased I am that we have such a huge programme for new classrooms and school building programmes, particularly in Staffordshire and in Stoke-on-Trent? I thank my hon. Friend for the £2.5 million under the new deal, which will fund 10 new classrooms at Holden Lane high school in my constituency, where work commences tomorrow.

My hon. Friend's policy is one of innovation and vision—[HON. MEMBERS: "Oh!]—because building new classrooms will enable us to implement our policy of lifelong learning and ties in with primary schools. Will he look at the accumulated backlog in respect of new classrooms in Staffordshire and in Stoke-on-Trent, which has resulted from 18 years of no improvements under the previous Government?

Mr. Clarke: I thank my hon. Friend for her question. Such improvements are being made throughout the country. I certainly give her an assurance that I will look into the backlog to which she referred, but she was justified in using the words "innovation" and "vision". The fact is that we had 18 years of stagnation, but more resources are now going into building. Teachers' governing bodies are being creative about how those resources can be used to drive up educational standards. I travel around the country a great deal and it is truly inspirational to see what many people are doing with the resources that we have been able to let them have.

Employment Zones

13. **Mr. Syd Rapson** (Portsmouth, North): What plans he has to help unemployed people aged 25 years and over in employment zones to find employment. [75588]

The Minister for Employment, Welfare to Work and Equal Opportunities (Mr. Andrew Smith): We aim to have 15 employment zones throughout Britain up and running from April next year, with some 48,000 long-term unemployed people eligible for help. A key innovation in the zones will be personal job accounts, which will, for the first time, bring together funding from benefits, training and employment service programmes.

Mr. Rapson: I thank the Minister for that answer. Could he explain to an old-fashioned sceptic such as me how the new personal job accounts will provide the flexible help needed by the unemployed?

Mr. Smith: The rules of past initiatives have been rigid and have required that money can be used only for a particular purpose, whereas, under this scheme, the personal adviser, working in conjunction with the long-term unemployed client, will be able to plan a programme of training, work experience, enterprise and self-employment. If people want to be self-employed, the personal adviser will help them to move forward. Pooling funds that have previously be available only in a fragmented way will make a much more coherent and effective programme.

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Surrey Heath): Does the Minister recognise that, contrary to his boast about the Government's policies, especially the new deal, instead of tourism and leisure businesses recruiting many more young people, at a recent trade function for one of the main trade bodies for tourism and leisure, it was revealed that not one business has taken on anyone under the new deal? Does that not show the complete bankruptcy of the Government's policies and the accuracy of what my hon. Friend the Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts) said a few moments ago?

Mr. Smith: No, it does not. It is more nonsense from a party that did next to nothing to help the long-term and young unemployed, and now cannot come to grips with the fact that the new deal has, according to independent evaluation, made an encouraging start. Tourism, leisure and catering are among those industries recruiting the most people from the new deal. From memory, I think that over a fifth of new deal recruits who are getting jobs are going into that sector.

The hon. Gentleman should examine the hard evidence. He should compare the performance of the young, unemployed people who went through the new deal programme when the pathfinder areas were up and running with the performance when the new deal was not up and running in the rest of the country. That comparison has been made, and it shows that youth unemployment fell by 18 more percentage points in areas where the new deal was operating. That is proof that this programme is working and helping young people forward. Conservative Members should, as some of them have, get behind the new deal and help to make it a success, instead of carping and trying to make it a failure.

Personal Adviser Service

14. **Kali Mountford** (Colne Valley): What is the role of the personal adviser service in respect of disabled people seeking work and training. [75589]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Ms Margaret Hodge): Under the new deal for disabled people, the personal adviser service offers those who are claiming incapacity benefits a client-focused service based on the needs of the individual disabled person. It gives those people access to an extensive range of specialist disability programmes. Personal advisers carry out initial assessments of a client's employability, arrange any specialist assessments that are needed, give advice on benefits and training issues, draw up employment-focused action plans and work with clients to carry them out.

Kali Mountford: I am delighted with the response from my hon. Friend the Minister, which will meet many of the concerns that have been expressed by people with disabilities who have attended my surgeries. They are fearful that they will be forced into employment that is unsuitable for them, and that training opportunities will not recognise their needs. Personal advisers may not understand their problems of access to employment. Can they have an assurance that personal advisers will be thoroughly trained so that they know the local marketplace and how disabled people can get access to it? Disabled people need to be supported throughout their lives so as to ensure that they have a full opportunity to be citizens and not just people in receipt of benefits.

Ms Hodge: Training for personal advisers is absolutely crucial, and is professional and individually tailored to ensure that they have the skills that are necessary to help this special group under the new deal. I endorse what my hon. Friend said. We know that, of the 2.6 million people who are on incapacity benefit, 1 million would like to work. It behoves us to try to break down the barriers to employment that far too many disabled people have faced for far too long.

Adult Literacy

15. **Mr. Vernon Coaker** (Gedling): What estimate he has made of the numbers of adults with literacy problems; and what support is being given to them. [75590]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Mr. George Mudie): Just over one in five adults—some 8 million adults of working age—have poor literacy skills, according to the 1997 "Adult Literacy in Britain" survey. A wide range of Government programmes offer basic skills provision for adults. By 2002, up to 500,000 learners a year will benefit.

Mr. Coaker: Many hon. Members will be staggered by the information that 8 million adults have basic literacy problems. A number of those people will be the excluded, prisoners, and others with difficulties of all kinds. May I urge my hon. Friend to give as much prominence as possible to the recommendations in the Moser report, and to the individual learning accounts that are to be introduced? The present position is clearly unsatisfactory, and cannot be allowed to continue.

Mr. Mudie: I think that the whole House will appreciate my hon. Friend's concern.

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): No.

Mr. Mudie: That probably puts the right hon. Gentleman in a minority of one.

Those 8 million people will be unemployed, on benefits or in low-paid jobs, and the figures demonstrate that they receive less training than others. My hon. Friend is right: we are awaiting the Moser report, whose publication is imminent, and we shall be prepared to work with it. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State pointed out we ascribe great importance to individual learning accounts, which can act as a catalyst for ordinary people who would not necessarily have considered going back to learning otherwise. They can pick up that £150, and embark on the road leading back to learning and to employment.

Early-years Education

16. **Dr. Phyllis Starkey** (Milton Keynes, South-West): If he will make a statement on the Government's policy on the provision of *(a)* playgroups and *(b)* nursery classes for early-years education. [75591]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Ms Margaret Hodge): Early-years services are planned in each local authority, so that the maintained, private and voluntary sectors all contribute to planning and providing early-education places for four-year-olds and, increasingly, for three-year-olds. As I announced yesterday, we are providing a further £500,000 in direct help for voluntary pre-school groups and playgroups with short-term financial difficulties. That will enable them to play a full part in the expansion of places.

Dr. Starkey: I welcome the additional funds. In my constituency, despite the council's excellent early-years planning, playgroups and nursery classes in schools have drawn my attention to problems that they are experiencing in filling places. That is directly due to the aftermath of the nursery vouchers free-for-all. Will my hon. Friend keep the situation under review, and ensure that playgroups and nursery classes that are experiencing short-term difficulties have the finance to tide them over?

Ms Hodge: Because we wanted to escape from the free-for-all, we introduced early-years development and child care partnerships, so that there could be proper planning for places in each local authority area. This year, for the first time, each partnership has undertaken an audit of both supply and demand in its area, so that there can be sensible provision.

I shall continue to keep an eye on what is happening in Milton Keynes. I am currently considering the plan that it has submitted. I hope that the local authority itself will consider raising the age of admission to reception classes, if it has the capacity so to do.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): In the light of what she has said, will the Minister confirm that she agrees that

the contribution of the pre-school playgroups—including the one that services the children of Marsworth, in my constituency, which I had the privilege of visiting last Friday—is just as valuable as the contribution of school reception classes? Given the primacy of personal choice for parents, does the Minister agree that, at no stage and in no way, should any parents feel that they are being pressurised or corralled into sending their children to school reception classes, as distinct from their preferred choice of pre-school playgroups?

Ms Hodge: Of course we agree—the entire thrust of our policy demonstrates our belief that diversity in provision for children in their early years is absolutely crucial. Over the next three years, we shall be investing £8 billion in providing high-quality and affordable pre-school education, and £8 billion in early education and child care. The important thing is choice for parents, families and children. The choice should be theirs, and not be determined by a producer-led interest. I hope that, in his constituency, the hon. Gentleman will be supporting parents and their children, in ensuring that they are able to choose the setting that best suits children's needs.

University for Industry

17. **Mr. Dennis Canavan** (Falkirk, West): If he will make a statement about progress in establishing the university for industry. [75592]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Mr. George Mudie): Good progress has been made towards establishment of the university for industry. A three-year corporate plan was recently agreed by Ministers as the basis for future planning. This morning, the university for industry announced its proposals to take forward its development and implementation. It intends to publish a summary of those plans shortly. Lord Dearing, the newly appointed board and Dr Anne Wright—the university for industry's chief executive—will lead that exciting work. The university for industry is on target to launch nationally in 2000.

Mr. Canavan: Does my hon. Friend agree that the university for industry is one of the most positive and innovative projects on the education agenda? Bearing in mind that the official launch is supposed to take place next year, will he give us a bit more detail about the project? For example, will the university for industry basically be a national learning resource centre, a degree-awarding body, or both? To what extent will it use existing academic institutions to provide nationwide access to interactive learning technology in the home and the workplace, and in local schools and libraries?

Mr. Mudie: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's warm welcome—

Mr. Don Foster (Bath): Surprised?

Mr. Mudie: I am not surprised at all, but very grateful, for my hon. Friend's warm welcome for the institution. The university for industry will not be a degree-awarding institution. It will be more a broker, bringing together existing institutions, and will—through the technology infrastructure—make individuals aware of services, courses and the availability of places. There is a separate UFI organisation for Scotland, and we are working closely with it in co-ordinating its activities.

Mr. Andrew Lansley (South Cambridgeshire): The Minister will be aware that the Budget Red Book makes it clear that only £5 million is to be allocated to the university for industry, and that any other funds will have to be met out of the budget of the Department for Education and Employment. If Ministers have agreed a corporate plan, will the Minister say how much money has been allocated to the university for industry from within his Department's budget, and from which other budget it has been taken? Will he also explain to the House why, last Friday, when I talked to the training and enterprise council in Cambridgeshire and asked about the university for industry, I was told, "All we have seen is material suggesting that it will happen some time, but no one has told us anything about what it will do in practice"?

Mr. Mudie: Similarly unhelpful and ungrateful comments are made about TECs—the hon. Gentleman should pay no attention to them. He should consider the fact that we have been appointing a board, a chief executive and a chairman—and we are delighted that Lord Dearing has accepted. The sum in the Red Book is for development costs. However, now that the corporate plan has been agreed, provision of £44 million will be triggered. The Red Book also does not show the considerable sums for development—about which, two Question Times ago, the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis) asked me—provided from European Adapt funds.

New Deal (Young People)

18. **Mr. David Lock** (Wyre Forest): What proposals his Department has to ensure that young people on the gateway section of new deal have the skills needed to hold down full-time jobs. [75593]

The Minister for Employment, Welfare to Work and Equal Opportunities (Mr. Andrew Smith): The gateway help for young people includes jobsearch, careers advice and guidance and support with basic skills. There is also specialist help for those who have suffered homelessness, alcohol or substance abuse.

Mr. Lock: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for that answer. Does he agree that the gateway phase is vital to enable young people to move from benefit into work? Taking people from a life on the dole and giving them the skills necessary to hold down a job is a crucial building block for the first stage of their career. Will he join me in commending the valuable work done by the new deal advisers in Worcestershire, where the programme has been such a success, in preparing young people for work?

Mr. Smith: I am pleased to join my hon. Friend in congratulating the advisers and others working on the new deal in his county. They, too, will appreciate the active support that he has given the new deal. He is right to say that the gateway has been an outstandingly successful feature of the new deal. The continuity of support from personal advisers is greatly welcomed by clients and employers. The extra money made available in the Budget will enable us to develop pre-employment involvement in training on the part of employers and other still more intensive help to ensure that even the hardest to help get the maximum benefit from the gateway, thereby enabling them to move into productive employment.

Business of the House

12.31 pm

Sir George Young (North-West Hampshire): Will the Leader of the House give the House the business for next week?

The President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mrs. Margaret Beckett): The business for next week will be as follows:

MONDAY 22 MARCH—Opposition Day [8th Allotted Day]

Until about 7 o'clock there will be a debate entitled "Government Responsibility for Council Tax Increases" followed by a debate on Europe, America and the World Trade Organisation. Both debates will arise on motions in the name of the Liberal Democrats.

Proceedings on the Consolidated Fund (No. 2) Bill.

TUESDAY 23 MARCH—Remaining stages of the Local Government Bill.

WEDNESDAY 24 MARCH—Until 2 o'clock there will be debates on the motion for the Adjournment of the House.

Second Reading of the Access to Justice Bill *[Lords].*

THURSDAY 25 MARCH—There will be a debate on defence in the world on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

FRIDAY 26 MARCH—Private Members' Bills.

The provisional business for the following week will be as follows:

MONDAY 29 MARCH—There will be a debate on the Stephen Lawrence inquiry on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

TUESDAY 30 MARCH—Progress on remaining stages of the Employment Relations Bill.

WEDNESDAY 31 MARCH—Until 2 o'clock there will be debates on the Motion for the Adjournment of the House, which will include the usual three-hour pre-recess debate.

Conclusion of remaining stages of the Employment Relations Bill.

The House will also wish to know that on Tuesday 23 March there will be a debate on reform of the structural and cohesion funds in European Standing Committee C and that on Wednesday 24 March there will be a debate on the deliberate release into the environment of genetically modified organisms in European Standing Committee A. Details of the relevant documents will be given in the *Official Report.*

[Tuesday 23 March:

European Standing Committee C—Relevant European Union documents: Unnumbered, Reform of the Structural Funds; Unnumbered, Agenda 2000: Cohesion Fund Amendment; 5480/99, European Regional Development Fund. Relevant European Scrutiny Committee Reports: HC 34 xii (1998–99); Relevant European Legislation Committee Report: HC 155-xxvii (1997–98).

Wednesday 24 March 1999:

European Standing Committee A—Relevant European Union document: 6378/98, Deliberate Release into the Environment of Genetically Modified Organisms. Relevant European Scrutiny Committee Report: HC 34iii (1998–99) Relevant European Legislation Committee Report: HC 155-xxvi (1997–98).]

The House will also wish to be reminded that, subject to the progress of business, it will be proposed that the House will rise for the Easter recess at the end of business on Wednesday 31 March until the start of business on Tuesday 13 April.

Sir George Young: The House is grateful for details of next week's business and an indication of business for the following week. We welcome the fact that the right hon. Lady has found time for a debate on the Stephen Lawrence inquiry.

Can it be right that at no time in the four weeks following the constitutional crisis that hit the European Union on Monday will the House of Commons debate that subject? Has not the House led the world in showing how the Executive are held to account, in combating fraud in the public sector and in promoting democratic accountability? Should not the voice of this House be heard in the critical weeks that lie ahead, not least on the proposed pay-offs for some members of the Commission and on the proposals put forward by my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition and others for validating future nominations?

Should not we also debate the crisis at the nationality and immigration department of the Home Office, where only six per cent. of calls get through and where people begin to start to queue at four in the morning? People end up being trapped in this country for six months or more because the Home Office has their passport. That department also has a backlog of 200,000 case files—occupying some 14 miles of shelving—many of which are inaccessible, because the garage in which they are stored is not considered safe to access.

Key meetings are being held this weekend in Washington and Rambouillet on the future of Northern Ireland and Kosovo. Can the Leader of the House tell us whether we might expect statements on either or both of those meetings at the beginning of next week?

Finally, the Leader of the House said on Tuesday that she would provide time for a debate on the White Paper on the reform of the second Chamber, now that the House of Lords Bill has left this House. When will that debate take place?

Mrs. Beckett: First, I entirely agree with the right hon. Gentleman that this House and this country have taken a strong lead in combating fraud and promoting sound management, including sound financial management. I take his point that, because of the Easter recess, no debate is scheduled to consider the EU crisis. Equally, until the Berlin special summit next week, for example, it will not be clear what shape the relevant discussions will take.

I take the right hon. Gentleman's point about pay-offs, but he will be aware that the contracts which have led to such payments long pre-date this Government. In so far as we have redundancy arrangements in this House for members of the Executive, they do not depend on behaviour.

The right hon. Gentleman asked about validating nominations for EU Commissioners. As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister pointed out yesterday, the Conservatives have made their own nomination for the new Commission—accession to which would normally follow the European elections—without seeing the necessity to change the procedures. Indeed, they saw no need to do so when they were in power.

[Mrs. Beckett]

The right hon. Gentleman referred to the crisis in the handling of immigration and nationality cases. All Members of Parliament are aware of those concerns and the problems caused. Part of the reason for the crisis is the work that is now having to be undertaken to lay the foundation for a better service—including work on providing new information technology systems. As for the nature and scale of the crisis, all those who were Members of this House eight to 10 ago years will be well aware that whatever the current crisis might be, it pales into insignificance compared with the situation then. Clearly, the right hon. Gentleman has forgotten the days when, under the Government of which he was a member, the backlog was six months' worth of post, which was not even opened, never mind dealt with. We need no lessons from the Conservatives on this matter.

We are doing our best to keep the House informed of the outcome of the meeting in Rambouillet and of the discussions on Northern Ireland. It is not clear what the outcome will be, but I will bear in mind the right hon. Gentleman's request for a statement. I cannot tell him, at this moment, whether I expect there to be the need for one at the beginning of next week.

The right hon. Gentleman will know that I have undertaken to find time for a debate on the White Paper on House of Lords reform. It will not be held in the near future, but certainly it will happen before the summer.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): May we have a debate on the role of the independent Members of Parliament throughout this century? Our parliamentary system has benefited from, and will continue to be based on, party political systems, but is it not right to look at what has happened in the past—and in recent years, as we now have a solitary independent Member of Parliament? Although we normally disapprove of politicians breaking their election promises, the role that has been played by the hon. Member for Tatton (Mr. Bell)—which has been unique and valuable in many respects, including his contributions on landmines, the honours system and warfare—has been so important that the honourable thing for him to do would be to break that election promise, seek election in Tatton next time and seek also the multiplication of his kind in this House.

Madam Speaker: Did the hon. Gentleman give notice to the hon. Member for Tatton (Mr. Bell)?

Mr. Flynn: I did not, but—

Madam Speaker: If he had, the hon. Member for Tatton would probably have been too embarrassed to turn up.

Mrs. Beckett: It is rare that any hon. Member needs to be given notice of being paid great compliments. Of course, I take my hon. Friend's point. The role played by the hon. Member for Tatton (Mr. Bell) has attracted praise. I would normally hesitate to be drawn into commenting on the affairs of another political party, and I feel even greater caution when it is a political party of one.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): Following the question from the right hon. Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir G. Young) on the developing situations in Kosovo and Northern Ireland and the European crisis, does the Leader of the House agree that if, particularly following the Berlin summit, it proves necessary to have a debate before Easter, the House could continue to sit on Maundy Thursday? We would all prefer to avoid that, but I hope that she agrees that it would be wrong for us to adjourn for our recess without debating those important matters.

We also hope for a statement before the recess on the Monopolies and Mergers Commission inquiry into the milk industry. The dairy sector is already in dire trouble, and the continuing indecision about the report and the failure to publish it so that it can be debated is causing huge concern. Will the Leader of the House communicate to the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food that milk producers are not in a monopolistic position, although milk buyers are in an oligopolistic position, and ask him to make a statement?

The Leader of the House may have noted that some questions were asked yesterday of the Minister for the Cabinet Office about the labelling of genetically modified food. He was not able to make a statement to the House, but I understand that a statement was made to a press conference this morning. Will she acknowledge that the issue is far too important for such treatment? There is wide public concern, and the House should be the first to hear of the Government's proposals.

Mrs. Beckett: If events occur in Kosovo, Northern Ireland or the European Union of such magnitude or clarity that it is necessary or possible to make a statement on them, the Government will of course bear that in mind. I said in my announcement that the House would rise subject to progress on business. I am not sure that all the hon. Gentleman's colleagues would share his enthusiasm for sitting on Maundy Thursday.

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): They are all off on holiday.

Mrs. Beckett: I was not going to say that.

Of course I understand the concerns about the MMC report on milk. I cannot undertake for a statement to be made next week. The hon. Gentleman will know that these are difficult matters in which Ministers play a quasi-judicial role, so the report can be published only when all the right steps have been taken.

My understanding is that it is Agriculture Ministers, not Cabinet Office Ministers, who laid the regulations about labelling this morning and who may perhaps have held a press conference.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Following the request of the right hon. Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir G. Young) for a statement or debate about the Euro-crisis, has my right hon. Friend considered the possibility that the so-called crisis did not result in people like me shedding any tears? The truth is that I could almost revel in it. I could see the very core of the Common Market beginning to break up. Why do we need a Commission at all? Let us save a lot of money and not replace the 20 Commissioners. We have the Council of Ministers and the so-called Parliament. What else do we need? We must think the unthinkable at times like this

and get rid of them. As for all the redundancy pay, the Tories have a cheek to talk about that, because nearly a dozen Tory Ministers got the sack, including Hamilton, and they all ran away with the redundancy money.

Mrs. Beckett: I am confident that my hon. Friend is seeking either a statement or a debate on those matters. He makes, as he will appreciate, a bold and sweeping suggestion and I doubt whether the Government will be able to come to such conclusions, certainly within the time scale of the business statement.

Mr. Humfrey Malins (Woking): My constituent, Paul Connolly, was a civilian employed in direct support of United Kingdom forces in the Gulf war and has since suffered serious ill health. He is one of thousands of veterans who have suffered and not been compensated. Will the Leader of the House find time for a statement or debate on the issue of Gulf war veterans, their illnesses and when they might be compensated?

Mrs. Beckett: I fear that I cannot offer the hon. Gentleman time in the near future for a debate on the serious problems suffered by his constituent, about which I am sorry to hear, as I know the House will be. However, the hon. Gentleman may find other opportunities to raise the matter in an Adjournment debate and he may also catch your eye, Madam Speaker, during the defence debate that I have announced.

Mr. Gordon Prentice (Pendle): My right hon. Friend will know that the Channel 4 broadcaster, Sheena McDonald, was knocked over by a speeding police car in Islington last month and suffered serious injuries. I have since unearthed figures that show that, last year, 2,123 people were knocked down by speeding police cars answering 999 calls or other emergencies. Hundreds of people were seriously injured and 15 died last year, and those figures are not out of the ordinary. We see such carnage every year. Is there not a case for my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary to make a statement to the House about what advice and guidance he has issued to chief constables about how police cars are driven in such circumstances?

Mrs. Beckett: All hon. Members will share the concern that my hon. Friend has expressed, both about the tragic accident involving Sheena McDonald and about the other people who suffered injury or were killed. At the moment, I cannot call to mind the statistics for the percentage of accidents reflected by the figures that my hon. Friend has given, but I will draw his remarks to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary. However, my hon. Friend will probably find that those are operational matters for chief constables, rather than directly for Ministers.

Mr. Michael Jack (Fylde): Before the last Liberal leaves for his Easter holidays, may I press the Leader of the House to explain clearly why the House should not have its say on matters connected with the European Commission and recent events before the die is firmly cast with reference to its future? The Leader of the House will recall a debate in which we discussed the democratic deficit and questions of accountability in the work of the Commission and the European Union. Would not it be a good idea to have a debate before Easter so that we could make our contribution to the deliberations on the future of the Commission?

Mrs. Beckett: Of course no one is saying that there will be no debate: none of us knows how quickly those matters will be resolved. I am confident that hon. Members will take all the opportunities available to them, in the pre-recess debates, for example, and at Prime Minister's Question Time, to continue to raise those issues.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire): Caretakers are not normally well paid, and nor do they receive massive pay-offs when they resign. It seems to be different in the case of European Union Commissioners. Should we not have a debate soon on the fraud report? Should we not influence what our representatives do at the Berlin special summit, and should we not have a separate debate after the summit?

Mrs. Beckett: I shall bear my hon. Friend's remarks in mind. As I said to the right hon. Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack) a moment ago, hon. Members who catch the Speaker's eye in our pre-recess debates will be able to raise many issues, of which that may be one. The original report from the Court of Auditors on EU fraud was debated in a European Standing Committee, as recommended by the Select Committee on European Scrutiny. The underlying concerns raised by hon. Members have therefore been under review, and that will continue to be the case.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): May I reiterate requests for an early debate on Northern Ireland? Kosovo is an international issue, but Northern Ireland is a matter internal to the United Kingdom. In a week in which violence has escalated and in which there have been two brutal murders, we should not set Northern Ireland aside.

Will the Leader of the House investigate whether the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs might look into breaches of justice and human rights infringements in the United States of America, whose Foreign Relations Committee seeks to hold a hearing on the Royal Ulster Constabulary?

Mrs. Beckett: It is not for me to tell the Foreign Affairs Committee what it should debate, but I am sure that the Committee will note the hon. Gentleman's remarks.

The hon. Gentleman asked for a debate on Northern Ireland, saying rightly that we should not set that subject aside. Of course the Government will not set aside Northern Ireland, but I doubt whether events are moving at such a pace that we will be able to debate the matter before the Easter recess. I shall of course bear the hon. Gentleman's remarks in mind.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Albeit I have been lucky in gaining an Adjournment debate on the bombing of the Al Shifa plant on Wednesday, and although there is a defence debate on Thursday, should not the House receive a statement from either the Prime Minister or the Foreign Secretary on the political objectives—not the defence aspects—of the bombing? In particular, should not we have such a statement before anyone embarks on the counter-productive folly of bombing the Slavs,

[Mr. Tam Dalyell]

thus creating a situation in Kosovo and with the Russians that would have endless consequences? In particular, may we have a statement on the Russian attitude to what has happened?

Mrs. Beckett: With respect, the Government are not responsible for the attitude of the Russian Government. Certainly, I take my hon. Friend's point that he is anxious to pursue issues on the objectives of bombing. I must disagree with his suggestion that political objectives are not a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence. Of course they are; the Secretary of State holds those responsibilities in common with other members of the Government, and they are very much part of his remit.

I must also take issue with my hon. Friend's suggestion that he has been lucky to gain an Adjournment debate on the matter. Assiduous is the word that I would use.

Mr. Forth: The Leader of the House will of course have read *The Sun* this morning, and she will therefore know that members of the outraged road haulage industry will hold a major demonstration on Monday about the costs that the Government have put on the industry. She will not know, however, that my constituent, Mr. Houghton, rang me this morning to make the same point personally. He fears for his livelihood, and for the livelihoods of his colleagues in the industry, as a direct result of what the Government are doing. Will the Leader of the House confirm that newspaper stories about a possible change of mind are true? May we have an early debate or a statement next week to coincide with the demonstration and to reassure the industry that the Government have got their policy wrong and will change it?

Mrs. Beckett: I fear that I cannot promise an early debate, all the more because there will be every opportunity to discuss the matter during debates on the Finance Bill, which will come before the House soon. We all look forward with interest to hearing the case of those who have expressed concern. I point out to the right hon. Gentleman that one must compare like with like: other costs for road hauliers are substantially lower here than in some of the countries with which the hauliers are making comparisons about fuel costs. I remind him that the highest increase in fuel duty during the past 10 years—13 per cent.—occurred in 1995 when the Conservative Government, of whom he was a member, were in power.

Mr. Syd Rapson (Portsmouth, North): As my right hon. Friend has been unfairly blamed for all the problems with the millennium bug, does she accept the blame for the baby boom that will result from last night's over-indulgence in conception activity, no doubt because of the magnificent football match in which Manchester United stuffed the opposition?

Mrs. Beckett: I fear that I cannot find time for a debate on any of those issues during the next couple of weeks, or indeed in the near future. I thank my hon. Friend for his kind remarks and hasten to assure him that I do not take responsibility for any problems that result from the millennium bug; I take responsibility for the action that the Government are taking to minimise those problems, and am happy to do so. I certainly take no responsibility at all for the other issues that he raises.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): Yesterday, in answer to my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Hague), the Prime Minister said that

"appointments are of course always subject to parliamentary scrutiny".—[*Official Report*, 17 March 1999; Vol. 327, c. 1116.]

My right hon. Friend was referring to the necessity of United Kingdom appointments to the European Commission being approved in advance by the House—and rightly so, in view of early-day motion 437, tabled by my right hon. Friend the Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major) and the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn), which states:

[*That in the opinion of this House the names of British commissioners to serve in the European Union should be approved by the House of Commons before appointment.*]

If the Prime Minister's words are to have any meaning, and as the British taxpayer funds, to some degree, the salaries and the pay-offs of the European Commissioners, will the right hon. Lady find it in her heart to heed the genuine feeling expressed by right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House to hold a debate on a matter whose gravity deserves the immediate attention of this Parliament? If her relationship with the Liberal Democrats has any validity, could they not give up their Supply day on Monday for such a debate?

Mrs. Beckett: First, the hon. Gentleman refers to the pay-offs that might be due to retiring members of the European Commission. I remind him that, as I said earlier, the contracts under which any such moneys are due were not negotiated under the stewardship of the Labour Government. Secondly, he mentions the genuine feeling on both sides of the House; I appreciate and accept that some Members might have such feelings, but would point out to him that, as Conservative Members have felt the necessity to scrutinise those matters only in the past 10 days, the genuineness of their concern is called into question.

Mr. Martin Salter (Reading, West): Is my right hon. Friend aware that the proposals to privatise all or part of National Air Traffic Services have caused considerable concern to residents living near our major airports, to Members of Parliament who represent those constituencies and, most importantly, to the air traffic controllers, whose safety record is second to none? Has she been briefed on yesterday's successful lobby by the Institution of Professionals, Managers and Specialists against those proposals? Does she agree that a full parliamentary debate is needed on that important safety issue once the current consultation period is over?

Mrs. Beckett: I am aware of the great concern felt about those matters and of the consultation exercise. At present, I cannot undertake to find time for a debate when that exercise has been completed, but my hon. Friend is right to draw attention to its importance and the Government will take its results on board.

Mr. Christopher Gill (Ludlow): May we have an emergency debate on the crisis facing small abattoirs?

Right hon. and hon. Members with abattoirs in their constituencies will be aware that, as a result of the impost of astronomical increases in meat inspection charges, prospectively from 1 April this year, many small abattoirs will be driven out of business. I use those words advisedly. Those abattoirs will not go out of business as a result of market forces or because they are not competitive; they will be driven out of business by the Government impost of those astronomically high charges. Once they close, they will never reopen and that will spell the end of the craft sector of the meat industry for all time.

Mrs. Beckett: I fear that I cannot offer to find time for an emergency debate on that matter. However, the hon. Gentleman might seek to raise the subject in the pre-recess debates.

Miss Julie Kirkbride (Bromsgrove): May I press the right hon. Lady on the complacent answer that she gave to my right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) regarding the road haulage industry? The Government normally pay a great deal of attention to what appears on the front page of *The Sun*, and we now know that there will be a white van jam in London on Monday morning. I draw the right hon. Lady's attention to the leader in this morning's edition of that paper, which says:

"Stop drivers being robbed at the petrol pump".

The Government's diesel price increases are astronomical, and it behoves the British public to remember that, every time they fill up their cars, £8.50 of every £10 they spend on petrol goes in tax.

Mrs. Beckett: The hon. Lady accuses me of complacency, but there was nothing complacent about my reply to the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth). I simply pointed out that far higher increases in duty were imposed by the Government of which he was a member and of which the hon. Lady was a supporter.

I understand the concerns that have been expressed. As I said earlier, it is important for people to take account of other lower costs in the road haulage industry. The Budget that continued the use of the fuel escalator—which was introduced by the Conservatives—also froze vehicle excise duty for 98 per cent. of lorries and reduced the road tax for low-emission lorries. I remind the hon. Lady of the words of the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke) when, as Chancellor of the Exchequer, he introduced the fuel escalator. He said:

"Any critic of the Government's"—

that is, the Conservative Government's—

"tax plans who claims also to support the international agreement to curb carbon dioxide emissions will be sailing dangerously near to hypocrisy."—[*Official Report*, 30 November 1993; Vol. 233, c. 939.]

Mr. Phil Hope (Corby): My right hon. Friend will be aware that today sees the launch of the gift aid 2000 scheme by the Chancellor and Eddie Izzard—of whom only the latter is a cross-dresser. Millennium gift aid encourages people to give donations to support education and anti-poverty projects in the world's 80 poorest countries. For every £100 donation, the Government will give £30 in tax relief to the charities and voluntary organisations that do that excellent work. Will my right hon. Friend find time to debate that scheme in the House of Commons? Perhaps that debate could take place in the context of discussing other Budget proposals such as the review of charity taxation, which is under consultation. That will develop a range of new proposals which will support charities, individuals and business donations to charities, and which the voluntary sector will appreciate very much.

Mrs. Beckett: I thank my hon. Friend, who has always taken a great interest in the voluntary sector and in the work of charities, for that information. Like all hon. Members, we welcome the steps that the Chancellor felt able to take in the Budget to support and bolster the work of such organisations. I fear that I cannot offer to find time for a special, separate debate on that issue, but I feel confident that the matter can be explored during debate on the Finance Bill.

Mr. John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings): The Leader of the House has resisted calls by my right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) and my hon. Friend the Member for Bromsgrove (Miss Kirkbride) for a debate on the haulage industry. Will she make time to debate specifically the effect on unemployment in rural constituencies of the swingeing increases in diesel duty? The Leader of the House will know that many haulage companies are based in rural constituencies, where they are significant employers. I refer her to the excellent article by Tim Spanton that appears in today's edition of *The Sun*. It is a piece of investigative journalism for which the House should be very grateful. Will the right hon. Lady take note of that article and make time for a debate on the employment effects of the swingeing increases in petrol and diesel prices?

Mrs. Beckett: I always take note of what is said in newspapers such as *The Sun*. Indeed, I noted the great welcome *The Sun* gave to the Budget, which it said would advantage every group in Britain. I remind the hon. Gentleman of what I said to both the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst and the hon. Member for Bromsgrove (Miss Kirkbride). First, it is important to compare like with like and to consider the haulage industry's overall costs, not just fuel costs. Secondly, the previous Government, of which the hon. Gentleman was a supporter, first introduced the fuel duty escalator. Thirdly, this is not the largest rise that has ever been imposed—that was imposed by his Government in 1995.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): Will the right hon. Lady find time for a debate on the substance of early-day motion 436?

[*That this House notes with concern the Prime Minister's Answer of 10th March, Official Report, column 358, that there is a 'net tax cut of £4.5 billion' for the coming year, because the total tax increase in the coming year is £7.1 billion; further notes that the Prime Minister's claim not to have raised taxes but to have cut them has been described by the eminent economist Anatole Kaletsky as 'simply false'; recalls the Prime Minister's previous assertion that any Minister giving false information to the House would speedily correct the mistake; and calls on the Prime Minister immediately to correct his false assertion and apologise to the House.*]

[Dr. Julian Lewis]

That motion has been signed by 59 right hon. and hon. Members and relates to the Prime Minister's suggestion that there has been a net tax cut of £4.5 billion for the year ahead, whereas there will be a total tax increase of £7.1 billion in the coming year. Does the right hon. Lady agree that such a debate would give the Prime Minister or his spokesman ample opportunity to explain why, if their figures are right and ours are wrong, the eminent economist Anatole Kaletsky has described the Prime Minister's figures as simply false?

Mrs. Beckett: First, the hon. Gentleman asked me for a special debate, and I say to him, as I have said to others, that those matters can be aired in the debates on the Finance Bill. Anatole Kaletsky is certainly distinguished, but he is not necessarily therefore always right. I prefer to rest on the judgment of organisations such as the Institute for Fiscal Studies. In response to his assertion about the correctness of his figures over those given by the Prime Minister, I simply say to him that it was never possible in the past to trust figures given by his party, and it is not possible now.

Mr. Andrew Lansley (South Cambridgeshire): Will the Leader of the House arrange for a debate next Monday or Tuesday on the EU Commission's resignation and the special summit in Berlin? The Prime Minister has been aware for more than two months of the date of publication of the inquiry into fraud and nepotism in the Commission, and the date of the special summit was known for a similarly long time. There is, therefore, no excuse for the Government not having provided time for a debate. Will the right hon. Lady remind the House on how many occasions in the past we have had an opportunity to debate the issues relating to a summit of the European Council of Ministers in advance of the meeting, rather than afterwards?

Mrs. Beckett: Of course, there are arrangements for discussing issues relating to the European summit which broadly circle the pre-arranged regular meetings of the European Council. No such special arrangements have ever been made for informal or special Councils. Those matters can and will be aired in debate. The hon. Gentleman asserted that the Government should have found time for a debate on those matters early next week, but he wants to prejudge the outcome of the inquiry that was set up following the initiative of my colleagues in the European Parliament. The Government are not prepared to do so and we await the outcome of that inquiry.

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): Tomorrow, the business of the House will be a debate on implementing some of the recommendations of the Neill committee, particularly those relating to referendums. That has cross-party support and is firmly supported by the hon. Member for Tatton (Mr. Bell), of whom we heard a eulogy earlier. Will the Leader of the House pledge that her Government will enact all the recommendations of the fifth report of the Committee on Standards in Public Life? Will she further pledge that her Government,—particularly the Home Secretary, who is sitting next to her—will do nothing to block the enactment of the Neill committee's recommendations?

Mrs. Beckett: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is perfectly well aware, as a result of a statement made by my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary when the Neill report was published, that the Government are studying that report very carefully. I cannot give him the undertaking that he demands that there will be complete acceptance of all the recommendations. We are carefully examining those fundamental proposals.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): Further to the request by my hon. Friend the Member for New Forest, East (Dr. Lewis) and in the light of the pitifully inadequate response by Ministers to the Budget debate, can we have an early debate, in Government time, on the Government's stealth taxes? Given that the Labour manifesto, of which I think I need to remind the right hon. Lady, says:

"How and what governments tax sends clear signals about the economic activities they believe should be encouraged or discouraged, and the values they wish to entrench in society",

does she accept that it is incumbent on Ministers to explain, as they failed to do during the Budget debate, why people who have mortgages, who are married, who put petrol in their cars, who have pensions, who acquire savings, who buy property and who run businesses should all face a draconian increase in taxation under this Government?

Mrs. Beckett: That was a lengthy if not a very pertinent question. I am sure that all such matters can be raised in Finance Bill debates.

Mr. Owen Paterson (North Shropshire): On 11 November, I secured an Adjournment debate on the crisis in the road haulage industry. The video of that debate is being shown all around the country at hauliers' meetings. The lamentable ignorance of the Economic Secretary to the Treasury and her failure to reply to the points made are much commented on. Three colleagues have brought up the subject this morning. Sadly, the Leader of the House has not taken on board the seriousness of the damage that will be inflicted not just on the strategic industry, which is in danger of losing 26,000 jobs, but on the whole economy. An uncompetitive haulage industry would damage every business in the land. We would be looking at another 26,000 job losses—more than would be lost in the west midlands were Longbridge to close. This is an urgent issue of national importance which affects every constituency. Could we please find time for a debate?

Mrs. Beckett: I say again to the hon. Gentleman, who accuses me of not taking on board the seriousness of the issue, that it is not for me to answer on this subject. I am here to discuss which debates we will have in the House. He asked for time for a debate and there will be all the time in the world during proceedings on the Finance Bill—he will be able to stay up until the small hours of the morning—to discuss the road haulage industry. He will then be able to circulate the video of those debates, which I am sure will gain even greater applause.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): I appreciate that, when the right hon. Lady was planning

the business of the House, she was not aware of the crisis about to erupt in the European Union. She has heard Members from all parts of the House express a desire for a debate on that matter. The business for next Tuesday and Wednesday is important—of course it is—but not as crucial or urgent as the Prime Minister hearing hon. Members' views, as he ought, before he goes to the Berlin summit. Will she rearrange Tuesday's or Wednesday's business so that the House has the opportunity to debate on the Adjournment the issues that will be discussed in Berlin? They are vital and relevant to every hon. Member and all our constituents. May we please have that debate?

Mrs. Beckett: I will certainly bear in mind what the hon. Gentleman says, but cannot undertake to rearrange next week's business. Indeed, I suspect that there will not be much to do in such a debate, other than bemoan the events that have brought us to this pass. He can do that without a debate next week.

Point of Order

1.13 pm

Mr. Andrew Lansley (South Cambridgeshire): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. You will be aware of the understandable anger in the road haulage industry about the costs that the Government are imposing on it, and their complacent attitude to it, which has led to the prospect of a large demonstration in London on Monday. Have you received notice of any difficulty that the police may have in ensuring Members' access to the House on Monday under the terms of the sessional orders? Will any special arrangements have to be made?

Madam Speaker: I am sure that the hon. Member appreciates that this House has dealt quite well indeed with such sizeable lobbies in the past. We have become accustomed to doing so over a good many years. I assure him that we shall do our utmost, as we always have done, to ensure that all steps are taken to enable those who are lobbying—quite peacefully, one hopes—to have access to their representatives, and that the lobby around the precincts of the Palace and in this House is conducted in the best possible order. I hope that Members who are involved in the lobby, and who want to see the people who are coming here, will support and help the authorities on Monday in their efforts to see that everything is carried out in the best possible order.

BILL PRESENTED

Energy Saving Materials (VAT Relief)

Mr. Alan Simpson, supported by Mr. Cynog Dafis, Mr. Matthew Taylor, Mr. Peter Bottomley, Mr. John McAllion, Mrs. Margaret Ewing, Mr. Clive Efford, Sir Teddy Taylor, Ms Roseanna Cunningham, Mr. David Chaytor and Mr. John Hayes, presented a Bill to extend VAT relief on energy saving materials; to require the preparation of reports on energy saving materials; and for related purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on 26 March, and to be printed [Bill 68].

Opposition Day

[7TH ALLOTTED DAY]

Policing

Madam Speaker: I have selected the amendment standing in the name of the Prime Minister.

1.15 pm

Sir Norman Fowler (Sutton Coldfield): I beg to move,

That this House pays tribute to the high standards of policing in this country; endorses the priority of the last Conservative Government in increasing the strength of the police by over 15,000; but deplores the policies of the present Government, which are leading to reductions in police strength, cuts in services and the introduction of non-police patrols at a time when it is essential to build the best possible relations between police and public.

The debate is set against the background of a much bigger national debate about the role and position of the police in Britain. That is, in my view, a debate of fundamental importance, in relation to which the Government risk adopting exactly the wrong policies for the challenge that we face. That debate has been given added force by the publication of the Macpherson report, and it is with that report that I start.

The Macpherson report is undoubtedly important—not only because of the tragedy of Stephen Lawrence's murder, but because of the changes and reforms that the report points to, which we shall debate shortly. However, let me say first what the Macpherson report does not say and does not justify. It does not justify a generalised attack on the police service. It does not justify a generalised attack on the thousands of policemen and policewomen who do their job conscientiously and well, sometimes despite enormous difficulty and danger. It does not justify a generalised attack on the standards of the police in this country, which in my view remain high—probably higher than those of any comparable European country.

Of course, errors must be put right and mistakes corrected, but we should be clear in our minds that we do not have a racist police service; the Macpherson report does not say that we have. Enemies of the police should not pervert the message of the report to that end.

What we do have is a police service that, in one respect, leads Europe and, arguably, the world. It is not that the British police are better equipped, and goodness knows it is not because we have the strongest police service numerically; it is that there is greater trust between police and public in this country than anywhere else. Most people regard the police as their friends and allies. In February 1999, a Gallup poll in *The Daily Telegraph* found that no less than 83 per cent. of the public found the police mainly polite and helpful. Obviously, we need to extend that feeling of trust even more, but I very much doubt that such trust exists in France and Germany.

The police service is not one of our worst, but one of our best services in Britain, and it has been consistently successful in its public order task since the second world war. Any Government who were to put that relationship at risk would deserve censure.

None of what I have said is an argument against change; change is part of any organisation. When the police service was established, the police had to fight for acceptance, so there is nothing new in their fighting for acceptance, or improving their efficiency and effectiveness—but all that must be for a purpose. As the chief inspector of constabulary suggested a few days ago, the most important performance indicator is the local community satisfaction rate—how satisfied the public are with the local police.

What do the public want of the police? They want an efficient police service, but they want more than that. They do not want a police service that simply reacts and responds to emergencies and emergency calls. According to the Gallup poll that I mentioned earlier, their greatest complaint is as follows. No less than 79 per cent. of the public agree with the statement that the police are invisible and that there are too few bobbies on the beat. In other words, what the public want is an extension of community policing. My concern, and the concern of virtually everyone whom I respect on the matter, is that Government policy is taking us in exactly the opposite direction. Rather than more police, we shall have fewer. Rather than better services, we shall have worse. Rather than trained police, we are being offered non-police patrols.

I debated some of those issues with the Minister of State, Home Office on the "Today" programme this morning. It is always interesting when the Minister of State, rather than the Secretary of State, does an interview. I stress that I am not critical of that decision; I know how sensitive the Secretary of State can be.

When I was Secretary of State for Social Services, I told my then Minister of State, my right hon. Friend the Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major), that it was time that he raised his profile and did interviews on cold weather payments.

Mr. Colin Pickthall (West Lancashire): It did not do the right hon. Gentleman any harm.

Sir Norman Fowler: I do not know what happened to my right hon. Friend. I also remember telling my other Minister of State, my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke), that he could tap his cigar over John Humphrys, rather than in my office. I think that it was in that spirit that the Minister of State was deputed to the "Today" studio to discuss the police.

The Minister of State's account of Government policy on the police provided an entirely new perspective on the police service under this Government. The police service may think that it is under pressure but, according to the Minister of State, real-terms spending on the police is up, police forces are rolling in cash, and policemen are falling over one another as they patrol the streets of our towns and cities. As for non-police patrols, he has not even heard of them, or of the prospect of introducing them. That is the wonderful world of Walt Boateng.

If that is the case, it is strange that those who must implement the Government's policy do not seem to see it in quite the same way. The response of the Association of Chief Police Officers to the 1999-2000 Budget settlement could have been written in reply to the Minister of State's injunction, "Let's be real". ACPO's response stated:

"This settlement leaves the police service well short of what it needs. Let's be realistic. Government cannot expect any public service, least of all the police with their wide responsibilities, to meet all the public's expectations with such a shortfall."

The Association of Police Authorities, which has a Labour chairman, said of the same settlement:

"The overall increase in spending provision for police authorities in England and Wales is 2.7 per cent. Even when augmented by locally generated efficiency gains, this will be inadequate to meet the current demands facing police authorities, let alone provide for growth and investment."

The Police Federation commented:

"One of this Government's main manifesto pledges was to support law and order. But Treasury officials have swung the axe on police budgets. This will result in fewer police officers, the closure of local stations and a reduction in front line services."

Who is right—Home Office Ministers or the police service, which has to manage as best it can with the budget that it has been given?

I have figures calculated by the statistical section of the House of Commons Library. Between 1979–80 and 1996–97, there was a 354 per cent. cash increase for the police. In real terms—that is, above inflation—there was a 74 per cent. increase in those years.

On the basis of this Government's spending plans, between 1997–1998 and 2001–02, there will be an 11.2 per cent. cash increase for the police, which amounts to a real-terms increase of 0.7 per cent. That is the difference in priority between the Conservative Government's policy on the police, and that of the present Government.

Mr. Oliver Heald (North-East Hertfordshire) *rose—*

Ms Hazel Blears (Salford) *rose—*

Sir Norman Fowler: I shall give way to my hon. Friend, and then to the hon. Lady.

Mr. Heald: Does my right hon. Friend agree that Labour Members are obviously so embarrassed by Home Office Ministers' explanations that only three of them are present?

Sir Norman Fowler: It is probably 0.7 per cent.

Ms Blears: If, as the right hon. Gentleman says, expenditure on the police rose under the Conservative Government's stewardship, how does he explain that the 2.5 million recorded crimes in 1979 rose to 4.5 million when the Conservatives left office?

Sir Norman Fowler: As the hon. Lady knows, crime came down steeply in the last four or five years of the Conservative Government. If she does not know that, she knows nothing about the crime position. However, I rather agree with the Home Secretary on that point. I do not think that there is a direct correlation between police numbers and crime. My point concerns not only crime. For the Home Secretary to make a speech only about crime figures would miss the whole point of the debate and, with respect, the hon. Lady is in danger of doing so.

This debate is about not just crime rates, but public order and having the trust of the public. To achieve that, the police service needs credible strength, and nowhere and never has that challenge been greater than it is today in the aftermath of the Macpherson report.

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the work of the police in the community extends beyond crime? One of the problems in Derbyshire in the past has been the investigation of fatal road accidents, which takes a heck of a lot of police time, a matter which I have pursued with Ministers. That matter is not crime related, but it is important to the public.

Sir Norman Fowler: I agree, and it is a point that I shall try to develop. Crime and its prevention are obviously vastly important, but a range of other issues are fundamental to relations between police and public.

To put the figures another way, the statistical section of the Library confirms that under the previous Government, there was an average annual increase in spending in real terms on the police of 3.3 per cent. a year. If that was converted to cash, this Government would be spending an additional £1.3 billion during the next three years. That is the difference.

That is one reason why the previous Conservative Government were able to increase the strength of the police by 15,300. As far as I know, no one, not even the Minister of State, seriously believes that that is what the Government are about. Police numbers are not going up, but coming down. In the first 18 months of this Government, they have come down by about 800, and the fear of many chief constables is that, during the next two or three years, they will drop further.

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Jack Straw): In what month was the budget for 1997–98 set?

Sir Norman Fowler: The budget for 1997–98, the budget that takes us forward—no, I do not know the answer. The right hon. Gentleman obviously knows the answer, so I shall let him give it.

I am beginning to see a glimmer of the right hon. Gentleman's point. He is saying that the budget was set in the previous year. That is correct. But there was nothing to prevent the Government from increasing the budget. The right hon. Gentleman has used exactly the same arguments about inheriting spending commitments for the years after that. The Government must take responsibility for their spending in that period.

Mr. Straw: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir Norman Fowler: No, let me finish. Even the Home Secretary concedes that the past three years— *[Interruption.]* If the Home Secretary wants to take part in the debate, will he listen?

Mr. Straw: I will.

Sir Norman Fowler: The past three years were undoubtedly and unquestionably the Government's responsibility. Is the Home Secretary challenging the fact—let me ask him directly—that, on average during our period in government, we spent 3.3 per cent. in real terms above inflation? Is he challenging the fact that, under his Government, that amount will be drastically reduced, to the extent that he will be lucky if he spends more than 1 per cent. in real terms above inflation over that whole three-year period?

Mr. Straw: I will develop this point considerably in my remarks: the trend that we are following is similar to

[Mr. Straw]

that which was followed from 1994–95. For example, in 1995–96, expenditure on the police increased by 0.22 per cent. I am glad that—after the right hon. Gentleman gagged so much at a simple question about the date on which that budget was set—he has, at long last, admitted that his Government set the budget for the police service for 1997-98. Was he saying that, having set that budget before the election, they would have increased it after the election, had they won? Was that the point that he was trying to make?

Sir Norman Fowler: That was constantly done in respect of the second year, but—*[Interruption.]* Yes, of course it was. If the right hon. Gentleman does not know that, he does not know anything about how public spending was handled. His point is fascinating because he always goes for one or two years, but he refuses point blank to face the fact that, over the whole period of the Conservative Government, spending in real terms went up by more than 70 per cent. Does he—*[Interruption.]* If I may intervene in the Home Secretary's conversation, does he dispute that that is the case? The answer is that he does not dispute it; the fact is that he cannot.

The Government do not have the same financial priority for the police. Why cannot the Home Secretary come clean on this issue instead of wriggling, which is typical of him? He is not giving financial priority to the police and he knows it. The inevitable consequence is that expenditure on the police is being cut and the man responsible is this Home Secretary.

Sir Nicholas Lyell (North-East Bedfordshire): Is my right hon. Friend aware that that cut is causing deep concern in the counties? In Bedfordshire, not only the police authority, but the chief constable has been moved to speak up because of the practical reductions faced by the police, which the Government disguise as 2 per cent. efficiency cuts.

Sir Norman Fowler: What I find despicable about this whole debate is the Government's inability to come clean about what they are doing. They are wriggling and wriggling and wriggling because, in reality, they are cutting and cutting and cutting, but cannot admit it. That explains why there are only two and a half people on the Labour Benches.

Sir David Madel (South-West Bedfordshire): On the point made by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for North-East Bedfordshire (Sir N. Lyell), is my right hon. Friend surprised that the average settlement is 2.7 per cent., yet all that Bedfordshire has been given is 0.8 per cent? Although the Minister of State has listened to us courteously, all that we have had is a Mona Lisa smile and no action.

Sir Norman Fowler: I correct myself; there are four Labour Back Benchers in the Chamber. My hon. Friend is entirely right; Bedfordshire is one of the areas that have been affected greatly.

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Aldershot): I hope that my right hon. Friend will not let the Home Secretary off the hook on the point about the 1997–98 budget. The Home Secretary said that that budget was the responsibility of the previous Conservative Government, which is entirely true. Does my right hon. Friend accept that one of the bases on which the Labour party secured its mandate to govern from the British people was unquestioning acceptance of the spending priorities and targets set by the Conservative Government? It obtained office, in large measure, on the basis of that undertaking. Does he agree that it was open to the Labour Government—if they really believed in their support for law and order—to increase that budget when they came into office in 1997?

Sir Norman Fowler: Yes, that is exactly what I said. What I think is wrong, false and phoney about the Home Secretary's argument is that he uses figures and years selectively. He takes figures for one or two years and then tries to build up the Government's whole record on that period. If he uses the crime figures for that period to establish the Government's record, then surely to goodness he should use the police figures for the same period. I repeat that there was an average real—terms increase in spending of 3.3 per cent. a year under the previous Conservative Government. There is not the slightest prospect of this Government matching that, and they are not even attempting to do so.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. I remind the right hon. Gentleman that he should be addressing the Chair.

Sir Norman Fowler: I was about to turn round to do just that, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Angela Smith (Basildon): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir Norman Fowler: May I continue?

There have been reductions in manpower in the Metropolitan police in London, in Sussex, West Yorkshire, Kent, Essex, Nottinghamshire and Hertfordshire, as well as other forces. The strength of the City of London force is now below its 1979 level. No one can seriously doubt where policy is pointing, and many forces are not even attempting to add to their strength. The most that they can do is to try to retain the strength that they have and, for many of them, that is proving unsuccessful.

It is not just police manpower that is affected: it is also the services provided. Police stations are being closed: not just those that are unused, but stations in busy areas such as Chislehurst and Biggin Hill. The Essex force is being forced to make economies and, as my hon. Friend the Member for South–West Bedfordshire (Sir D. Madel) said, there is a similar story in Bedfordshire, and the same applies to Cleveland.

The position is so bad that even the Liberal Democrats have woken up to what is happening. [HON. MEMBERS: "Both the Liberal Democrats."] I am glad that the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr. Allan) has woken up; he is 0.5 per cent. of his party present. Their spokesmen tour the country, and the leader of the Liberal Democrats—at least I think that he is still their leader—recently visited south Lakeland to express concern over the closures of Cumbrian police stations, as did the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Dr. Brand) last month.

The problem is that they have their photo opportunity and then forget to make any representations. As my hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Collins) has pointed out, he is the only person to have expressed any written concern to the Government about police station closures in Cumbria.

Mr. Tim Collins (Westmorland and Lonsdale): My constituents are angry to find that petitions organised by Liberal Democrat councillors and the constant visits by Liberal Democrat MPs have not resulted in a single letter from a Liberal Democrat to the Home Office on this matter. Perhaps that is why only two of them are present in the Chamber at the moment.

Sir Norman Fowler: It would be unfair of me to knock the Liberal Democrats, but if provoked I will.

Mr. Michael Jack (Fylde): Is my right hon. Friend aware that, in the Home Secretary's own county of Lancashire, police officers in Preston told me last week that not only are they under complement this year, but they are envisaging cuts in police numbers next year? Does he agree that the situation will go from bad to worse?

Sir Norman Fowler: My right hon. Friend typically puts his finger on a crucial point. We should be concerned about not just this financial year, but next year and the year after. Many chief constables say that they will do their best to struggle through this year, but if that continues to be the case next year and the year after, the consequences will be very serious.

Angela Smith *rose—*

Mr. John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings) *rose—*

Sir Norman Fowler: I shall give way for the last time to my hon. Friend.

Mr. Hayes: Will my right hon. Friend add Lincolnshire to his list of areas where there are crises of policing? We have similar problems there.

Does my right hon. Friend agree that the reason why so few Labour Members are present today—indeed, there are more civil servants here than Labour Back Benchers—is that they are acutely embarrassed, because they know that this problem applies to their constituencies and their counties? Only a couple of Liberal Democrats are here into the bargain.

Sir Norman Fowler: The same thing happened when we last debated the police grant. I think that half the Labour speeches actually opposed Government policy—although there was not much time, because the Minister of State spoke for 45 minutes. Had there been more time, we would have been able to hear more opposition.

My fear is the fear expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for South-West Bedfordshire. I am afraid that the situation will get worse. Chief constables tell me that they may struggle through this year—although they are in difficulties—but that there will be worse problems in the next two years.

What are the Government offering to replace what they are reducing? Well—as the Home Secretary will doubtless announce and reannounce in a moment—they are offering a number of schemes to "target" policing. The idea of hotspot policing comes from the United States, where it has been successful; but in the United States, schemes such as that and zero tolerance policing have been introduced at times when police strength has been radically increased. In New York, it has been increased by 7,000 in the last few years, and in the United States generally, there is a programme aimed at increasing it by 100,000. In that context, targeting makes a great deal of sense, because it is in addition to what is already being done. What our Government cannot do is introduce schemes of this kind as a substitute policy. They cannot introduce targeting and, at the same time, reduce the general strength of the police force.

The Government have another plan. They are encouraging the idea of a non-police patrol. Let me explain what that is, for the benefit of the Minister of State. The concept was explained last summer by the chief constable of Surrey, Mr. Blair.

Mr. Straw: No relation.

Sir Norman Fowler: I take the Home Secretary's word for that. Nevertheless, although there may be no family relationship, the extent to which the Prime Minister has embraced the concept prompts a number of questions.

According to Mr. Blair, two local authority patrols in bright red uniforms marked "Surrey police compliant", drawn from the welfare-to-work programme, will move around the high street, in radio contact with the police officer with direct responsibility for the area. I would have been inclined to laugh off the prospect, but next morning, *The Guardian* quoted the Home Secretary as saying that the chief constable's plans were "a real possibility". Since then, the Metropolitan police have been consulting on pilot schemes in London.

I believe that patrolling the streets of our towns and cities is essentially police work. I speak first and foremost from the public's point of view. The public want not only the reassurance conveyed by a police presence, but the knowledge that they are dealing with trained men and women who meet high standards, who know their own patch, who will act with common sense and sensitivity and who believe that authority does not result automatically from the uniform that they wear, but must be earned. That is what policing is all about, and that is why I say that community policing should be our priority—a priority that is underlined repeatedly by the Macpherson report.

The Home Secretary has replied by saying:

"If you talk to the public they understand that you cannot have a police officer walking up and down their street all day and every day. You never had that. That was a myth about what happened in some golden age."

The right hon. Gentleman is right, but that is because he gave an example that he knew to be self-evidently absurd. There never was an age in which every street was constantly patrolled. There was, however, a time when there were more police patrols than there are today, and there was a time when chief constables did not have to envisage council-employed redcoats patrolling town centres.

[Sir Norman Fowler]

Indeed, there was a time when the Home Secretary himself believed that all this was important. He says now that he cannot even express a view about police numbers, but back in 1995, he voted against a police grant order. He said then:

"police services say they will have to cut police numbers."—[*Official Report*, 31 January 1995; Vol. 253, c. 962.]

Indeed, the Labour manifesto talked about getting more officers back on the beat.

I believe that the issues raised in this debate are of fundamental importance. The importance of trained police on the beat goes beyond even the reassurance that they give. The generally good relations between police and public in Britain depend on the regular meeting, day by day, of policemen and policewomen with members of the public. It would be an act of supreme folly if police were to become a service remote from the public they serve.

We cannot take that relationship for granted. We have to work at it constantly. Police patrolling may not hit the headlines in the same way in which crime hits the headlines, but it is vital in retaining public confidence.

I am genuinely concerned that the Government's policies are taking us in exactly the wrong direction. I am concerned that they have reduced their financial commitment. I am concerned that police numbers are falling and services are being reduced. I am concerned about their policy on non-police patrols. I am concerned—particularly after this debate—about the Government's complacency about what has happened. If, as I fear, the Government's policies undermine the strength of the police service, the public will not forgive them.

1.46 pm

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Jack Straw): I beg to move, To leave out from "country;" to the end of the Question, and to add instead thereof:

"notes that the previous administration's promises in 1992 and 1995 of an additional 6,000 police officers were never carried through and that police numbers instead fell; welcomes the additional £1.24 billion for the police service and the extra £400 million for the crime reduction programme which are to be provided over the next three years; supports the police in their crucial role in tackling crime and creating safer communities; and recognises the need for the police, as with other public services, to continue to improve efficiency and effectiveness and deliver best value in the interests of the whole country."

The right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler) started his speech with a tribute to Britain's police service, and I fully associate myself and my Government with that tribute. However, I crave his indulgence in not following him on the issues raised in the Lawrence report. He was not necessarily to know it when preparing his notes, but—as he and other hon. Members will now know from the business statement by my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House—there will be a full day's debate on the Lawrence report on Monday 29 March. As I told the House when making my statement on 24 February, I shall publish, next week, a full statement providing our full response, recommendation by recommendation, so that hon. Members are better informed of our response well in advance of that debate.

Central to the claims made today by the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield was the claim that police numbers started to decline only after the previous general election, and that that has been the responsibility only of the current Government. I should like to put the record straight. During both the 1970s and the 1980s, police numbers overall rose by 25,000. Although I should be happy to trade statistics—I should enjoy it—if the right hon. Gentleman wants to do so on the 1980s and very early 1990s, he should bear it in mind that the annual increase in the police service was just over 1,000, whereas the annual increase during the Labour Government of 1974-79 was 2,000.

The overall 25,000 increase stopped at the beginning of the 1990s. It did so because the then Conservative Government made a calculated decision to end the increase in police numbers. As in many similar decisions, however, the only thing that the previous Government did not do was to announce their decision. That is confirmed by the then Home Secretary, now Lord Baker, at page 450 of his memoirs. He said:

"I found, however, that while several of my ministerial colleagues and Tory MPs supported the police in public, they were highly critical of them in private. There was impatience, if .. t anger, that although we had spent 87 per cent. more in real terms since 1979, and had increased police numbers . . . there had still been a substantial rise in crime. 'Where is the value for money?' asked my colleagues.

I had even heard Margaret Thatcher criticize the management and the leadership of the police."

Lord Baker went on to describe the negotiations that he was having with the then Chief Secretary to the Treasury, David Mellor, who said that his time as a Minister at the Home Office had not

"turned him into a friend of the police."

He said that Mr. Mellor had said of police—words that I should never use:

"They are overpaid, we've thrown money at them, and we have the highest level of crime in our history."

That marked a clear decision by the previous Government in the early 1990s to stabilise expenditure on the police and to preside over a decline in numbers. In 1993, there were 128,300 police officers. By March 1997—only weeks before the general election—that number had fallen by 1,132. By March 1998, it had fallen to 126,856 and, by September 1998—the latest date for which figures are available—the overall figure had fallen to 126,500.

What makes this debate such a spectacular own goal for the Conservatives is that all that decline took place during the period of budgets that they set. In 1998–99, I have presided over a higher rate of increase in spending than that was originally earmarked by the Conservative Government.

Sir Norman Fowler: The right hon. Gentleman said that spending, as well as manpower, was stabilised in the 1990s. Will he now take the opportunity to correct that reply and to agree that in 1991–92 there was a 6.3 per cent. real-terms increase in spending, in 1992–93 there was a 3.6 per cent. increase, in 1993–94 there was a 2.1 per cent. increase, in 1994–95 spending was stable, in 1995–96 there was an increase of 2.6 per cent. and in 1996–97 there was an increase of 2.5 per cent? In five out of six years there were substantial real increases in spending. If the right hon. Gentleman is puzzled, he should consult the House of Commons Library statistics department.

Mr. Straw: I was looking puzzled because the right hon. Gentleman's run of figures does not square

with mine. We can exchange figures later. I am interested in arguing from the figures. I accept that, as Kenneth Baker said, real-terms expenditure on the police rose by 87 per cent. until the early 1990s, and police numbers reached their peak in 1993. However, the issue is whether the increase in spending had fed into police numbers.

Extraordinarily, some hon. Members whose areas are receiving large increases in police budgets for next year, such as the 6.1 per cent. increase for Derbyshire, are complaining about forward spending under the plans for which we are responsible. I do not remember hearing Conservative Members complaining about the huge decrease in Metropolitan police numbers over which they presided. It was a decrease not of 200 or 300 or 1,000; 2,000 Metropolitan officers were cut between 1992 and the time of the most recent figures—all under budgets that were set or earmarked by previous Home Secretaries. The Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis expects numbers next year to be within 75 of the numbers this year.

Those are the facts. The previous Government made a covert decision not to increase police numbers, but they then made a public promise to increase police numbers—a promise that they comprehensively broke. Sometimes I weep for the Conservatives, because, if only they had consulted us, we could have told them that the least that they should do is make promises on which they will not be completely exposed within a few months.

In their 1992 manifesto, the Conservatives promised to increase police numbers by 1,000 officers. Did they? Of course, they did not. They were 400 short. Having broken that promise, the then Prime Minister—never one to break the habit of a lifetime—decided to utter another promise in 1995, which he then went on to break. At the Conservative party conference in 1995, he said:

"we have found the resources over the next three years to put, not 500 but an extra 5,000 police officers on the beat."

What happened? Was the increase 5,000? Was it 500? No, it was zero. Numbers went down. In the period when the Conservatives promised 5,000 extra officers, numbers went down by 470—and Conservative Members wonder why they lost the last election, and why they completely lost the plot on law and order.

Mr. David Drew (Stroud): I was genuinely intrigued that the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler) did not mention police pensions in his speech. Does my right hon. Friend agree that one of the significant problems with the budgetary situation is the pensions overhang?

Mr. Straw: I agree, and a large number of unexploded time bombs—well past their set date—were left in the drawer of the desk that I inherited from my predecessor. The Conservatives deliberately decided not to publish a review of police pensions, even though they knew that action had to be taken.

The right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield made a serious point when he said that there had been some increase in real spending in the 1990s, and he implied that that should have fed its way into an increase in police numbers. However, he omitted to say that, in the Police and Magistrates Courts Act 1994—for which he voted—the powers of the then Home Secretary to set police numbers were removed. My predecessor as Home Secretary, the right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard), said:

"In future the number of constables will be a matter for local decision . . . It is not a matter for me."—[*Official Report*, 26 April 1994; Vol. 242, c. 113.]

The previous Government said that they had no power to determine police numbers—and then, only months later, they were promising to do just that.

That is what is so incredible about the Conservatives' promises. They promised 5,000 officers—a promise which, by law, they prevented themselves from ever meeting. Rarely has there been such a reckless set of promises made by any party—even one as intent on defeat as the Conservative party.

Sir Norman Fowler: I am interested to explore what the Home Secretary is saying. On 31 January 1995, he led his party to vote against a police grant which was substantially greater than any provided by the Labour Government, including the last one. One of his reasons for that was that he was getting complaints from chief police officers that numbers were going down around the country. Is he saying now that that was the wrong decision, or that he should not have used that argument to justify the Labour party's voting against the police grant?

Mr. Straw: We were justified at that time because, as my figures show, there was virtually no increase at all in 1995-96—only 0.2 per cent. Also, we were not facing both ways on public spending. There were careful discussions within the shadow Cabinet about our pledges, and their public spending implications, before any of us were allowed to speak on them.

The right hon. Gentleman has implied at the Dispatch Box that there will be significant increases in spending on the police. I wish to refer to the four letters that I wrote to him in October and November, asking about his party's pledges on police spending, and on public spending overall. One of many compliments that I am happy to pay the right hon. Gentleman is that he is an assiduous replier to letters. Indeed, I can think of some occasions when he has replied by return to letters even from me.

Sir Norman Fowler: Once.

Mr. Straw: No, on other occasions. Whatever else may be said about him, the charge that he sits on letters is not one that can be made against him. In an article in the *Police Review*, the right hon. Gentleman was reported as saying that

"the Government lost out on the opportunity it had to make savings on its welfare budget . . . which could have been transferred to the police".

On 7 October, I wrote to him, asking which bits of the welfare budget he was proposing to cut to transfer the money to the police. Nothing happened. He broke his usual habit of politeness and refused to send me a reply.

On 2 November, I wrote the right hon. Gentleman another letter, to the effect of, "Norman,"—I call him Norman—"could I have a reply?" The next week—the week of the public spending plans—the shadow Chancellor dismissed our public spending plans for the next three years, including our police spending plans,

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as "reckless". He used that word, which made for some difficulties for the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield.

To clarify the matter, I wrote to the right hon. Gentleman and said:

"As this increase"—

of £1.24 billion—

"is part of that 'reckless' package of public expenditure, I should be grateful if you would let me know if you are now opposing it."

Silence followed that letter, too. On 25 November—I thought that, although we are an efficient Government, something might have happened with the post—I wrote to him and personally delivered the letter. I did not want there to be any doubt that he had received it. What has happened between 25 November and 18 March? Absolute silence.

Sir Norman Fowler *rose—*

Mr. Straw: Ah, we have a reply.

Sir Norman Fowler: The pressure is obviously getting to the right hon. Gentleman. He is forgetting replies. I replied to Straw—as I call him—on the Floor of the House, during Question Time. I drew to his attention my record on social security. Is that beginning to twitch a little memory bud? I happen to believe in the importance of the House of Commons. I know that the right hon. Gentleman is a lovely National Union of Students man and loves shoving letters and challenges everywhere. Why does not he listen to what is said in the House of Commons?

Mr. Straw: I have not had a reply. I was anticipating that the right hon. Gentleman would tell me how his plans to increase spending on the police squared with the shadow Chancellor's very clear statement that our overall spending plans, including spending on the police of £1.24 billion, were reckless, but he cannot do it because he knows that he has been silenced. He suggests that we have lost the reply, but that is not remotely the case. Never has the right hon. Gentleman replied to the point on the Floor of the House. If he has, let him produce the *Hansard* report to that effect.

The right hon. Gentleman well knows that one of the ways in which each of us is rightly put on the spot, whether in opposition or in government—he has experience of both—is by the exchange of letters. He also knows that it is wholly discourteous not to reply to letters, especially in four times of asking. Which benefits would he cut in order to transfer the money to the police? How does he square his promise to increase police spending with the shadow Chancellor's clear dismissal of our increases as reckless?

Sir Norman Fowler: I have given my reply. [HON. MEMBERS: "No."] I gave the Home Secretary my reply weeks ago.

The right hon. Gentleman has been speaking for 20 minutes and has not said a word about the Government's policy on the police. It will be noted by police forces throughout the country that he is not addressing the problems of the police service, but is back to his old NUS debating days.

Mr. Straw: What I have done—it is for others to judge how effectively—is to point out that what the Conservatives are implying about police numbers bears no relationship to the facts. Police numbers went down in each of their last seven years in government. No one in the country believes what the Opposition are saying about police numbers because they know that the promises—if they are promises—that the right hon. Gentleman is making from the Dispatch Box to increase public spending are wholly undermined by the shadow Chancellor. That is the simple truth.

Mr. Bruce Grocott (Telford): May I suggest that we could get around the apparent problems with the postal service to everyone's satisfaction if, during my right hon. Friend's speech, one of his colleagues on the Front Bench would write a letter to the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler) and physically pass it across? By the end of the debate, we could expect a written reply.

Mr. Straw: We look forward to the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield letting us have the *Hansard* reference for his reply so that my hon. Friend the Minister of State can deal with it in his winding-up speech. I am sure that the right hon. Gentleman will ensure that that is done, because it is extraordinary that, after all the questions, he has still not been able to say where the money will come from.

Mr. Jack: Before we move on from the subject of correspondence, will the Home Secretary help me with an item of correspondence that I have received from the chief constable of Lancashire? She tells me that she got a 1.9 per cent. settlement, but she needs 3.9 per cent. to carry on. She has used her efficiency saving of 2 per cent. to bridge the gap, but, because of requirements under the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 for reasons of new communications and information technology, she needs another £2 million. What do I say in my reply to the chief constable—in the interests of the safety of the Home Secretary, of course—to enable her police force to do its job?

Mr. Straw: The right hon. Gentleman was a Minister at the Home Office at the time the policy was changed, so he knows all about it. I have a high regard for the chief constable of Lancashire, but the overall increase in police spending is 2.4 per cent. That is what has been agreed by the police authority, not the 1.9 per cent. to which the right hon. Gentleman refers. The police service in Lancashire accepts that it will have to make efficiency savings, and I believe they can be made alongside an improvement in output. That is the challenge for the police service. We are increasing resources significantly, including £1.24 billion over the next three years. That is 2.7 per cent. next year, 2.8 per cent. the following year and 4 per cent. the year after that. Those increases in central Government funding will be supplemented by money from council tax payers, and, overall, budgets are set to rise by 3 per cent. for the majority of police

authorities and by 3.6 per cent. for those in the shire county areas, from which most Conservative Members come.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: Are those figures in real or cash terms?

Mr. Straw: They are in cash terms. One of the reforms of the previous Government was to talk in cash terms and not in the funny money of real terms.

The right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield referred to his time at the Department of Social Security. I was one of the few people who bought a copy of the right hon. Gentleman's memoirs. I was able to do so, being an impecunious member of the Cabinet, because it was remaindered.

Sir Norman Fowler: That is an old joke.

Mr. Straw: It is a good joke. They were down to 50p. One of the points that the right hon. Gentleman made—it is a fair point—was about the need to obtain efficiencies from the health and social services. He said:

> "You can argue about the amount of resources devoted to health but what you cannot sensibly argue about is that the resources devoted to health care should be used to maximum effect."

We were behind the Conservative party on the issue of efficiency in local government and public services, and I am willing to say that.

Sir Norman Fowler: Labour did not say that at the time.

Mr. Straw: No, but we should have done. What I find remarkable about Conservative Members is that they do not apply the clear lessons about efficiency in every other public service to the police. Conservative Members seem to imply that the police services have reached some level of perfection in efficiency, when everybody in the police services, as well as outside, knows that not to be the case. Lincolnshire has been mentioned; its chief constable is restructuring top tier management and merging some divisions to enhance community policing. In the Metropolitan police area, which I know best, they have a target of reducing sickness per officer by 11 per cent. in 1998–99 and a further 10 per cent. in 1999–2000.

Across the country, reducing police sickness levels to the level of the median—not even below it—will save £35 million, which would be equivalent to the cost of 1,100 police officers on operational duties. The simple truth is that all the evidence—from the Audit Commission, Her Majesty's chief inspectorate of constabulary and local police authorities—shows that there is no direct relationship between the inputs and the outputs of the police service. Under the Conservative Government, a number of police forces received a reduction in funding, but achieved an increase in output, and the reverse is always the case.

The Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee—a Conservative—was correct when he said that there is an enormous variation in the performance of police forces. We are trying to ensure that the level of each is raised to the level of the best. There is a clear challenge on efficiency savings, and I do not resile from it.

Quite a proportion of police spending relates to non-pay matters. People who know the police service will know that a number of police officers are not engaged in front-line duties. We must release those officers for such duties. In our manifesto, we said that we sought to put more officers back on the beat, and we are doing that by, for example, reforming the Crown Prosecution Service and dealing with delays in the courts.

The debate about police numbers has become rather abstract. One reason for that is that the boundary is shifting constantly between staff who are available to fight crime as uniformed or warranted officers or as civilians. It shifted under the previous Government, and it has shifted under this Government. It is crucial that we judge the effectiveness of the police service—just as the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield judged all other public services when he was in government—not by scoring debating points on inputs, but by looking at outputs, setting clear performance benchmarks and judging those services.

Mr. Hayes: The right hon. Gentleman speaks of benchmarks, but will he concede that they should not be just reactive or crime related? At present, police funding is largely to do with the level and nature of crime. If he gets the benchmarks wrong, he will exacerbate the problems to which he referred.

Mr. Straw: I agree with all that the hon. Gentleman says. We seek to make the police service and the partnerships involved in dealing with crime more proactive. That is why we are putting £400 million into crime reduction, for example. The police are heavily involved in those partnerships, and it is possible to move from being reactive to being proactive.

Sir David Madel *rose—*

Mr. Straw: I shall give way in a moment.

Let me give an example: if an area has a high incidence of crime and disorder, the police can firefight it day by day with response vehicles, but the way to solve it is to find out who is committing those crimes and to jail them.

Mr. Hayes *rose—*

Mr. Vernon Coaker (Gedling) *rose—*

Mr. Straw: I promised to give way to the hon. Member for South-West Bedfordshire (Sir D. Madel), and I shall later give way to, as they say in pantomime, the one behind me.

Sir David Madel: The benchmarks that the Home Secretary wants the police to achieve are met in Bedfordshire, and partnership is improving. However, the population of the county is increasing all the time. Why is Bedfordshire's settlement so incredibly low? Even at this late hour, can the Home Secretary help us?

Mr. Straw: It is a timeless verity that, under the police spending formula, some forces gain and some do less well. No one should accuse me of favouritism, because Lancashire has also done less well than other forces, and so has Bedfordshire. We have considered Bedfordshire's

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case carefully and spending per head of population is broadly in line, to within 50p, with the shire county average, even taking into account the fact that the increase in spend in the past year has not been as much as the chief constable or the police authority would have wished.

Mr. Coaker: My right hon. Friend remarked earlier that police numbers are not the only important thing. They are important, of course, but, if we are to reduce crime, the partnerships created by the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 will be important. Local people will work with the police to reduce crime so that everyone is involved. If we simply reduce the debate to a question of how many police are on the streets, we shall not tackle the causes of crime. We might feel good, and we might have a good debating point, but we would do nothing to make our communities safer.

Mr. Straw: Chief constables, among others, have sought the freedom to decide how police money should be spent. We are all grown-ups here, and we all know that people will argue for more in the run-up to any Budget settlement. In opposition, I quickly learned when I drew the short straw—[HON. MEMBERS: "Short straw!"] Some might prefer to call the position of Labour local government spokesman a poisoned chalice. I remember that, when I was local government spokesman in the halcyon days of 1983 to 1985—when we dealt much more with the enemy behind us than with the Government in front of us—local authorities, and mainly Labour ones, used to scream and shout every year at Budget time about how services would collapse if the Budget went ahead, but, hey presto, it never happened.

The police want flexibility. They have used the flexibility that the previous Government granted with our support in 1994 to make sensible, rational decisions about whether to put more money into, for example, having more uniformed, warranted police officers or civilian staff, or into more information technology and better equipment. It is far better that they have that flexibility.

The final point made by the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield related to non-police patrol. I looked perplexed as he spoke because I remembered a debate in February 1996 on non-police patrol. In those days, we did not call it non-police patrol; it was the private security industry. Even under the Conservative Government, there were twice as many people in the so-called non-police patrol—the private security industry—as in the police service. The number increased substantially under the Conservatives, but I make no complaint about that.

A large number of people who were not police officers were involved in patrolling and public safety duties, as there are today. A report from the Select Committee on Home Affairs said that the private security industry had to be regulated. During an Opposition day debate, we moved a motion to that effect, but it was voted down by the right hon. Gentleman and his party. As ever, however, the right hon. Gentleman faced both ways: he went through the Lobby to oppose what we said, but stood up in the House to support it.

The right hon. Gentleman may have forgotten what he said, but, for the benefit of the wider public, I have it here. He first criticised me for saying that we could not have a police officer on every street corner. He said:

"The implication for the public is that there will never be, under any Government in any circumstances, enough regular police to investigate every burglary and house break-in that happens in our great cities, such as London or Birmingham. That has not happened in the past"—

there was no praying in aid of a golden age from the right hon. Gentleman then—

"and there is no reason to believe that it will happen in the future."

He went on to say:

"We may regret that, but we should learn a lesson from it . . . we must all learn to take crime prevention seriously".

We have accepted his advice, and we are taking crime prevention seriously. Today, he is saying that non-police patrol is some sort of left-wing plot or a figment of the imagination of the Liberal Democrats. He certainly says that it is nothing to do with him. But in 1996, he said:

"Too often in the past 20 years, policy makers have not recognised what the private security industry can and should do in a modern society. It can help the citizen and the company to prevent crime by guarding premises, by supplying alarms and by handling cash in transit. But the private security industry's role goes beyond that and it is equally sensible to consider the duties carried out by the police and prison officers and ask whether those roles can be performed by the private security industry."—[*Official Report*, 13 February 1996; Vol. 271, c. 887-88.]

What Mr. Ian Blair is saying now is no different from what the right hon. Gentleman said then.

Sir Norman Fowler: The Home Secretary is being absurd. What I was saying was utterly different. I challenge the right hon. Gentleman to give any quotation of mine in which I advocated using the private security industry to patrol the streets. I simply have not said that. In the quotation that he gave, I was referring to the movement of remand prisoners and other such matters. Whatever he says, I do not support the private security industry patrolling the streets as a replacement for the police. I have never supported that, and I have made several speeches on the subject. We are not even talking about the private security industry; we are talking about local authorities. Mr. Blair is talking about local authorities.

Mr. Straw: I can only answer by reading one sentence:

"But the private security industry's role goes beyond that and it is equally sensible to consider the duties carried out by the police and prison officers and ask whether those roles can be performed by the private security industry."—[*Official Report*, 13 February 1996; Vol. 271, c. 887.]

As for local authorities, which are in the vanguard of so-called non-police patrol—

Sir Norman Fowler *rose*—

Mr. Straw: No, I shall not give way; I am answering the right hon. Gentleman's question.

Those local authorities that are in the vanguard of non-police patrol are not new Labour but old Tory local authorities, namely Westminster and Wandsworth, and I commend them. Those authorities sensibly realise that there are complementary roles for so-called non-police patrol—whether undertaken by local authorities or by private security industries under contract—and the police service. That has always been the case. What the right

hon. Gentleman said three years ago was wise and I hope that he will support our White Paper on the private security industry, when my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Home Office publishes it.

Mr. Bob Russell (Colchester): The past is the past. May we now deal with the present and the future? The shadow Home Secretary said that he is opposed to the privatisation of the bobby on the beat. Will the Home Secretary assure us that he, too, is opposed to the privatisation of the bobby on the beat and that Group 4 will not be patrolling our streets?

Mr. Straw: Of course I am opposed to the privatisation of the bobby on the beat, and I want to make that absolutely clear. The police service must be directly delivered. However, I must also make it clear that, as we speak, throughout the country in Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrat areas, members of Group 4, Securicor and many other private security firms are, for example, patrolling so-called private shopping areas, and quite rightly too. That complements the work of the police; it does not detract from that work, but assists the police in preventing and detecting crime. Instead of suggesting that that practice does not exist, has not existed and should never exist, it is crucial to accept that it is a reality and to work out ways in which we can improve it, not least by the regulation of the service.

Sir Norman Fowler: I intervene again only to say that the right hon. Gentleman is misleading the House if he is suggesting that I advocate, or have advocated, the use of private security firms or local authorities to replace the police in patrolling duties. I have not done that during the 30 years in which I have taken an interest in police matters. I deeply resent the fact that the right hon. Gentleman is, as usual, trying to play the person, rather than make the argument.

Mr. Straw: If that is the right hon. Gentleman's position, I accept his assurance. I was not misleading anyone; I was merely reading the words from the record and giving them their ordinary and natural meaning.

The Labour Government came to power determined to reduce crime and the fear of crime. The police are the first to say that they cannot tackle crime on their own; local communities have a crucial role to play. The Crime and Disorder Act will strengthen those local partnerships. The Government made no promises on police numbers; at the election, we promised to relieve the police of unnecessary bureaucratic burdens to get more officers back on the beat, and we are doing just that, as I have already explained, by streamlining criminal justice procedures, reforming the Crown Prosecution Service and improving police efficiency.

Our aim is to make people feel safer and to ensure that the chance of their becoming victims of crime is reduced. Efficient, well-targeted use of police resources is the best way to achieve that. The public know that that is now our aim; they also know that we are intent on delivering it. That is why they so comprehensively supported our law and order agenda at the election and rejected the Conservatives.

2.24 pm

Mr. Richard Allan (Sheffield, Hallam): I apologise to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and to the House for being unable to stay until the end of the debate; I have to attend the Special Standing Committee on the Immigration and Asylum Bill at 3 pm. That Committee is a procedural innovation that is proving popular, perhaps more so than Opposition day debates.

I should like to associate the Liberal Democrats with the comments praising the work of our police forces all over the country. As community-based politicians, we are immensely proud of the essential, important and successful work carried out by our community-based police service. In large part, that service commands the respect of the community through a tradition of policing by consent, which we want to continue. It is in that light that we want to talk about police numbers.

We regret that we cannot support the Conservative motion and have tabled an amendment giving our view on police numbers. Although we agree with some of the sentiments in the latter part of the Conservative motion, it contains no apology for their period in government and we believe that a little humility around the kitchen table would be in order when discussing police numbers. At the same time, we are critical of the Government's view on the matter and are unable to support their amendment.

Much of the argument seems to be about two key judgments. The first is whether size matters in the police service and the second is whether the Home Secretary is responsible for that. There is an analogy to be drawn with class sizes: not every class of 30 pupils is automatically better taught or more successful than a class of 40. However, the Government seem to have accepted that, in general, size does matter in respect of class sizes and that more teachers produce a better output. We argue strongly that similar considerations must apply to the police. Although a direct correlation cannot be proved in every force between an increase in the number of police officers and the success of that force, common sense suggests that a larger police force will generally lead to better results and a smaller police force will generally lead to less good results.

In respect of whether the Home Secretary is responsible for police numbers, he has correctly referred to the technical legal position. It is interesting to hear Conservative Members, who were responsible for the legislation devolving responsibility to chief police officers, complain that the Home Secretary has not mandated police numbers. However, just as on class sizes the Government did not hide behind local education authorities' responsibility, but accepted that there is a direct correlation between the funds given to LEAs and the class sizes in individual boroughs, so the Home Secretary could give strong indications, and the funds to back them up, on police numbers, which could result in an increase in police numbers. On the other hand, if he gives no indication that that is his priority and there are no corresponding resources, there will be a fall in police numbers.

As the Home Secretary points out, the Conservatives made some specific commitments. He left us to guess whether those commitments had been met, but Liberal Democrat and Labour Members know exactly what happened because, when the Conservatives were in power, we spent much time attacking them for the

[Mr. Richard Allan]

faults to which he referred. It is interesting to hear different arguments from Labour Members now that they sit on the Government Benches, which suggest that they no longer have the same interest in police numbers as they had when they were in opposition. When the Conservatives were in power, Labour's view clearly was that size did matter.

While they were in opposition, Labour Members were clever in not committing themselves to increasing the numbers of police officers, but we believe that they gave the clear impression that they would do so. They strongly criticised the Tories for falling police numbers and their carefully worded manifesto stated that they would

"relieve the police of unnecessary bureaucratic burdens to get more officers back on the beat."

That allows them the get-out clause that there was no absolute commitment. However, the public expected the slogan, "Tough on crime, tough on the causes of crime", to mean more police officers, not fewer.

Angela Smith: I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way, especially as the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler) resisted my attempts to intervene. Does the hon. Gentleman accept that Labour's criticism of the Conservative Government was of hypocrisy, because the Conservatives constantly argued that they were providing more police officers, but failed to do so?

Mr. Allan: I am content to accept that Labour's argument was about the hypocrisy of the Conservatives. Liberal Democrats also made the same criticism, which was levelled at an open goal created by the former Prime Minister, who set up that huge target but stepped aside and watched police numbers fall. However, at that time, when the public heard Labour's spokespeople calling for greater numbers of police or criticising the Conservative Government for allowing the numbers to fall, they understood that a Labour Government would not allow the same thing to happen. During the 18 months from 31 March 1997 until the production of the latest figures, there has been a fall of 781 officers in England and Wales. Since the election, 25 out of 43 police forces have faced cuts in the number of officers. The Government could have made that a priority if they had wanted to.

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Surrey Heath): While the hon. Gentleman is giving the House and the country a history lesson, would he care to go a little further back to when the Conservative Government first came to power in 1979? Police morale was at an all-time low and the police were threatening national strikes. Police morale was improved only by the Conservatives' commitment to provide, from 1979 throughout their period in government, a proper payment structure and proper support for the police. Prior to 1979—I know that the hon. Gentleman was very young then—the Liberal party was as bad as the Labour party for attacking the police.

Mr. Allan: I am interested to hear history lessons, but I am not sure whether I wish to explore the boom and bust in police morale from the Callaghan Government in the 1970s onwards. That may not be germane to this debate.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way. It is only fair, having taken interventions from the Government and Opposition sides, that he should now take one from his own Benches. Unlike the hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Mr. Hawkins)—he used to represent Blackpool, but I cannot remember where else he went on his chicken run—I was a Member of Parliament in 1974. I recall how the Liberal party strongly supported efforts to improve police morale by ensuring that the police were paid properly. However, it is time for the Government to recognise that two wrongs do not make a right. The previous Government's failure in this area—they failed disastrously, as I know only too well because I was a member of a police authority for many years during the period of Conservative rule—is immaterial. We are trying this afternoon to identify what this Government will do about the situation that they inherited.

Mr. Allan: My hon. Friend makes a valid point: we need to look across the spectrum of policing and other related areas.

The introduction of non-police officers is an important consideration. Civilianisation programmes have been mentioned in discussing how far events have moved and the relevance of police officers. Police forces are recruiting more civilian officers to free front-line police officers from bureaucracy and time-consuming paperwork. We support that approach, which I hope is welcomed on both sides of the House. However, that does not explain why 10 forces have seen a reduction in their civilian staff since the general election. Seven forces have seen a fall in the number of both civilian and police officers, and that combined reduction must affect the impact of those police forces.

We accept that there is more to tackling crime than police numbers, but our communities will not feel secure unless we get those numbers right. The Metropolitan police have been mentioned as a case in point. There is no doubt that they have faced the brunt of recent cuts. Since the general election, the Metropolitan police have lost 571 officers and 1,460 civilian staff—a 10.8 per cent. reduction. It is widely expected that that trend will continue, with recruitments not matching retirement levels. The Home Secretary said that Metropolitan police numbers will be within 75 of their current total. However, we must ask: 75 in which direction? The Home Secretary's careful wording suggests that the force will be 75 officers down—there would have been a bigger hurrah if he had announced an increase of 75.

It is a crucial time for the Metropolitan police: they must recruit more officers, particularly from the ethnic communities in response to the Macpherson report. The downward trend in recruitment makes it harder for the force to achieve the targets that the Home Secretary will set. Figures published last week by the Home Office in response to a parliamentary question tabled by my right hon. Friend the Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) show that the number of officers in local divisions of the Met is falling even faster than the headline total.

The total figures show that, in an 18-month period, the number of officers fell by 571. However, the total for local divisions is 1,208 for the past two years. While the Met has lost 31 officers on average every month, the local divisions of the Met have lost 50 officers a month. That suggests that front-line policing is suffering as a result of the cuts.

The Library has produced some useful analysis of police funding over the lifetime of this Parliament. I would like to examine the Government's record in this Parliament rather than their inheritance from the Conservatives. We criticised at the time of the election—and have continued to criticise ever since—the Government's decision to maintain Conservative spending plans. The Government repeat headline figures, and they have a wonderful knack of rolling three years' spending into one. The comprehensive spending review cited some very large numbers which become significantly smaller when we divide them by three and take account of the fact that they are announced several times for added impact.

According to our analysis of the comprehensive spending review, total police funding will increase by 2 per cent. in real terms—that must be a good thing. However, over the lifetime of this Parliament, funding for police will increase by only 0.01 per cent. in real terms. In 1998–99, the police suffered real-terms cuts for only the second time in 20 years. The previous Government can take credit for their average real-terms increase of 6 per cent. in police funding. Potential police numbers under this Government are causing great concern, as is the increasing cost of police pensions, which was mentioned by the hon. Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew). We still see no ultimate resolution to that problem, which will continue to drain resources from front-line policing.

As the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir Norman Fowler) mentioned, the Association of Chief Police Officers and the Association of Police Authorities have been critical of the Government. The Association of Police Authorities went further in describing the kind of struggle that police authorities are facing. It said:

"all authorities will be walking a tightrope in balancing front line police numbers with the need to invest in the very latest technology."

That is an area of critical concern. I recently visited the National Criminal Intelligence Service, and there is no doubt that a force such as that needs the latest technology as much as do the shire and the metropolitan forces on the ground. Police forces need sophisticated technology of a kind never seen before, which adds to the pressure. We do not want our forces having to choose between purchasing essential new technology and fulfilling their role of patrolling our streets. The police must have sufficient resources to carry out both of those essential functions, as well as the new functions—the partnership arrangements—under the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, which Liberal Democrats welcome.

The Government offer efficiency gains as the solution. We think that some efficiency gains can be made. We do not seek to protect the police by saying that no efficiency gains can be made. However, we do not believe that such gains will overcome the need for increased front-line policing. The role of the police is significant in that equation. The right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield referred to the increased number of police officers required to support the community policing programme in New York. The chief police officer in New York, William Bratton, has made it clear that partnership community policing is the way forward. I point to the fact that New York now has twice as many officers per head as London, and that the London figure is continuing to fall. *[Interruption.]*

We believe that the future lies with community policing and with providing sufficient funding to enable police forces to recruit an extra 6,000 officers. We believe that, in an era of resource accounting, it is very clear that the kind of money required—perhaps £120 million—to fund 6,000 additional police officers would reap rewards such as a lower crime rate and less damage to people in the community—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I am sorry to interrupt the hon. Gentleman, but there is far too much noise coming from the other Benches.

Mr. Allan: We believe that, with that sort of investment—which would pay for 6,000 new officers—there would be significant rewards. That is not a waste of expenditure and it is not spending in a revenue sense, but an investment that would be returned through savings made elsewhere. That is the kind of spending that the Government, if they had the will, could have made this year, and which they should make in future years. We will continue to press for them to fund community policing. Every community needs an officer who is well known and with whom everyone can interact.

Mr. Tyler: I am a great admirer of my hon. Friend. Does he recall that, in the previous Parliament, it was calculated that just £1 extra per year from each adult citizen would be required to increase manpower to the level that the chief constables felt was necessary in order to police this country properly? The Conservative Government failed to do that, but such is the nature of the task.

Mr. Allan: There was publicity about that at that time. The public are willing to provide funds for safer communities and we, as a party, are not scared to tell people up front that if they want decent public services, they will be required to pay for them. We are prepared to stand on our platform and go before the electorate to tell them that if they want community policing, it will cost them. We believe that they would choose to support that proposal in overwhelming numbers. They will not support the cuts in the police services which will come about as a result of the total settlements from this Parliament and the financial situation inherited from the previous Government.

Our final concern is that even if chief police officers had extra resources, it is questionable that they would be able to make the necessary recruitments to their force. We are extremely concerned to note that the number of applicants to the Metropolitan police dropped from more than 7,000 in 1995–96 to fewer than 5,000 in 1997–98. Parliamentary answers from the Home Office reveal that the number is still falling. I hope that the Minister, when responding in his usual informative way, will state whether the police service will be able to recruit extra officers if they can make the efficiency gains that he hopes for. I assume that he believes that those gains will lead to increased police numbers.

2.41 pm

Angela Smith (Basildon): Having listened to the debate so far, I believe that hon. Members have become obsessed with numbers. I often have a great deal of sympathy with comments made by the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr. Allan), but listening to his contribution today, I wondered how the 1p increase in income tax will pay for all the Liberal Democrats' commitments, including extra spending on the police.

We have missed the point of this debate on the strength of the police force, which is how the police relate to the community and how safe the community feels. The issue is not numbers, but the perception of crime in the community.

When I intervened on the hon. Member for Hallam, I made the point that the Conservatives have, once again, misunderstood us. Our criticism of them, which we shall continue to make, is that when they were in government, they harped on about increasing police numbers. At the Conservative party conference, the former Prime Minister made the hasty statement that the Government would increase police numbers by 5,000. As my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary said, they had already taken away the power that would have allowed them to do so, but they made a promise that they could not keep. That was hypocritical and misled people, particularly because the promise was made at a time of rising crime.

Crime has continued to rise. The way to deal with that is to involve the police in community policing. I am pleased that in Basildon we have had a crime prevention strategy and a partnership since 1990.

Mr. Bob Russell Is the hon. Lady saying that her constituents, who live in the same county as my constituents, welcome next month's cut of 135 police officers and the disposal of a entire motorcycle fleet?

Angela Smith: I understand why the hon. Gentleman won the recent golden anorak award from *Tribune* newspaper, but I urge him to be patient regarding my comments and the delivery of the anorak.

I want to emphasise the importance of community safety partnerships, which were mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Gedling (Mr. Coaker). We are all grown-ups, so I can hazard the comment that it is not the size of the police force that matters, but how we use that police force in the community. The previous Government refused to deal with that problem and to make community safety partnerships statutory. As I said, we have had such a partnership in Basildon since 1990. It deals not only with crime, but with the fear of crime.

I have spent much time in my constituency talking to youth groups, women's groups and pensioners. The fear of crime is the one issue that they all mention on every occasion. That has nothing to do with crime statistics. It relates to how they perceive their place in the community and how they think crime could affect them. There has been a distinct change in Government policy to deal with the fear of crime, which is leading to greater community safety.

I pay tribute to the Basildon community safety partnership, which has won numerous prizes for its work. The previous high sheriff of Essex, which includes the constituency of the hon. Member for Colchester (Mr. Russell), said that Basildon was one of the best areas in the county and gave it several awards. Basildon residents do not normally take kindly to men who dress up in tights and frilly shirts and have silver buckles on their shoes, but on that occasion, we took the high sheriff to our hearts and appreciated the work that he did with us on community safety.

The booklet produced by the partnership deals with four aspects of community safety and involved the police and the local council. It considers personal safety, property safety, business safety and community safety. John Robb, the chief executive of the district council, referred in the booklet to

"initiatives aimed at reducing crime and increasing the quality of our lives."

He made the point that the quality of our lives is directly affected by how we perceive crime in our community.

Superintendent Dennis Sheppard, divisional commander for Basildon, said that crime affects us all. The previous Government would have been wise to take on board his following firm point:

"If we are to further reduce crime and 'Build a Better Basildon' then each and every one of us has a part to play. Only by working together will we impact upon crime and thereby improve peoples' quality of life.

The success of our Community Safety Partnership demonstrates what can be achieved when people work together towards a common goal."

Later in my remarks, I shall give examples of how effective that work has been.

I have been impressed with the personal dedication of the officers, from the council and the police, involved in the partnership. Ken Venables of Basildon council and Ray Williams of Basildon police have a unique working relationship. I commend it to other authorities, who could use it as a model of how to reduce crime and the fear of crime in their community.

The strength of that relationship lies in the way in which the police have developed the role of community safety officers. Brett Mercer, who covers my area, is highly regarded in the community and has become a friend to its people. Officers such as Di Capon and Darren Griffiths, who work in another part of my constituency, have made the effort to get to know the community and individuals know that they can contact them.

I was recently contacted by petition by the residents of a local estate who are concerned about what is often called petty crime, although that is the wrong name for it. It includes vandalism and breaking into and damaging cars. We should never underestimate the impact of such crime on the lives of individuals. My response was to write to the police and ask what they could do about it. I asked if I could examine the policing records for that area and discuss the matter. They responded not only by discussing the problems with me, but by asking for the names and addresses of residents who would like to talk to them. They are prepared to meet residents, deal with their complaints and discuss how they can help. That is a significant step forward in community relations and demonstrates the strength of the police in the local community.

I should like the Minister to take note of and comment on earlier remarks about the private security industry. During the day, the Laindon shopping centre in my constituency is bustling, lively and friendly, but in the evenings, a gang of youths, some as young as nine or 10,

ran around the centre vandalising the place. The police can take few measures to deal with that because the owners of the shopping centre will not co-operate. Henley's Management Ltd., which manages the centre for the owners, refuses to co-operate or to talk to me, the police or the local council.

It is all very well giving local councils and the police the statutory authority to work together, but unless the owners of properties such as shopping centres play their part, the role of the police, community and council will be limited. I have approached the company to suggest a meeting. There is an argument for installing CCTV in the area, or perhaps for making greater use of local private security, but unless the owners of such shopping centres co-operate, the role of the police is limited. The police are playing their part, so will the Minister consider whether there is a way to involve owners of shopping centres and private areas, lock them into community partnerships and impose on them a statutory duty to co-operate with the police and the council?

I want to emphasise the effectiveness of policing. We all recognise that resources are under pressure, but there are ways effectively and intelligently to use the police force, working in the community, to reduce crime. What matters is not police numbers but crime reduction and how communities feel.

Car crime is a problem in Basildon. We have what were seen in the 1960s and 1970s as wonderfully designed housing estates, where children can play and through which cars cannot go. All cars must be parked outside the estates, so people cannot see them from their front doors. As a result, theft of and from cars in Basildon was the highest in Essex. It was a serious problem. As I said, one cannot underestimate the impact of such crime. Auto crime amounted to 33 per cent. of total crime in my constituency—phenomenally high.

The council and the police have targeted resources in the shorter term, which has led to massive reductions in car crime. Theft of cars reduced from 240 a month to 115—it halved. How was that achieved? Operations such as "Biteback"—a significant title—raised the profile of the police, and the local force was restructured. There has been a major shift of emphasis from reactive policing to problem solving. In addition, much stronger links between the police and the community were built, giving the police intelligence of who was responsible for crime.

Many of us are aware that very many relatively minor—I use that word cautiously—crimes are committed by very few people. A disproportionate amount of car crime was being committed by a small group of people. The police were able to deal with that because they could address the people responsible. The police identified the community safety partnership as being responsible for such an achievement.

The police have looked not only to the past, but to the future. The Basildon festival leisure park—the major leisure park for the entire south-east—has recently been built. It has 1,500 car parking spaces, and 20,000 people visit the centre each weekend. There are marvellous leisure facilities, such as night clubs, discos, bowling, cinemas and eating places. One might think that car crime would increase in such circumstances. However, the police and the council have used their resources intelligently. They worked with architects for two years prior to the opening of the development, which resulted in the provision of a special building for monitoring 24-hour closed circuit television. Security guards are also on duty 24 hours a day. In the first six months of the park's operation, there were six reported cases of auto crime. Few facilities of that size could boast such a record. The strength of the police must lie in the community safety partnerships that they are establishing.

Police in my area have also been involved in tackling crime at its root. They deal not just with crime, but its causes and how it ballooned to such an extent under the Tories. Under the Basildon bonus scheme, in partnership with schools, pupils who are least likely to be able to find jobs on leaving school have been identified. Although there is not a direct link between people who are unemployed and crime, there is no doubt that unemployment, which rocketed under the previous Government, fuels an atmosphere in which crime flourishes. Projects involving schools and mentors from the police and local authority have been aimed at supporting such kids and giving them confidence and self esteem in order to divert them from offending. Such efforts have a long-term impact on crime figures.

We must tackle crime holistically. We cannot just say that the number of police officers has a direct impact on crime. We must also consider how those police officers are employed and how they are used in the community. The Government have given the police extra strength under the Crime and Disorder Act 1998. The statutory duty to work with the community has empowered the police.

The Tories have got the issue very badly wrong. By concentrating just on numbers, they have failed to understand the community problems that crime causes. People want to know not just how many police officers there are in Essex or how much money is being spent, but what measures will affect them and prevent them from becoming victims of crime. That is what effective community policing achieves. Crime cannot be seen in a vacuum; it must be seen as part of our community. The sooner that we understand that we need such an holistic approach, which this Government have taken with community safety projects and the Crime and Disorder Act, ensuring that all of us feel part of the community effort to address the problems, the sooner we will tackle the problem that the Tories failed to tackle.

2.55 pm

Mr. Andrew Hunter (Basingstoke): About half an hour ago, the Home Secretary was speaking about police performance, to which the hon. Member for Basildon (Angela Smith) referred. Neither would dispute the proposition that no single measure can accurately reflect police performance. If, as the Audit Commission says,

"the public has a right to expect that increased spending will lead to improved performance",

it is fair to say that there is no direct link between the number of police officers and the effectiveness of the police force in preventing and detecting crime. Nevertheless, as I understand it, the essence of Opposition Members' arguments is that the Government's spending plans for the police for the next three years threaten both the quality of the service that our police forces can provide, and the maintenance of manpower levels. That is exemplified in reports that suggest that, for the financial year 1999–2000, 1,000 officers could be lost from the Metropolitan force.

[Mr. Andrew Hunter]

My speech comes from a Hampshire perspective. My constituency is admirably served by the Hampshire constabulary and a competent police authority. I shall make just three points. The first is somewhat technical. I hope that the Minister will be able to reply later in the debate or, if not, through correspondence in due course. The Government announced a three-year freeze in the standard spending assessment methodology, but it is unclear precisely how that affects the police SSA. In each year since 1995–96, the percentage of police SSA distributed on 1994 officer establishment has been decreasing by 10 per cent.—50 per cent. in 1995–96, 20 per cent. in the financial year that ends shortly and 10 per cent. next year.

Some police authorities are confused about whether that annual 10 per cent. drop constitutes a change in methodology, and will therefore be frozen, or whether it is an inherent part of the methodology, and will therefore continue. According to one's interpretation, Hampshire is looking at the loss of a not insignificant £1.8 million.

Secondly, even if we disregard the methodology issue, the Government's pronouncements on future funding give rise to very great concerns about both the quality of policing and establishment levels. During the 17 years of Conservative government, spending on the police, as hon. Members on both sides of the House have acknowledged, increased each year by an average of 3.4 per cent. over and above inflation. As a result of the comprehensive spending review, however, we are considering increases for the next three years that are only marginally above the rate of inflation. That must be compared with the 6.1 per cent. increase which the Association of Chief Police Officers estimates is required to maintain the existing quality of services and to take on new pressures.

Under Conservative—and, to be fair, for a period, under Liberal—control, Hampshire county council and Hampshire police authority made the maintenance of its combined establishment of civilian and officer manpower a priority. Modest progress was made in just four years; a little under 200 new posts were created. The question now facing us is how sustainable is that increase. Given increases that barely match inflation, some would say that we face a doomsday scenario. The present establishment and quality of service cannot be maintained without the most serious implications for council tax. The so-called 2 per cent. efficiency drive is likely to compound the problem instead of curing it because, as the Audit Commission found, little more than a quarter of 1 per cent. of efficiency savings is to be found.

Therefore the reality behind the Government's rhetoric appears to be lower service, poorer-quality, fewer officers and higher council tax.

In the next few years, identifiable budget pressures will make it even harder to maintain today's establishments. I shall not go into details because the Minister of State is aware of the arguments. There is worry about the funding on public safety of the radiocommunications project, once it is up and running—worry about whether there are adequate funds for it within the financial settlement envisaged for 2000-01. There are capital implications as well as current spending implications. There are similar worries about funding of the National Crime Squad and the National Criminal Intelligence Service. If there are to be increased overheads as a result of expansion and for other reasons, those must be met by increased levies on local police authorities.

The Labour election manifesto made much of a pledge to promote law and order. In reality, the Treasury must work on the budgets. In the words of the Police Federation press release of 2 December,

> "This will result in fewer police officers, the closure of local stations and a reduction in front line services."

So much for being tough on crime.

3.1 pm

Mr. David Drew (Stroud): This debate on policing matters is especially opportune. Although Labour Members would criticise the Opposition motion, many useful points will be raised in the debate which I hope will inform, not only ourselves, but the police force and those who look on the police as their protectors.

I shall speak briefly on the three obvious issues. The first is the operational changes that police forces are being asked to undertake. The second is funding—I would not disagree with some of what the hon. Member for Basingstoke (Mr. Hunter) said about funding problems. The third issue is the welfare and payment conditions of serving police officers.

The debate comes at a useful time because I shall spend tomorrow night with the local police in my town of Stonehouse. I try to get out with them every three months or so; I believe that it is useful for all hon. Members to see how the police function. I whisper this very softly, but every time that I have been out with the local police they seem to have a quiet night, so I am regarded as a good-luck charm; other Friday nights are not so wonderful. I have yet to see that much action, but I hope to enrich my perspective.

Our police authorities have undergone enormous change since their somewhat controversial establishment. Their true impact is as yet unclear. Some of us would argue that policing still has a resonance within the local government framework, and that there have been dangers in isolating it from other service provision, but those police authorities are extant and we must face up to all the implications.

Many other changes have taken place, not least the one that I am constantly made aware of when I go out and listen to constituents. In the past 10 to 20 years, policing has changed. It is now much more about targeting resources and fighting crime directly, which is not necessarily commensurate with the high-visibility presence of police on the beat. That poses a dilemma. In a rural or semi-rural area, such as the one that I represent, constituents will not see so much of the police. I assure them that there is a lot of policing going on—there is plenty of action behind the scenes. However, they cannot have it both ways. The time that the police spend walking the beat cannot be spent chasing criminals—and most of us would presume that the latter is the most effective way for the police to use their time.

That links with the ministerial statement, made yesterday, I believe, that the Government were prepared to consider changing the location of police stations, different ways in which the police could be tasked to perform their duties and so on. I welcome that because, although there should be a debate on the subject and

although we should be very much affected by what constituents tell us, we cannot believe that the police service is static. It must evolve and move with the times. Criminals are mobile, so we must make the police as mobile as possible.

The need for change has been acknowledged and acted on in my local police force, in Gloucestershire. A year ago, we restructured the police force into three new divisions, and beneath those are inspector areas, under the command and control of inspectors. The three in my area are Inspector Cheryl Thomas in Stonehouse—with whom I shall spend some time tomorrow night—Inspector Dave MacFarlane in Stroud and Inspector Mike Barton in Dursley. I have spoken to each in turn. Interestingly, they all welcome that additional responsibility, and the police on the ground thoroughly understand it.

The re-organisation has freed some people for specialist work in different teams. It is not without criticism—Chief Constable Tony Butler has had to go out and spell out to his force what he is doing and why he is doing it—but, in the main, it seems to have been welcomed and to work well.

Interestingly, we have just got rid of beats in Gloucestershire; we now have a system of parishing, which seems more sensible and which we can all understand. We were never sure what a beat was, who patrolled it and where they would be at any moment.

I shall now discuss the budgetary situation. In Gloucestershire we have an historical problem that pre-dates May 1997. Ours is a relatively small police force. The area is neither urban nor rural and, although it has a population of more than 500,000, that population is well spread, causing locational and funding difficulties.

Like the hon. Member for Basingstoke, I believe that we would have welcomed some re-jigging of the standard spending assessment. We would always argue in Gloucestershire that, because we never fit any of the criteria exactly, we do quite badly out of funding mechanisms. That is true, not only of policing, but of local government and of our health authority.

I urge my hon. Friend the Minister to keep that subject on the agenda. I urge him to ensure that the funding mechanism is as fair and transparent as possible. Might it be at all possible for him to find some more money for Gloucestershire? He knows that I have been in correspondence with him and he knows that we are about to meet—I hope sooner rather than later—to discuss some of the funding difficulties. We had a relatively low increase of 1.4 per cent., which is causing the police force some pain, especially as it is a small force. It is more difficult for a force of that size to accept the notion of 2 per cent. efficiency savings. Having suffered under the previous Government, the force has been asked to take even more difficult decisions on how to eke out the budget this time.

Therefore I ask my hon. Friend the Minister to take back to the Home Office the message that the Gloucestershire police are trying very hard. They have introduced many of the changes that are needed, but the budget is not as good as it could and should be, and we may need to address that, if not this year, in future years.

Before I conclude I shall mention two points, one of which I raised with the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler), and which I was surprised, if not staggered, that he did not mention—the pension overhang. It is a major problem. I have re-read the police pension review that was published last March. None of us can hide from its findings. The previous Government may have had a good reason for not undertaking such a review earlier, but we have published it and gone out to consultation. The pension issue cannot be avoided for much longer. In a couple of years, we in Gloucestershire will be spending more than 20 per cent. of our budget to keep up with pension payments.

In no way am I attacking the police or saying that we should not pay a good pension. However, the way in which we are currently funding pension payments, including the police provision from their own pocket, is not sustainable in the long run. We all know that. If we claim otherwise, we are fooling ourselves. I hope that my hon. Friend will tell us when policy decisions are to be taken following consultation, and how we will move matters forward.

One of the reasons why police pension payments are so high is that so many police leave the force early. That may be partly a result of attacks on the police. Also, the fact that policing is such a physical job means that they must be at peak fitness. We know about the difficulties, which must be taken into account in long-term plans to improve the welfare of the police. We must ensure that we provide adequate funding and organise policing in the most effective way.

In conclusion, I shall deal with some of the dilemmas confronting the police. It is a pity that the Liberal Democrat Benches are so empty today. It is good to see that the hon. Member for Colchester (Mr. Russell) is present. I assume that his hon. Friend the Member for Cheltenham (Mr. Jones) is elsewhere, as today is the last day of the festival.

The race course in my area has decided to hold a three-day meeting over the millennium, which will require extra policing and the participation of all the emergency services. I have been told, and I am sure that I will be told again tomorrow night when I go out with the police, that the race course will be paying its bar staff about £70 an hour during the night of the millennium. It is quite within its rights to do so, but try to persuade the emergency services, including the police, that it is all well and good for them to work on their normal pay or perhaps a little extra over the same period. They will simply be fulfilling their normal responsibilities, although they will get time off in lieu.

I know that the festival will go ahead over the millennium and bring considerable revenue to Gloucestershire, but we need to think through our attitudes to the police. We take their work for granted. That is why it is so important that we get their pay, conditions and welfare right. We must deal with the pensions issue and ensure that our police operate as efficiently as possible. That can be achieved only if we give them the wherewithal to do their job as well as they can.

3.13 pm

Mr. John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings): The police services in Britain are struggling, by their own account. The chief constables said that the latest settlement is well short of what is required. The Association of Chief Police Officers stated that even allowing for efficiency gains, the settlement is inadequate to meet current demands, still less new challenges.

[Mr. John Hayes]

I shall deal with five aspects of policing that all relate to the number of police in our police authorities. First, the increase in police numbers that took place during the 1980s and early 1990s has not been matched since. I take the Home Secretary's point that that process began in the early 1990s. It is interesting to note that if the figures are analysed closely, shire areas were disproportionately affected by that tailing off. I shall deal with the reasons for that later.

During the past two or three years, most police authorities have been hit by declining numbers. One of the problems is the relationship between crime rates and police numbers. We heard earlier of the assumption that if crime rates fall, a related fall in the number of policemen is justifiable. That is a fundamental error, reflecting a misunderstanding of the role and purpose of policing. It links policing to crime in too direct a way. The correlation is not so simple.

My second point relates to policing style. I shall not—nor, Mr. Deputy Speaker, would you allow me to—deal with the hyperbole and overreaction in the Macpherson report, although it might be appropriate to say that it is time that hon. Members stood up for our public servants against the ludicrous charge of institutionalised racism. I understand that we shall have the opportunity to do that in a future debate.

Police style is related to numbers. If we believe that the style of policing appropriate for the modern age mainly involves crime-solving, and that it is essentially reactive—like the ambulance service, perhaps—we denigrate the role of prevention, the importance of public morale, and the importance of police morale and complements. Policing should be about civil order and social service. The choice is between the fire brigade or ambulance service model, and the "Dixon of Dock Green" or "Heartbeat" type of policing.

We have heard that there was never any golden age in policing, but I reject the idea that the public do not want more bobbies on the beat—more friendly policemen whom they get to know, who are part of the community, who have particular responsibilities to a locality and who are seen in a positive light by the public. I am sure that is what people want. We must ensure that the policing style reflects that legitimate public demand.

Such a style of policing involves patrolling. In opening the debate, my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler) spoke of the importance of policemen being seen to patrol—bobbies on the beat, patrolling on foot and by car. Such non-adversarial policing is good for maintaining links between law enforcement officers and the public. The Minister will remember that one of the conclusions of the Scarman report was that there was a danger of the police becoming a remote elite, who were not just hostile to a particular part of society, but anti-people and distant. Part of non-adversarial policing—of the bobbies on the beat culture—is to forge a closer bond between public and police.

My third point entails crime and the fear of crime. All public surveys suggest that the fear of crime is profound. Dealing with that fear should be part of the policing agenda. That will not be accomplished by a style of policing largely based on crime reporting, crime detection and effective emergency reaction.

That brings me to my fourth point, which is about funding. In Lincolnshire, for example, we do not have enough crime or enough of the right type of crime to attract additional resource. *[Laughter.]* The fact that Labour Members laugh shows that they have not taken notice of what I said earlier. If policing is linked solely to the nature and level of crime, it ignores the role of the police as preventers of crime, the creators of social order and the custodians of a bond between people and the law.

That role is fundamental. If the police are seen as involved solely in clearing up serious crime, that removes aspects of their role such as visiting schools to forge links with young people. That role has largely disappeared in many constabularies because the police simply do not have the manpower for it. That approach, which, from their reaction, is clearly supported by some Labour Members who do not approve of such policing, has done much damage in divorcing the public from the police.

If the grant settlement is tied to a reactive style of policing—a crime-led style of policing—it inevitably reinforces that style of policing, because the police will have only sufficient funds to deal with emergencies. They will not have the latitude to develop innovative policies in non-adversarial policing.

Mr. Drew: Is not the hon. Gentleman missing the point that crime and disorder strategies and partnerships allow the police to work with other elements within their communities to ensure a full coverage of all the issues about which he speaks?

Mr. Hayes: The problem with crime and disorder strategies is that they may become solutions looking for problems. The crime and disorder strategy must be geared up to the preventive non-adversarial policing that I described, and resourced accordingly—I will deal with the standard spending assessment later.

The Minister of State nods, but there is little evidence to suggest that there is a satisfactory solution to the issue of the extra cost of policing rural communities. A research project is under way and I shall be looking for an assurance when the Minister replies that that will be published in the early part of this year so that we can study it. I hope that future settlements will take account of its findings.

At the moment, there is only patchy evidence of any serious commitment to considering the different policing needs of different parts of the country, and, worse still, how different parts of the country need to be funded in a way that is sensitive to their local needs. If policing is funded according to national criteria which are insensitive to particular demands—for example, those of sparsely populated areas—it will be inappropriate for such areas.

The staff in my chief constable's office made that very point to me this morning. To be honest, they did not complain about this year's settlement, although they were disappointed with the Government when the settlement was aggregated over two years. The Home Secretary said that that was because the Government had inherited the previous Government's spending plans—as though a Government coming into office with a massive majority and a mandate would not set their own agenda and say that, having looked at the situation closely, the figures would have to be changed; as though that would not have been part of a legitimate democratic decision.

What nonsense. In Lincolnshire, as in so many other shire counties, aggregated over two years the settlement is disappointing.

My fifth concern is that a problem also arises from the way in which the governance of police is likely to be changed by making police authorities best value authorities. The danger is that the targets that will be set by which the police will be judged are likely to reinforce the style of policing which I described earlier. The targets and measurables will be based on detection rates and measures of efficiency. It is hard to measure the intangible benefits from local community policing, such as school visits, in a way that can be related directly to crime and clear up rates, detection and efficiency. The problem with making police authorities best value authorities is that we shall set in stone targets and measurables—tangibles—which will reinforce an undesirable type of policing which is far removed from that which the public want.

The inclusion of police as best value authorities, inappropriately shoehorned into a structure that is essentially designed for local government, will reinforce many of the problems. It will also challenge the tripartite governance of the police, which is so valued by the police and the public. It will lead to a nationalisation of the police by setting uniform national targets by which the police will be judged, and by decreasing the role of local police authorities, possibly even impinging on chief constables' ability to make their own decisions on operational matters.

Some of those problems are long-term issues, and some are strategic issues, and it would not be fair to blame everything on the Government. *[Interruption.]* The Minister of State will know that I am renowned for my generosity and I do not want to tarnish that reputation today.

High expectations were raised when the Government took office, and they have no one but themselves to blame for that. Every interest group possible was told that the Government would deliver for them. That was certainly true with regard to police and law and order matters. The fact that there are fewer policemen on the beat in Spalding in my constituency now than there were five years ago is a cause of real concern to my constituents. They do not understand why the Government have not delivered on their pledges, have broken their promises and disappointed the people of Lincolnshire and elsewhere in Britain.

The Minister may legitimately say that some of these issues are strategic, but we will reply with equal legitimacy that the Government have made a slow start in addressing these strategic matters and have disappointed not only the people of Lincolnshire, but the people of Britain.

3.26 pm

Ms Hazel Blears (Salford): I appreciate that one of the great strengths of the House is the diverse perspective that hon. Members bring to our discussions. But listening to some contributions this afternoon, I genuinely wonder whether Conservative Members have any idea what it is like living in an inner city, trying to cope with the explosion of crime that has taken place in recent years, and whether they have any understanding or appreciation of what my constituents face daily as they live with crime, burglary, robbery, violence and massively escalating theft.

It is right to set today's debate in a context. Conservative Members do not like to be reminded of uncomfortable figures; they prefer those that support their arguments. But we must examine the massive explosion in crime during the 18 years of Conservative Government. I shall confine my remarks to Greater Manchester, the area that I represent and know. In those 18 years, recorded crime rose by 130,000. That is a massive figure. Crimes against the person tripled in those years. Burglary increased two and a half times to a massive figure of 75,000 burglaries a year. Unbelievably, incidents of robbery increased 12 times, from 494 in 1979 to 6,296 in 1997. It may well be that resources have been put into the police, but the results of those resources have been pathetic. They did not deliver what the people wanted.

My constituents want crime to be reduced and burglars and robbers to be caught, convicted and sentenced. They also want the good, effective community policing. I say to the hon. Member for South Holland and—

Mr. Hayes *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Is the hon. Lady giving way, or just hesitating?

Ms Blears: I was simply hesitating because I could not remember the hon. Gentleman's constituency.

I say to the hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Mr. Hayes) that my police force regularly goes into primary and secondary schools, investing a huge amount of time and resources in trying to ensure that young people can grow up with a sense of moral values, knowing the difference between right and wrong and trusting the police. We recognise that it is in working with young people that we shall begin to reduce the menace of crime that threatens those whom I represent. That is the context in which we should be talking about police numbers this afternoon. I am particularly worried about the increase in violent crimes—which threaten people's sense of safety and security—in many inner-city areas. Not only crimes that have been committed, but fear of crime limits people's willingness and ability to take part in normal community activities. Even the police now recognise that the links between unemployment, poverty, deprivation and crime are incontrovertible. Therefore we have to rebuild our communities if we are to tackle their long-term problems of crime.

The Opposition have a short and selective memory. They have concentrated on certain figures this afternoon, but I, for one, will never let them forget that their policies led to the massive explosion in crime, certainly in my city. Over 18 years of Tory Government there was excessive consumption for a few and a life of real hardship for the many.

Mr. Hayes: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ms Blears: No.

The Government have had to pick up the pieces after the community breakdown and disintegration that took place over those years, which is a huge task. Labour Members readily acknowledge that progress will not be achieved overnight and that our communities will not become safe and secure within a short time, but if we are

[Ms Blears]

to be successful we will have to be much more imaginative and creative about the way in which we run all our public services. That includes the police.

Mr. Hayes: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ms Blears: Time is short, so I do not intend to give way.

We need to examine the figures closely. The Audit Commission has said that there is no direct correlation between police numbers and the detection of recorded crime, but it has also said that there are significant variations in performance between police forces. The clear-up rate on burglaries in the best-performing metropolitan force is almost twice that of the worst. In particular, the Welsh police forces seem to do very well; they clear up 43 per cent. of burglaries, but only 11 per cent. of burglaries are cleared up in Greater Manchester.

To me, those figures say that questions need to be asked about how the police are working, how they are conducting their business, what they do in different areas and how we can learn from best practice. For example, why can Cumbria police detect 33 per cent. of recorded crime and Derbyshire police only 20 per cent? Those numbers are more complicated for the Opposition to deal with because they require thought and analysis, and they need to be worked through. Perhaps that is why the Opposition choose to rely on the crude numbers relating to simple police strength. The figures relating to performance raise difficult issues for us to tackle, but, if we are to achieve sustainable long-term improvements, we must be prepared to analyse them.

The Audit Commission report says that there is little direct correlation between the number of police officers employed, the work that they do and the targets that they achieve. The police have now recognised that they cannot simply tackle crime on their own and that they have to work in partnership with others. That would add value to the money that we spend on the police.

The police are not some separate force, but integral to our communities. They work with the housing, education and social services, business and voluntary sectors as well as with the community. Bringing that expenditure together and making sure that we get added value from it is that task that faces us.

Local people do not particularly want more crime to be detected, although that would help. They want crime to be reduced, or not to be committed in the first place. We must shift the emphasis of the conduct of policing from simply trying to detect crime once it has happened—because, by then, there is already a victim and communities are being destroyed—to addressing the start of the process, to make sure that we concentrate on reducing and preventing crime.

To achieve that objective the police must work with other partners, such as local councils, to design better street lighting and work on housing estates, and with the business community to set up closed circuit television systems, for example. In the development at Salford Quays, which is a prime industrial development, local businesses are helping to fund extra police services and the installation of closed circuit television. Those businesses recognise that it is in their best interests to make sure that the police force perform properly and competently.

The police also have to work with the public. I will welcome the anti-burglary initiatives that will be announced in the next few days. They will mean that many of my constituents will be physically safer in their own homes, but the overriding objective must be to strengthen our local communities. That means that the police must use ways of working that are very different from those that they used in the past.

If we want to make our towns and cities places in which people want to live, work and bring up their families, we have to make sure that people have pride in their areas. They also need the confidence and the strength to combat the criminals themselves, but that ability has been lost from many of our communities. People live in fear and are often unwilling to give evidence when they witness crime. They do not feel that they have a stake in the community and do not feel safe and confident enough to intervene.

I am pleased that imaginative, innovative and creative work is being done in many police forces up and down the country, and we should recognise and applaud that. Resources are being put into diverting young people from crime, not only through school visits, but through involvement in practical projects on the ground. I shall give two examples from my constituency. The Gears project is funded by the police, the probation service and the National Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders, and those bodies bring together youngsters with a particular interest in motor bikes.

Those youngsters might have stolen motor bikes—*[Interruption.]* As a keen motor cyclist, I have a great interest in that. Those bodies bring young people together to build their own racing motor bikes. They are acquiring skills and receiving training in welding and engineering, which is diverting them into much more positive activity, and there is also an element of excitement for them.

If we are genuinely to divert young people from crime, we cannot simply invite them along to a youth club for a game of football, ping-pong or whatever. Young people want to be involved in exciting activities that give them a buzz and make life worth living, and our motor cycle project has been extremely successful in diverting young people from crime.

The second constituency example is a project run by my local rugby league team, Salford Reds. The club has an incredibly successful youth development programme and works with other organisations. The police are very supportive of the project and people visit primary schools—not only to get the youngsters playing rugby league, but to get them along to matches and involved in the club so that they feel that they have a stake in their city. That is so important in making sure that we build the self-confidence of those communities. Projects that divert our young people from crime are very important.

The police are working in new ways. We are putting an awful lot of resources into video surveillance. In areas with a lot of crime and disorder, parents often deny that their youngsters are responsible for causing trouble, but they react swiftly and effectively if they are confronted with video evidence of their children committing crimes and making other people's lives a misery.

Targeted policing means that our police meet every week to consider the causes of incidents and target their resources on the hotspots of crime. The police draw in officers from the housing department and the local authority and make sure that they consider the full spectrum of reasons for crime taking place in our community. They do not simply patrol the beat; they direct their activities to where maximum effect will be achieved and crime will be reduced.

In Salford we have a wonderful witness support scheme, which has been acknowledged in the Home Office document "Speaking up for Justice". It supports witnesses from the day that they witness a crime all the way through the process until they are able to give evidence in court. We must have more than a court-based scheme. We must say to people who are brave enough and strong enough to stand up and give evidence in difficult circumstances, "We are with you, we will support you, we will help you and we will take you through the whole process." I commend Salford's witness support scheme as an example of good practice.

All those are new ways of working. The police service should not remain static. The world is changing and the police service, and all our public services, have to change, too. We believe in public service, but we also believe in getting value for money from the investment that we make. Up and down the country, innovation is taking place and the old numbers game is over. It is not enough for Governments simply to allocate the resources, wash their hands, step back and not take any responsibility for results.

The huge variations in detection rates show us that some factors make some forces more successful than others. Those are difficult issues, but tackling them is the only way to achieve sustainable, long-term success. We are not about short-term thinking; this Government will be in office for a long time to come. The people in Salford whom I represent are delighted that, at long last, they have a Government who take their views seriously. The Government are getting involved in a partnership and in setting local priorities and targets. They will have the levers to drive up those standards. They have a Government who are listening, and I believe that it is because the Conservative Government did not listen and were out of touch that they are now out of office. Long may that remain so. I urge hon. Members to dismiss this motion.

3.40 pm

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): It is disappointing that some colleagues were unable to speak in this debate, but doubtless they will find other ways of voicing their concerns about the state of the police service in their constituencies.

The Home Secretary failed to deal with the central point in the Opposition motion that police numbers are falling as a direct consequence of the policies of the Government. When he was not making personal attacks on my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler), he seemed to be saying that the budget that the Government have allocated to the police is challenging but adequate. The Opposition say that the police funding settlement under Labour for the next three years is insufficient to maintain an effective police service. The direct consequence will be fewer police officers—not hundreds fewer, but potentially thousands fewer—which will undermine the fight against crime and the Government's law and order strategy.

Angela Smith: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Greenway: No, I shall not give way.

From Essex to Cumbria, Bedfordshire to Gloucestershire and Lincolnshire to North Yorkshire, police numbers are going down, and we have heard much about that this afternoon. We believe that there is room for improvements in efficiency, but the Government insist on a 2 per cent. across the board efficiency gain in each of the next three years, and the effect of that will be inconsistent across the country. It penalises the very forces—many of them are the smaller, rural forces—that have already taken action to improve efficiency within their force. There was no better example of that than the one given by the hon. Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew) about Gloucestershire.

Sensible changes in the police estate will take years—not months—to implement. I refer particularly to yesterday's welcome report from the Audit Commission, "Action Stations". I am quite frankly astonished that the Home Secretary did not find time to refer to it in his 40-minute tirade.

Ministers have still not said how the 2 per cent. annual efficiency savings will be judged, but their impact cannot be in question: there will be fewer officers and a reduced service to the public just at a time—and this is central to our motion—when it is most essential to build the best possible relations between the police and the public.

The Home Secretary criticised the record of the previous Conservative Government. I shall briefly highlight four points. First, crime rates fell by 15 per cent. between 1994–95 and 1997–98: the source of the figures is the Audit Commission's 1997–98 report. Secondly, the number of constables increased in England and Wales by 2,322 between April 1992 and March 1997. The source for that is a written answer by the Secretary of State for Wales when he was a Minister in the Home Office. The average time that police constables spent in public increased by 4 per cent. between 1994–95 and 1996–97: again the source is the Audit Commission in its 1996–97 report. That report also stated:

"Most forces had increases in their funding in real terms between 1993/94 and 1996/97."

The Home Secretary seemed to forget what he said in his press statement a year ago announcing Labour's first police grant report settlement for 1998–99. He said:

"The police are the only local authority service to have had an increase greater than inflation in each of the last four years."

That is, four years in which the budgets were set by a Conservative Government. He has the audacity to come here today with a weak defence against the motion and to criticise that record.

Mr. Collins: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Greenway: If my hon. Friend will allow me, I shall not give way.

The Home Secretary clearly thought that such increases were a good thing. What has now persuaded him to change his mind, or did he not fight hard enough in the comprehensive spending review? Concerns about

[Mr. Greenway]

resources in the first Labour police settlement were brushed aside with the excuse that all the Government were doing was sticking to Tory spending plans. We heard the same point made again today, and we heard it on Tuesday when the Home Secretary had the audacity to use that as an excuse not to find money for closed circuit television cameras.

What do we find when the Government escape the shackles of budget constraints set by the mean old Tories and new Labour is free to do its own thing and put its money where its mouth is? The public and the nation should know what "tough on crime" really means under new Labour. What we got was a 1 per cent. cut in last year's settlement. We have got what the Police Superintendents Association has described as the worst spending round in a generation. The tragedy is that there are two more years of the same still to come. What a complete lack of political commitment to the police from a Government who seem intent on running down the police service! That lack of commitment risks a demoralised police force, from which the only gainers are the criminals. The losers will be our constituents: the general public.

The debate has shown that the demands we make on the police are greater than ever before. The police service throughout the country is overstretched. More and more police officers suffer from stress-related illnesses and violence through assaults. Our constituents want more visible policing. Much is made of zero tolerance—the in phrase is hotspot policing. Whatever name we choose, for the policy to be successful, it must be manpower intensive.

We need more officers, not fewer. They will have to implement the provisions of the new Crime and Disorder Act 1998, establish community partnerships, be responsible for policing millennium events, tackle vehicle crime, make our city centres safe late at night, build on the success of Operation Bumblebee to reduce burglary and Operation Eagle Eye to reduce street robberies, and respond every hour of every day to major road traffic accidents.

Those intractable problems cannot be solved by soundbites, by local authority or private patrols, or by a sudden conversion to CCTV cameras as a cheap way out—as we heard on Tuesday. Those initiatives should support the police, not be seen as a substitute for the police. Anyone who talks to police officers regularly will know that the police service wants to do an even better job and make our communities safer. Increasingly, the police feel betrayed by a lack of support from the Government.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield drew attention to what the Police Federation rightly said—that Treasury officials had swung the axe on police budgets. Like the Police Federation, several hon. Members have predicted fewer police officers, the closure of local stations and a reduction in front-line services in their areas, and those predictions are now coming true. That is not what the people of this country voted for in May 1997, and it will weigh heavily against new Labour when it chooses to face the country in two or three years' time.

What we heard from the Home Secretary was the same old display of complacency and commitment bordering on contempt. We ask no more than that the Government should match the Conservative commitment towards the police. They should match the pledge made by the Leader of the Opposition in Reading at the weekend to halt this decline in police numbers.

Hon. Members from both sides of the House must know that chief constables, police authorities, serving police officers and their constituents are deeply concerned about falling police numbers. This afternoon they can show how much they share that concern by supporting our motion.

3.49 pm

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. Paul Boateng): This morning, I went straight from the BBC studios—where I engaged in a debate with the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler)—to the streets of Peckham, where I joined two dedicated serving police officers on their patrol of a local estate. That was a necessary and salutary corrective, following my experience of debating the issue with the right hon. Gentleman. His rantings and ravings on police numbers—*[Interruption.]* Yes, that is what they are. The right hon. Gentleman's rantings and ravings bear no relation to what is actually happening.

While the right hon. Gentleman goes on and on about police numbers, police officers working on the ground with the public are responding to the challenge that they have been set by a Government who are determined to bring about the partnership between police and public that is the real answer to the problem of reducing and preventing crime. The Crime and Disorder Act 1998 creates the necessary context—a context within which we are devoting new resources to tackling the challenges of policing as we move into the next millennium. To pretend otherwise is to live in a fantasy land—the sort of fantasy land in which the right hon. Gentleman dwells all too often for the purpose of making political points about police numbers, and which the hon. Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) sought to perpetuate.

Ms Candy Atherton (Falmouth and Camborne): As my hon. Friend will know, we in Cornwall will have a particular policing problem in August, when there will be a total eclipse of the sun. Can he or our right hon. Friend the Home Secretary help in any way?

Mr. Boateng: My right hon. Friend has visited Cornwall to meet the chief constable, members of the police authority and members of the public. We shall respond in due course to the anxieties that my hon. Friend has expressed so eloquently in recent months.

Sir Norman Fowler: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Boateng: No, not at this point.

The lesson from Devon and Cornwall is being repeated throughout the country. It suggests that police and community should come together to deliver safe and secure communities. To get hung up on the issue of police numbers, as the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield does, is to miss the point. This Government are applying an unprecedented level of resources to the task of policing our country.

The hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Mr. Hayes) demonstrated real concern about Lincolnshire, and the hon. Member for Basingstoke (Mr. Hunter) was equally concerned about Hampshire; but when we compare what Conservative Members say with what has actually happened, we see a stark contrast between the two. Under a Labour Government, Lincolnshire's budget has been increased by 4.4 per cent. That is a larger increase than it had under the Tories at any time during the last three years of their Administration. The hon. Gentleman ought to be saying thank you, rather than pointing the finger of blame at the Government. The hon. Member for Basingstoke also whinged about resources, but, under this Labour Government, his local force received a 3.3 per cent. increase—above the national average—in its budget.

I visited Hampshire recently, and I commend the excellent work of the Hampshire police. In fact, the number of police increased by 38 in the six months between March and September 1998. That simply does not bear out the suggestion by Opposition Front Benchers that we are letting the police down. The reverse is the case.

Sir Norman Fowler: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Boateng: No.

What we are doing is putting the emphasis on police efficiency and effectiveness, which is where it belongs. We are pursuing an agenda that has been endorsed by the Select Committee on Home Affairs, by the Audit Commission and by Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary. All those bodies recognise that to see the issue in terms of numbers alone is to miss the point.

The Tories really have lost the plot in regard to the policing of our country. We are determined to pursue this debate in ways that bring communities and police closer together, and recognise the importance of the targeting initiatives that we launched in Peckham this morning. We are devoting new resources—some £5 million out of a total of £250 million—to underpinning our crime reduction strategy, in addition to the £1.24 billion settlement.

The hon. Member for Ryedale was disparaging about closed circuit television, but it is cementing a partnership not just between police and public but, importantly, between the police and the private sector. That partnership is delivering in shopping malls and public spaces up and down the country: delivering, under a Labour Government, something that a Conservative Government consistently failed to deliver. Why are we delivering that? We are delivering it because we have learned the lessons of modern policing, which are about spreading good practice and building on the excellent work that the police are doing throughout the country.

Let me give an example. We have learned from auto crime, including thefts from vehicles, that it is not enough to be reactive: it is not enough to be in the business of spouting the simple rhetoric that we hear from Conservative Members. The police must be supported in their job of gathering criminal intelligence. It is necessary to support their proactive approach, which is about disrupting the market in the supply of stolen goods and which is intelligence led and problem orientated, and about backing that up with resources that deliver. Those resources must deliver in terms of promoting a sense of well-being and security among the public, and also in terms of meeting the demand that chief constables and the men and women on the ground properly make of their Government.

What is that demand? It cannot be seen simply in terms of numbers; it also provides a context for the sort of partnership that was described by my hon. Friends the Members for Stroud (Mr. Drew) and for Basildon (Angela Smith). We are talking about people working on the ground in order to cut the ground under the criminal: people working on the ground to ensure that local authorities, through the youth service, are working not against, but alongside the police and diverting young people from crime and offending. We are talking about those who do the business of policing. That is not about rhetoric—the sort of rhetoric that we hear from Conservative Members—but about delivering a reality based on partnership between the police and the public and, importantly, on the significant resources that this Government alone have managed to deliver to the police in recent times.

Those resources mean that we are able, together, to reduce crime. They mean that we are able to prevent crime. They enable us to proceed on the basis that together we can beat crime, and undermine criminal activity. That is what we intend to do. We intend not to engage in empty rhetoric about numbers, but to engage in the serious business of delivering a strategy on the ground that reduces and prevents crime. Nothing will stop us from doing that—working with the police and the public to promote a safe and secure society.

Question put, That the original words stand part of the Question:—

The House divided: Ayes 121, Noes 315.

Division No. 118] **[4 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Body, Sir Richard
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Butterfill, John
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Kensington)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Colvin, Michael
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cran, James
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Day, Stephen
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fraser, Christopher
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gill, Christopher
Goodlad, Rt Hon Sir Alastair
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gray, James
Green, Damian
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson Smith, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Lidington, David

Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Moss, Malcolm
Nicholls, Patrick
Norman, Archie
Ottaway, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Prior, David
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robathan, Andrew
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Faversham)*
Ruffley, David
St Aubyn, Nick
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Streeter, Gary
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thompson, William
Townend, John
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Tyrie, Andrew
Wardle, Charles
Waterson, Nigel
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Woodward, Shaun
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Tim Collins and
Mr. Oliver Heald.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Baker, Norman
Ballard, Jackie
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Stuart *(Middlesbrough)*
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Boateng, Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Brake, Tom
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burstow, Paul
Butler, Mrs Christine
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Canavan, Dennis
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coleman, Iain
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Dalyell, Tam
Darvill, Keith
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, John
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Etherington, Bill
Fatchett, Rt Hon Derek
Fearn, Ronnie
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Foulkes, George
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Godman, Dr Norman A
Gorrie, Donald
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hancock, Mike
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith
Hoey, Kate
Home Robertson, John
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Ms Jenny *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kelly, Ms Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross Skye)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kingham, Ms Tess
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Love, Andrew
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McDonagh, Siobhain
Macdonald, Calum
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Mrs Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Merron, Gillian
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Mitchell, Austin
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moore, Michael
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Eddie
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Öpik, Lembit
Organ, Mrs Diana
Osborne, Ms Sandra
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Ms Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd

Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Rt Hon Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Rendel, David
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Salter, Martin
Sanders, Adrian
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Miss Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Stott, Roger
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Straw, Rt Hon Jack
Stringer, Graham
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tyler, Paul
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Wills, Michael
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, Dr Tony *(Cannock)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. David Hanson and
Mr. David Clelland.

Question accordingly negatived.

Question, That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 31 (Questions on amendments), and agreed to.*

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *forthwith declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to.*

Resolved,

That this House pays tribute to the high standards of policing in this country; notes that the previous administration's promises in 1992 and 1995 of an additional 6,000 police officers were never carried through and that police numbers instead fell; welcomes the additional £1.24 billion for the police service and the extra £400 million for the crime reduction programme which are to be provided over the next three years; supports the police in their crucial role in tackling crime and creating safer communities; and recognises the need for the police, as with other public services, to continue to improve efficiency and effectiveness and deliver best value in the interests of the whole country.

Roads

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord): Madam Speaker has selected the amendment in the name of the Prime Minister.

4.12 pm

Mrs. Gillian Shephard (South-West Norfolk): I beg to move,

That this House believes that the Government, having promised an integrated transport policy, are creating a standstill Britain and failing to deliver the immediate benefits promised before the general election; notes that 94 per cent. of passenger travel and 91 per cent. of goods moved within the UK is by road, so that a modern and efficient roads network is vital for UK prosperity and competitiveness; notes that the condition of UK roads is deteriorating; condemns the Government for cutting the programme of motorway and trunk road improvements to 37 schemes, which will increase the congestion and pollution which the Government say they oppose, despite raising the tax burden on the road user to £33 billion per year, of which less than one sixth is spent on transport; and calls upon the Government to stop hitting the road user with ever-higher taxes as a substitute for real policies to reduce congestion and pollution and to get Britain moving again.

The Labour party came to power pledging immediate benefits for the travelling public from its transport policies. Its manifesto promised

"an effective and integrated transport policy at national, regional and local level that will provide genuine choice to meet people's transport needs."

Two years on, where are those benefits? There has certainly been plenty of spin. The Government have churned out more than 100 glossy publications and consultative documents on transport. Friends of the Earth has described the Government's style as "carry on consulting".

There has been no shortage of photo opportunities. The travelling public have been treated to images of the Deputy Prime Minister posing at a bus stop—unfortunately for him, with one of his two Jaguars just within camera shot waiting to pick him up. They have seen him strap-hanging on the London underground—for just one stop, I think—to prove his public transport credentials. Those credentials were subsequently rather damaged by the revelation that he took a Royal Air Force helicopter, at public expense, to switch on the Blackpool illuminations. This week in the tabloid press there have been some fetching pictures—I suppose that one has to call them glamour pictures, although, thankfully for us all, they were not on page 3—of the Deputy Prime Minister delivering a lecture from the jaws of the deep on the need for the rest of us to use the bus more. *The Sun* called it "scuba skiving".

There have been promises, promotional pamphlets, photographs and hot air—plenty of that—but no immediate benefits for the travelling public. The Government's transport policy has achieved increased fuel taxes, cuts in transport spending, a slashed roads programme and no reductions in congestion and pollution. It is small wonder that a recent BBC MORI poll showed that just 3 per cent. of people think that the Government are doing a good job on transport. People know that they are paying more and getting less.

[Mrs. Gillian Shephard]

The Government want the public to believe that they have not increased taxes. Despite the Prime Minister's denials in the House and elsewhere, figures from the House of Commons Library show that taxes are set to be £7.1 billion higher next year as a direct result of the Chancellor's first three Budgets. Increased taxation for the motorist is part of the Government's stealth tax attack. They are hostile to the motorist. They attack what they call car dependency as though it were an illness. They appear not to realise that, for many, the car is a necessity, not a luxury.

Petrol in Britain is now the most expensive in Europe. Of every £10 that the travelling public pay at the pumps, £8.50 goes straight to the Exchequer. As the Automobile Association has said, it is as though the Chancellor

"is using motorists as a private piggy bank".

Adding together increased fuel tax, VAT and increased excise duty on all vehicles except sit-on lawnmowers, it became clear this week that not even the Mini has a small enough engine to qualify for the Chancellor's much trumpeted reduction in vehicle excise duty: road users will be paying to the Exchequer around £33 billion this year. The Government will be taking £9 billion more from road users in extra fuel tax during this Parliament than would have been the case if our policies had remained in place.

Mr. Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): Does my right hon. Friend anticipate, as I do, that the Minister of Transport will say that the escalator was of the Conservative party's invention? To pre-empt the jeering Labour mob, will she confirm that this Government increased the escalator by a full 20 per cent. in the Budget?

Mrs. Shephard: We introduced the fuel escalator when fuel was cheaper in the United Kingdom than in Europe and we needed to meet our CO_2 targets. This Government have increased the fuel escalator. We oppose that increase. As we did with whisky duty, the Government should review the global effect of their policies on road travellers and reduce that tax burden.

The Minister of Transport (Dr. John Reid): To set the record straight, will the hon. Lady confirm that the last five increases under the Conservative Government in the taxes about which she is talking were 10 per cent, 10 per cent., 13 per cent., 10 per cent. and 7 per cent?

Mrs. Shephard: No doubt the right hon. Gentleman will confirm later that he has imposed an extra £9 billion on the motorist during this Parliament, together with cuts in public transport and the roads programme.

The people worst affected by the Government's policies, as the AA regularly points out, will not be those with two Jaguars, but people for whom a car is a necessity. It is a secure, convenient means of transport for women, the elderly and families, as well as for those who live in the countryside, where 85 per cent. of households have and need a car.

Mrs. Christine Butler (Castle Point): May I advise the right hon. Lady that one of the Jaguars of the Deputy Prime Minister is a bicycle?

Mrs. Shephard: That is the best definition of Jaguar that I have heard for some time. I look forward to the next photo opportunity and seeing the Deputy Prime Minister on a bicycle disguised as a Jaguar.

This will not be the end of the Government's taxation on motorists. They are preparing three more taxes; congestion charging, motorway tolls and a tax on workplace parking. It is no good the Government promising that the income will be hypothecated to invest in transport improvements, because they also promised, before the election, that there would be no tax increases under the Labour Government. I am afraid that no one will believe them.

The Government are saving their worst example of highway robbery for business. Company car tax is to be increased—but at least the Chancellor announced that in his Budget. Curiously, he failed to announce that he was increasing the price of diesel by more than 11 per cent.—or more than 6p a litre. He played down the fact that he was setting the price of a tax disc for large trucks at a rate 11 times higher than the average in Europe.

The day after the Budget, the Road Haulage Association set up a telephone helpline to advise haulage companies planning to register abroad. There were 700 calls on the first day. However, moving abroad is perhaps what the Government want. In a letter to my hon. Friend the Member for Hexham (Mr. Atkinson) on 23 February, the Minister said that all hauliers who operate internationally

"can take advantage of lower prices elsewhere."

At least we know.

Mr. Gordon Prentice (Pendle): Did not the price of DERV increase by 60 per cent. between 1990 and 1997? Why did the considerations that apply in 1999 not apply between 1990 and 1997?

Mrs. Shephard: If the hon. Gentleman does his sums, he will realise that he is talking about a period of seven years, and he is talking about price increases.

Many smaller haulage companies cannot afford to move abroad, and many do not operate internationally. They will go out of business. This week, *The Times*, on the basis of a letter sent by a number of business organisations, estimated that transport tax could cost 50,000 haulage and associated jobs in three years.

The Minister of Transport is a sensible man.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Geraint Davies (Croydon, Central): Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Hon. Members: Oh!

Mrs. Shephard: Does the hon. Gentleman wish to correct me?

Mr. Davies: I wish to refer to the point made before the right hon. Lady's last, excellent point. May I draw to her attention the fact that the overall costs of running a typical firm of 50 38-tonne trucks—when corporation tax and labour costs are taken into account—are higher elsewhere? In the Netherlands, costs are 50 per cent. higher; in Belgium, 68 per cent.: and, in France, 35 per cent. The assumptions of that ridiculous article have not been made public, because it costs more to run companies in continental Europe.

Mrs. Shephard: I would not advise the hon. Gentleman to tell that to the average British trucker.

He might regret it. The Minister of Transport—normally a sensible man—told the Freight Transport Association a month ago that British hauliers were not suffering any serious disadvantage. I would like to read to him a letter faxed to me today by Mr. David Burton who runs a small transport company in Whissonsett, in Norfolk. He said:

"I am contacting you for help and to lobby this Government regarding the terrible plight of UK hauliers. As you are aware we cannot compete with unfair competition from continental hauliers due to this Government's insistence of the fuel duty escalator. I and my wife have built up from nothing to a profitable company employing 17 employees from a small rural village in mid Norfolk over the last 20 years. This is now very much in jeopardy due to vast differences in fuel duty. We have in the last month lost an valuable contract running to Spain due to unfair competition and also another contract to Holland and Germany is under scrutiny by our customer, asking for a reduction in rates which will be the final straw. We are desperate for help and cannot survive much longer."

I appeal to the Minister to listen to Mr. Burton—an authentic voice from the smaller end of the business—to reduce the tax burden and to play his part in saving 50,000 jobs.

Mr. Matthew Taylor (Truro and St. Austell): The right hon. Lady's concern for that haulier and the lorry industry—and for motorists in general—is clear. Will she make it clear whether the policy of her party is now to end the fuel escalator, and whether the shadow Chancellor has agreed that with her?

Mrs. Shephard: I have said that we think the Government should do as we did with whisky duty and review the global effects of their policy on the haulage industry and reduce the tax burden. That is what they should do—they are in charge.

Mr. Christopher Leslie (Shipley): The right hon. Lady is developing policy on the hoof. Is she proposing that we freeze duty on diesel, or cut the duty?

Mrs. Shephard: Clearly, the hon. Gentleman was not listening—I suppose that he was bemused by the glamour pics. What I said earlier was what I just said to the hon. Member for Truro and St. Austell (Mr. Taylor). I could hardly put the position more clearly. He may recall that we voted against the increase in the Budget.

The Government have increased road taxes, affecting every man, woman and child in the country. That is despite their promise that there would be no tax increases under Labour. The travelling public—the people who were promised immediate benefits under Labour—are entitled to ask why. Clearly, despite the Government's desire to hide behind a green smokescreen, this is not being done for environmental reasons.

The stark fact is that, following the Budget, the Government's tax take from road users will increase this year by £1.6 billion. Spending on transport is to be cut for each of the next three years, as the Department's own figures confirm. Thus, there will be no investment in public transport to provide a choice for motorists, as promised in "Consensus for Change."

The then Labour transport spokesman, now Secretary of State for International Development, said that her intention was that people should be

"caught in traffic jams when driving to work to see clean fast buses whizzing by and determined to leave their cars at home."

She was right on one count. We have the jams—but where are the buses?

As John Dawson of the AA said,

"The Chancellor's environmental excuse for hitting motorists is wearing very thin."

He said that the Budget is

"a purely revenue generating measure which impacts most on less well off families and those living in rural areas without any realistic public transport alternatives. No country in Europe spends so little of what it takes from motorists on its transport system."

Dr. George Turner (North-West Norfolk): Does the change in policy that the right hon. Lady is making on the fuel escalator—which, I understood, was introduced by the Conservative Government for environmental reasons—mean that she is abandoning a commitment to achieve the environmental objectives, or does she have alternatives to suggest? Many of us who represent rural areas understand the concerns that she is raising. The county that we both represent has more to lose—literally—in land mass by global warming than most.

Mrs. Shephard: The hon. Gentleman makes his point, whatever it may be. I have made it absolutely clear why we voted against the Government's punitive increase in diesel duty. I remind him that he, too, has many hauliers in his constituency.

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): Surely the Government are misunderstanding the point. It is not that lorries will cover fewer miles, but that companies will flag out to other European countries. They will carry on transporting, but far more cheaply than is possible in this country.

Mrs. Shephard: From what we understand from the Minister, the Government's policy is to attract foreign companies here to add to our pollution and congestion. The Government cannot claim that the extra tax that they have raised is used to reduce congestion and bottlenecks. Last July's roads review slashed the roads programme from more than 140 targeted improvements to only 37, and it will be up to a decade before many of those are completed.

Mrs. Anne Campbell (Cambridge): May I take it that the Conservative party no longer supports the international agreement to curb carbon dioxide emissions? If so, what measures would the right hon. Lady put in place that would have the same effect as our taxation measures?

Mrs. Shephard: The hon. Lady should listen to the case that I am making. The Government are imposing swingeing tax increases on road users. They have made cuts in overall transport spending, depriving road users of public transport alternatives. They slashed the roads programme, which would have reduced congestion and pollution.

The local transport settlement amounted to a real-terms decrease in cash for local authority road schemes, and that is set to continue for the next three years. The December survey by the Institution of Civil Engineers found that the maintenance backlog had increased by 40 per cent. since 1996 and now stands at a total of £160 for every vehicle licence holder.

[Mrs. Shephard]

The Opposition support an integrated approach to transport. We agree that we must make the best use of what we have, in the way that is most sustainable for the environment. We support the responsible use of the car and responsible roads investment to reduce congestion and pollution. When in office, we invested £26 billion in roads and nearly the same amount in public transport. Our policies levered in more private funds to increase public transport choices.

The Government have broken their pre-election promises on transport. There have been no immediate benefits for the travelling public. Their answer to transport problems is to tax the motorist off the road and to put hauliers out of business. Their swingeing stealth tax increases are hitting every man, woman, child and business in the country. They are cutting investment in public transport and our roads. They are creating a standstill Britain. I urge the House to support the motion.

4.34 pm

The Minister of Transport (Dr. John Reid): I beg to move, To leave out from "House" to the end of the Question, and to add instead thereof:

"commends the Government for taking a far-sighted and more integrated approach to roads policy than the previous administration; notes that the previous Government's 'predict and provide' approach to road building has been discredited and that the present Government has instead taken a realistic and practical approach based on the five criteria of integration, the economy, the environment, safety and accessibility; notes further that the previous Conservative Government's grandiose but impractical wish-list of schemes for which funding was not available has been replaced by a targeted programme of improvements, all of which can be started within seven years; welcomes its increased and more rationally-based spending on roads maintenance; and applauds the Government for tackling the problems of congestion and pollution, thereby ensuring that the road transport system operates for the benefit of individual people and the UK economy as a whole."

I strongly deprecate these attacks on my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister. He is a sensitive soul and will no doubt have been deeply offended by the remarks of the right hon. Member for South–West Norfolk (Mrs. Shephard). If she chooses in future to start a debate with an attack on my right hon. Friend for his obsession, as she put it, with media opportunities, she should advise her colleague, the hon. Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin), not to send letters round to all Conservative Members saying:

"Central office will be using the debate to mount a major media operation."

That may be the pot calling the kettle black.

Mr. Andrew Lansley (South Cambridgeshire) *rose—*

Dr. Reid: I have not actually said anything yet, but I will give way to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Lansley: I thought that it might be unwise to wait until the right hon. Gentleman had said something. As he purports to understand the road haulage industry, can he tell me how much it costs to fill a 1,000 litre tank with diesel in the United Kingdom and in Belgium?

Dr. Reid: I cannot give the exact cost, but I have looked into the matter and I can use the same example used by the hon. Member for North Essex in the weekend newspapers, and give the costs for 50 trucks of 38 tonnes each, assuming that they are flagged out and paying all the relevant costs in the United Kingdom, France, Belgium and the Netherlands respectively. We are entitled to make that comparison. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman asked me a question on a subject in which he purports to be interested, so he should listen to the reply.

For a fleet of 50 38-tonne trucks, if we include the social costs, national insurance, taxation, corporation tax, employees' costs, fuel and vehicle excise duty, the additional cost in France, as compared with the United Kingdom, is about £425,000 a year; in the Netherlands, about £600,000; and in Belgium, about £800,000.

I take the competitiveness of the road haulage industry extremely seriously—I shall meet representatives of the industry next Tuesday and will be pleased to listen to them and to discuss the industry's future—I understand that it is a fiercely competitive world and that there is overcapacity in the United Kingdom; but let us not exaggerate to the extent of blaming all the problems with competitiveness on the fuel escalator or on VED. We need a balance if we are to do justice to the industry.

Mr. James Gray (North Wiltshire) *rose—*

Dr. Reid: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman would allow me to read the first sentence of my speech. I intend to start at the beginning, which is always a good place to start.

I listened with attention and admiration to the right hon. Member for South-West Norfolk. I listened with attention for any mention whatever of the previous Government, whose legacy was our starting point, and with admiration because of her sheer oral dexterity in managing to speak for 25 minutes without mentioning that Government. There was no hint of self-criticism, no shred of remorse and not even a suspicion of guilt.

Let me remind the House of the starting point of the Labour Government's challenge on roads and transport. We inherited an awful legacy from the previous Government. We inherited road traffic set to grow by more than 33 per cent. over the next 20 years, and congestion, costed by the Confederation of British Industry at £20 billion per annum to business, set to double over the next 20 years. We inherited roads that kill or seriously injure more than 45,000 people a year. We inherited roads that add substantially to local air pollution, hastening the deaths of thousands of vulnerable people each year. Perhaps above all, we inherited no choice in public transport—a system in which all non-road transport had been allowed to decline for two decades. Those two decades saw reduced bus usage, reduced rail freight, reduced rail patronage and, above all, a road infrastructure that by every statistic issued even by the then Conservative Government was in the worst state of repair of any roads since records began.

Mr. Hilton Dawson (Lancaster and Wyre): My right hon. Friend mentioned the legacy of 18 years of Conservative Government. In my constituency, we have the legacy of a quarter of a century of Tory rule in Lancaster and the interminable Tory years in Wyre. Is my right hon. Friend aware of the problems caused by the scandalous condition of the moss roads network which blights the entire rural community in the Wyre district?

Is he aware of the appalling condition of bridges throughout Lancashire and of the desperate need for the Heysham-M6 link, which the previous Tory Member of Parliament resisted for so many years?

Dr. Reid: My hon. Friend makes his point well, and we and the wider nation are now aware of it. What was the Tories' policy to tackle the problems? Was it a plan for the future? Was it the development of public transport services? Was it the provision of choice? No. It was to produce every year an ever-lengthening wish list of roads—roads that were never funded, timetabled or finished, because they were never started. I shall remind the House of that cruel deceit that was perpetrated annually on the people of this country by the previous Conservative Government.

Mr. John MacGregor (South Norfolk): If the right hon. Gentleman really believes that—it is a travesty of what happened, and I hope if I catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to make that clear—why has he slashed the roads programme, substantially reduced expenditure and cut the transport programme generally?

Dr. Reid: I shall give the right hon. Gentleman an example—the House may find this illuminating—of the fantasy league of roads that was produced every year by the Conservative Government. In 1990, which was around the time that the right hon. Gentleman was Secretary of State for Transport, the Conservatives' wish list had 500 roads on it. They boasted proudly that it was costed at £30 billion, but it was funded only up to £1.26 billion. That was a deceit, because it was a pretence that—

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Dr. Reid: Conservative Members are very keen and I can see some of the young bulls getting up. They will get their chance in the ring in a moment. The Conservative Government pretended that they could build £30 billion worth of roads with £1.26 billion of funding.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (North Essex): Why cut it then?

Dr. Reid: It was the Conservative Government, as a gesture towards the real world, who cut the list between 1990 and 1995 from 500 roads to 250 and, finally, two years ago, to 150. They were the only Government in history to cut paper roads faster than they were building actual roads.

Mr. Stephen Day (Cheadle): I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for giving way to a 50-year-old bull. I feel as if he is waving a red rag at me, because my constituents do not recognise the description of the previous Government's so-called wish list. Can he explain to me why a road that was a third built under the previous Government has had its eastern and western sections cancelled by this Government? That was not a mirage of a road, because a third of it is there. Can we please have the other two sections?

Dr. Reid: Because of the delicate way in which the hon. Gentleman put his point, I shall look at it and see what can be done. [HON. MEMBERS: "Ah!"] I said that I shall look at it. The reality is that we have changed the policy and the programme because we are not prepared to deceive people.

The policy that we inherited was one of increasing congestion, with its associated costs and inconvenience, increasing pollution with its increasing damage to health, and increasing intellectual paralysis, as the Tory Government stood like rabbits transfixed in the headlights of a million oncoming juggernauts. I cannot pretend that we will turn that mess around overnight. The transport system is like a supertanker and it cannot do a pirouette. I realise that our transportation system is inadequate: it could not be otherwise because it is still largely the product of the legacy that were left. Inevitably, we have to deal with that. Although change will take time, we have already started with some success.

If congestion on our roads is to be tackled, we need to increase the amount of freight carried by rail. Under this Government, for the first time in more than quarter of a century, we have increased rail freight by 12 per cent. For the first time for more than 25 years, we now have more rail freight year on year—12 per cent. more last year and 16 per cent. more so far this year.

Sir George Young (North-West Hampshire) *rose*—

Dr. Reid: I shall give way to the right hon. Gentleman. As the originator and developer of congestion charging, he is entitled to come to the Dispatch Box.

Sir George Young: For sheer effrontery, it would be difficult to match what the right hon. Gentleman has just said. The increase in freight by rail was secured by privatising the rail system, a policy that the Labour party did all it could to obstruct.

Dr. Reid: For the first time in 25 years, in the first year of this Government, rail freight increased. Part of that, last year and this, was no doubt the result of privatisation. Part of it was because of the political backing and the money put into infrastructure grants for rail freight as a direct policy of this Government to reduce congestion on roads.

Mr. Simon Burns (West Chelmsford): How much?

Dr. Reid: A 16 per cent. increase in the first six months of this year—

Mr. Burns: Of what?

Dr. Reid: In tonnes per kilometre of freight carried on the railways. I shall send the hon. Gentleman a note and an abacus to make it easier for him.

If the waste and inconvenience of traffic jams are to be reduced, we must offer people a choice.

Mr. Jenkin *rose*—

Dr. Reid: I will give way if the hon. Gentleman will allow me to finish a paragraph. I may get through one yet.

If the waste and inconvenience of traffic jams are to be reduced, we must offer people a choice, a real alternative to using the car. Over the past three years there has been a choice. Use of railways has increased—as the right hon. Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir G. Young) said,

[Dr. Reid]

there has been a 25 per cent. increase in passengers—and there has been a reversal of the decline in bus passenger numbers in many areas. If crowded inner-city roads are to be improved, we must encourage the use of buses, and, for the first time in decades, the Government have begun to halt that decline and to turn it around.

We are making progress, and, unlike the previous Government, we have provided resources commensurate with the task of encouraging and developing public and private sector public transport systems. We have increased funding for capital maintenance of trunk roads by 50 per cent., from £200 million to £300 million, and we will end the decline of the condition of the trunk road network.

We will increase funding for making better use of that network by 60 per cent. by 2001–02. We have established a £50 million safety budget for small trunk road safety schemes, and a new programme of targeted improvements. We are committed to start a realistic programme of 37 schemes costing £1.4 billion within seven years, and we set out the relevant dates last December.

Mr. MacGregor *indicated dissent.*

Dr. Reid: The right hon. Gentleman may laugh, but when he was Secretary of State, he presided over 500 schemes that had starting dates ranging from any time between now and the millennium after next.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Dr. Reid: I must give way to the right hon. Member for South Norfolk (Mr. MacGregor).

Mr. MacGregor: The Minister must know that the £1.4 billion is to be spent over seven years. We spent almost that amount on new road schemes in a single year.

Dr. Reid: The right hon. Gentleman was not spending the same amount every year as we are spending over seven years. It is true that we have, for two reasons, diverted our emphasis from building new roads to road maintenance. First, we discovered—as did the previous Government—that we cannot work on a predict-and-provide basis, and that we cannot build our way out of congestion. Secondly, the dreadful state of the roads means that we will pay more in the long term by failing to maintain our roads in the short term than we would if we spent a decent amount of money on them. We have reallocated resources, and we make no apology for that.

Unlike the previous Government, we have made sure that every target road is funded and that we are capable of delivering it. We have been especially keen to construct bypasses. [HON. MEMBERS: "Where?"] My first statement as Minister of Transport was made two and a half days after I was appointed, and I was delighted to announce a programme that included 19 bypasses—almost four times as many in a single statement as the previous Government declared during their final four years in office. My statement included three bypasses shelved by the previous Government that I had reinstated. I think that every hon. Member would agree that bypasses are beneficial.

Dr. George Turner: I hope that I do not impose on the mood of generosity that my right hon. Friend has been displaying, but he will know that my constituents were promised a flyover at the Hardwick roundabout near King's Lynn. The promise was repeated for 14 years, but the flyover was never delivered. I respect the Government's honesty, and, although the pie-in-the-sky flyover is not to appear yet, my constituents will welcome the fact that the Government have said that there will be a flyover. May I tell my constituents that there will be a start on the project during this Parliament?

Dr. Reid: Before every hon. Member intervenes with a local bypass suggestion, let me remind my hon. Friend of what I have said before: if hon. Members have a specific case to raise, would they write to me about it? My hon. Friend can certainly commend to his constituents the honesty of the Government.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Dr. Reid: I will give way to the hon. Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin), but it must be the last intervention. I must make some progress.

Mr. Jenkin: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman. Naturally, we welcome the bypasses that he is building, but nine bypasses over seven years pale into insignificance against the 160 plus that we built during our 18 years in office. The Government are failing to live up to the expectations that they generated when they stood for office two years ago.

Dr. Reid: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his comment. However, we are building 19 bypasses, not nine. Those 19 were announced in a single statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley (South-West Surrey) *rose—*

Dr. Reid: I have to make some progress.

Mr. Gray: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The Minister has been on his feet for 20 minutes to speak on a motion about the Government's road policies without yet having mentioned the Government's road policies. Is not that a disgraceful waste of Back-Bench Members' time?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The Minister has taken a large number of interventions, which do not help him to make progress on his speech. Points of order of that sort only slow down the whole process.

Dr. Reid: Indeed, Mr. Deputy Speaker; that has ensured that I take no more interventions.

Unlike the previous Government, we have a coherent strategy, and it was set out in our White Paper in July last year. We are establishing integrated local transport strategies as well as national ones. We base our approach on partnership. There will be partnership with local authorities, to whom we are prepared to hand over decision making on 40 per cent. of trunk roads and we shall ensure that they have the resources to back those decisions. There will be partnership with the private sector; we have already announced three design, build, finance and operate trunk road projects. That brings us to the meat of the subject, about which the hon. Member for

North Wiltshire (Mr. Gray) asked. Those projects are for the A13 in east London, the A1 in Yorkshire and the A2-M2 in Kent; they are designed to harness the energies of both the public and private sectors.

As further evidence of that partnership, I am pleased to announce today the go-ahead for a private initiative project to fund the construction of the A130 bypass in Essex. The Government will provide £92 million to Essex county council to help fund construction on the A130. The poor reliability of the existing road has made it difficult for south-east Essex to attract business, investment and jobs. The scheme demonstrates that central and local government can work together effectively. It is integration in action: improving transport, aiding local regeneration, improving safety and creating jobs.

Apart from the differences that I have outlined, I hope that there are points on which the Government and the Opposition can agree. Streetworks are among the largest blights on Britain's roads. People are sick and tired of the disruption and inconvenience of prolonged streetworks. We intend to act on that and have made it plain that we shall authorise local authorities to penalise utilities or contractors for work that is overdue. We therefore entirely support the thrust of the private Member's Bill promoted by the hon. Member for Mid-Dorset and North Poole (Mr. Fraser). We want to hold consultations on the mechanics of any such legislation to ensure that we have the best and most effective mechanism to minimise the disruption caused by streetworks.

The terms of the hon. Gentleman's Bill would pre-empt that desire. However, I am glad to tell the House that the hon. Gentleman and I have held fruitful discussions and he has assured me that he is willing to co-operate in taking account of those points and I am hopeful that we can find a way forward. In any event, we want to act as speedily and effectively as possible to reduce the disruption and inconvenience of prolonged streetworks.

Mr. Christopher Fraser (Mid-Dorset and North Poole): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr. Reid: In view of my direct reference to the hon. Gentleman's Bill, the House would expect me to give way to him.

Mr. Fraser: I am most grateful to the Minister for his comments on my Bill. I hope that it will be one step in a positive direction for Government support on a matter that currently has all-party support; we shall continue to work on that matter.

Dr. Reid: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that note of all-party consensus, because in other areas the Government are prepared to take the hard choices that the Opposition are no longer willing to face. We have provided a new mechanism for reducing congestion, while providing a new income stream for transport initiatives. Congestion charging will provide local authorities with powerful new tools to tackle congestion, both through the charges themselves and through the additional transport investment that the income from the charges will allow them to fund. The right hon. Member for South-West Norfolk attacked congestion charging in her speech. I have to tell her that I cannot claim all the credit for that idea. Credit where credit is due: the concept was invented and developed by the Conservatives, by no less a person than the right hon. Member for North West Hampshire. The 1995 Green Paper stated that the Conservative Government held

"a presumption in favour of legislation"

on congestion charging. I am not so churlish as to deny the Conservatives the credit that is due to them, but am rather taken aback by their apparent modesty in claiming their birthright on congestion charges.

I was even more surprised to read the robust comments of the Opposition spokesman, the hon. Member for Croydon, South (Mr. Ottaway). In debate on the Greater London Authority Bill he said that the Conservative party did not rule out the possibility, at some time in the future, subject to consultation, of having a look at congestion charging. It is not as if Opposition Members know where they stand on that issue. I am reminded of the words of Churchill about Baldwin's Administration:

"They have decided to be undecided, resolved to be irresolute, adamant for drift, solid for fluidity and all powerful to be impotent."

That just about sums up the Opposition's approach to some of the issues that they have raised today.

The right hon. Lady referred also to the haulage industry, and particularly to vehicle excise duty and fuel. I assure the House that we recognise the impact that taxation can have on competitiveness and profitability. That is why we must strike a balance between legitimate environmental concerns and the transport needs of the industry. I shall listen carefully to what the Road Haulage Association representatives have to say when I meet them next Tuesday. However, we firmly believe that we can best help the industry—and particularly hauliers—by creating a climate of sustainable economic growth and long-term investment.

Let us examine some of the Budget measures. We have reduced main corporation tax to 30 per cent. and small companies corporation tax to 20 per cent. Moreover, from 1 April 2000, companies with profits of up to £10,000 will pay corporation tax of only 10 per cent. Companies with profits of up to £50,000 will benefit from relief given to ease the transition from the new starting rate to the 20 per cent. rate. Employees of haulage businesses will benefit from the new 10p starting rate of income tax from this April and employers will benefit from reduced national insurance contribution levels from 2001.

Those are only the general initiatives; the Budget also contained specific measures for hauliers. We have frozen road duty levels for 98 per cent. of all lorries—I thought that the Opposition would applaud that move. The reduction in VED for cleaner lorries has doubled from £500 to £1,000. The duty rates on ultra-low sulphur diesel have been reduced relative to ordinary diesel and the duty rates on road fuel gases have been cut by no less than 29 per cent.—one of the biggest ever cuts in duty.

The Opposition's suggestion that the Budget does nothing for haulage firms is a grotesque misrepresentation of the facts. It is all about balance. Vehicles with an 11.5-tonne drive axle weight—to which the Opposition like to refer—cause significant road damage. That is why their road duty rates were set as they were, although we froze 98 per cent. of other rates.

The Opposition are also suffering from amnesia about the fuel duty escalator. I remind the House that the previous Government introduced the fuel duty escalator

[Dr. Reid]

in 1993 and committed themselves to maintaining it until 2000. The right hon. Lady accused us of placing a burden on industry of 6 per cent. a year. She seems to have forgotten that 5 per cent. was imposed by the Conservatives and only 1 per cent. by Labour. We made that imposition in recognition of our need to act if we are to continue to lead the world on climate change.

As for the firms that are moving abroad to avoid the so-called excessive burdens, I gave the comparative figures for the whole cost earlier in the debate. I admit that it is a complex matter: I do not suggest for a minute that it is not possible to engineer a formula that would achieve savings. I want to talk to the industry about that and other matters. However, international haulage firms with 50 38-tonne lorries based in the Netherlands and Belgium—the countries with which we are invited to make a comparison—will face costs additional to the levels that I outlined earlier.

In view of the Conservatives' declared opposition to the fuel duty escalator and VED rates, I have done their Front-Bench spokesmen the courtesy of spending time reading through the speeches that Conservative Members made in government, so that I can consider their criticisms and how publicly they voiced them. Since Norman Lamont introduced the fuel duty escalator, there have been eight Budget debates and a huge number of transport debates. Not once during those years did tonight's Opposition spokespersons express a scintilla of criticism.

In the Budget debate of March 1993—the Budget that introduced the fuel duty escalator—the right hon. Member for South-West Norfolk hailed the Chancellor's statement as a Budget for business. She not only acquiesced in that Budget, but lauded it

Mr. Jenkin: What was the price then?

Dr. Reid: I am coming to the hon. Gentleman. In the debate on the Budget of November 1993, the hon. Member for North Essex, who will wind up for the Opposition tonight, waxed lyrical about the Chancellor's weight and stature, the heaviness of his task and, above all, his courage and the toughness of his decisions. In that Budget, which was lauded by the hon. Gentleman, the Chancellor increased the fuel duty escalator by 66 per cent.

Perhaps the hon. Gentleman should now recall the words of that Chancellor, who during that Budget statement, which both he and the right hon. Lady lauded, declared:

"Any critic of the Government's tax plans who claims also to support the international agreement to curb carbon dioxide emissions will be sailing dangerously near to hypocrisy."—[*Official Report*, 30 November 1993; Vol. 233, c. 939.]

All we can say to the Conservatives tonight is, "Hello sailor."

On roads, as on transport in general, we have set out an agenda for a generation, a radical platform for action and a programme for progress, with which I am sure the vast majority of hon. Members are pleased and proud to be associated.

5.8 pm

Mr. John MacGregor (South Norfolk): I begin by declaring an interest in that I am a non-executive director of a company that has a transport subsidiary. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh."] Well, at least that gives me an insight into the effect of the Chancellor's measures. I want to speak primarily as a former Secretary of State for Transport who had a substantial roads and road-building programme and as a Member of Parliament for a rural area who sees the damage that the Government's policies are doing. I shall focus on the roads programme.

The Minister of Transport does a good cabaret turn and has a sardonic wit, which was demonstrated in his opening remarks comparing his Government's performance with that of our Government. He could scarcely conceal the smile on his face as he quoted the figures, and I shall, I hope, demolish his case.

I am glad that we are having this debate because I have frequently spoken in the House, both as Secretary of State for Transport and, since I left office, as a Back Bencher, in favour of a major roads programme. I want to develop my case because the Government's actions are extremely dangerous for the country's future transport infrastructure.

I shall first set out the background that existed when I was Secretary of State for Transport and with which the right hon. Gentleman must now deal. As he knows, about 90 per cent. of all road traffic, both passenger and freight, consists of cars. I am all in favour of—and was myself determined to introduce—measures to change that balance, particularly for freight. I find it rather ironic that he is now claiming the credit for the current increase in rail freight, which is entirely due to the policies that I introduced in the Bill to privatise the railways, which his party completely opposed. I knew that the focus on the customer and the drive that the private sector produces would be the only way in which to achieve a switch of freight from road to rail. I am delighted that that strategy is working and that our policy achieved it.

I am in favour of as much switch as possible, but we must face the fact that, however much switch one achieves and however much one improves public transport, there will still be a substantial year-by-year growth in the use of roads by cars and lorries. We all know that many people must make essential journeys by car, especially in rural areas. Also, it is most people's aspiration to be more mobile. What is the first thing that young people want when they leave school and start to earn? About 80 per cent. want to own a car and to use it. We must face that fact as we develop transport policy.

There are two other background points. It has often occurred to me that one of the reasons why the climate is sometimes against road building and the car is that so many officials in Departments and national media commentators live and work in London. In London, the issues are entirely different because it has a good public transport network. In London, when we were in government, we spent much more on public transport than on roads. It was a different matter in rural areas, but I used to find it extraordinarily difficult to get the argument going about the needs of rural areas.

All Members of Parliament who represent rural areas know that public transport cannot replicate all the journeys that people want to make in rural areas. Therefore, a heavy emphasis must be placed on road investment in not just rural areas but many market towns

and others outside the metropolis. I have often felt that the national debate just does not mirror the real needs of people in rural areas. Any Secretary of State for Transport who travels around the country knows that the greatest representations are made on improvements to the road programme, such as bypasses, and so on. A Secretary of State for Transport ignores such representations at his peril.

Mr. Norman Baker (Lewes): As a former Minister, does the right hon. Gentleman agree with the conclusion of the Standing Advisory Committee on Trunk Road Assessment, which reported to his Government, that new road infrastructure generates journeys that otherwise would not be made?

Mr. MacGregor: That intervention was absolutely splendid, because it raised just the point that I was about to address. The Tories were not building any new roads. I stopped the last proposed new road—the additional proposal on the east coast as an alternative to the A1—because I did not think that it was necessary or desirable. It would have created what the hon. Gentleman suggested. There is a big distinction between building entirely new roads and substantial road schemes to widen and improve—not just maintain—the motorway and trunk road network, and bypasses.

Dr. George Turner: The right hon. Gentleman and I come from Norfolk, and he will know that the dualling of the A11 is still not complete after 30 years of waiting. Similarly, improvements to the A47 have been awaited throughout that period. Given what he has said, should not we have expected action and completion during the 18 years in which he was able to deliver?

Mr. MacGregor: The plain fact is that, when the Conservative Government came to power in 1979, no part of the A11 was dual carriageway. I was a Member then, and it used to take me four hours to travel from London to Norfolk. Now, the vast majority of the road is either motorway or dual carriageway, and my journey time has been halved. This Government will never implement the programme on the tiny bit left—the key part. I do not know what the hon. Gentleman is talking about. The Conservative Government made a huge improvement, but we shall not see any improvement from this Government. He knows that the major A47 Norwich southern bypass has hugely improved the position in Norfolk.

I must tell the hon. Member for North-West Norfolk (Dr. Turner)—I was going to make this point later—that 13 bypasses were built in my constituency while the Conservative Government were in office. *[Interruption.]* Most of them were not built while I was Secretary of State for Transport; I did not authorise any of them when I held that office. I worked very hard for them for my constituents outside that period in office. Two more such bypasses are needed, but they will never be built under this Government. I defend our record entirely—including in Norfolk. I am very glad that I gave way to the hon. Gentleman, because it enabled me to make a point which I hope everyone in Norfolk will recognise.

Mr. Anthony D. Wright (Great Yarmouth): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. MacGregor: No, I will not give way again, because I know that many hon. Members want to speak.

On new roads, it is important to recognise that the road projects that we are talking about, the expenditure on which has been so deeply slashed by the Government, are designed for improvement of the infrastructure, and include motorway widening schemes and bypasses. If one calls bypasses new roads, okay, those are new roads, but they are highly desired by everyone in the locality and are environmentally friendly.

I want to comment on the integrated transport programme. Integrated transport is a fine sounding phrase, but we actually promoted it during our period in office by aligning road and rail, aligning airports and so on. Much more alignment of bus and rail journeys is taking place as a result of privatisation than was ever achieved by central planning. That is evidenced by the fact that the White Paper recognises that no new road network is necessary—in other words, the road network that we established was the right one for an integrated transport planning policy.

The massive hole in the Government's integrated transport policy stems from the fact that they have devastated the road programme, thereby neglecting the one area of transport that takes 90 per cent. of the traffic. That is not what is meant by integrated transport policy. In my view, it is a disadvantageous approach to transport.

That brings me to the road programme generally. The Minister of Transport was far less than fair to my right hon. Friend the Member for South-West Norfolk (Mrs. Shephard); she repeated the figures for expenditure undertaken during the Conservative Administration: £48 billion on transport infrastructure, of which £26 billion was spent on roads. Given that 90 per cent. of traffic goes by road, the fact that just over half of our spending was devoted to roads shows that we did not have an undue bias towards them, but that we acknowledged the importance of expenditure on them.

The balance has now gone completely the other way; that is devastatingly serious.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. MacGregor: No, I will not give way.

In my last year as Secretary of State for Transport, we were spending just over £2 billion on the road programme—the Highways Agency programme. By 1998–99, that had reduced to £1.3 billion and it will reduce in the next three years, although road maintenance will increase. However, the increase in road maintenance in the next three years will bring back the relevant figures, in real terms, to precisely what I was spending on that work in 1993. I do not understand how the Minister of Transport can criticise us for neglecting road maintenance when he is claiming a great deal of credit for the increase that he is making, which will simply bring us straight back to where we were.

Mr. Prentice: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. MacGregor: No; I am sorry, but I will not give way. *[Interruption.]* Well, I will give way in a moment. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh."] All right; in fairness to my hon. Friends, I will not.

Therefore spending on road maintenance has not been substantially increased. Moreover, new road projects—bypasses, improvements to motorways and so on—

[Mr. MacGregor]

have been cut almost to nothing. Four hundred national road schemes were carried through in the period between 1979 and 1997—400 in 18 years. The Government are planning 37 schemes over seven years. That is the difference. It would take 70 years, under the Government's programme, to achieve what the Conservatives did. That is why the Minister was wrong in the comparisons that he drew.

The worrying aspect of all this is that the combination of all those factors will lead to increasing congestion on our roads and increasing uncompetitiveness, as well as a decline in road maintenance in local authority areas. That brings me to the subject of local authorities.

Mr. Prentice: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. MacGregor: No.

On detrunking, I support the Government. Their proposals to detrunk a substantial number of roads and pass them back to local authorities make sense. I often noticed that some national road schemes had less of a priority at local level than the local road scheme which failed to be included in that national programme. I therefore perfectly understand the principle of detrunking. However, it makes sense only if money goes with it, and I believe that there are only one or two new road projects in this year's transport settlement, the expenditure on which has almost reduced in real terms. Eighty schemes were requested—normal local authority schemes, not detrunking schemes. If one adds the detrunking schemes and examines the programme that the Government are offering, detrunking is a poisoned chalice for local authorities. No funding is going with the programme, so nothing will happen and all those road schemes will be frozen. The Government will try to blame the local authorities, but the fault will lie with the Government.

I shall say a word or two about DBFO—design, build, finance and operate—schemes and motorway tolling. I introduced the DBFOs and I am in favour of them. The Minister has just announced such a scheme—the A130—which I welcome, as I know the great need for it. However, I am worried about DBFOs. When I initiated the programme, I intended that in due course we would be able to introduce motorway tolling. The DBFO schemes to improve motorways would be financed by real income from motorway tolling. That is extremely important.

If the Government concentrate all new road schemes on DBFO and claim the credit—justifiably—for the private sector involvement, they will pile up enormous public expenditure later on the DBFO schemes. Those should be accounted for separately. Motorway tolling would provide genuine money to pay for such schemes, so there would be a genuine private finance initiative, genuinely costed and properly implemented. There is a serious danger if all future road schemes, or most of them, are done by DBFO. I hope that the Government will look to that.

I make no apology for having argued for motorway tolling. I issued a Green Paper proposing it, and I still think that it is the right way to improve our motorways. It gets revenue in to provide a better service. When the technology is available, which is the problem at present, the policy should be pursued. I regret that the Government are not putting enough initiative and push behind attempts to improve the technology. Congestion charging is entirely different and gives rise to many more problems than motorway tolling.

On the fuel duty escalator, I shall add one or two points to those that my right hon. Friend the Member for South-West Norfolk made. The environmental background to the introduction of the fuel duty escalator in 1993 has changed. There have been huge reductions in toxic emissions as a result of catalytic converters and other improvements in technology. Toxic emissions have fallen by 30 per cent. since 1993. That is a much more effective contribution to the global warming target than the fuel duty escalator will achieve.

Reducing toxic emissions acts directly on the issue. The fuel duty escalator has outlived its usefulness. It is producing tiny, if any, environmental benefits. All the revenue coming in from it is going not on environmental expenditure, but elsewhere. Let us admit that it is a means for the Chancellor to raise revenue for other purposes, and it does not achieve its objective.

Mr. Graham Stringer (Manchester, Blackley) *rose—*

Mr. MacGregor: No, I am not giving way.

I strongly support the Government in their endeavours to reduce toxic emissions and in the improvement of the technology of cars. I would happily endorse any programme to pull in polluting cars, impose heavy fines for lorries and so on. I believe that what the Chancellor introduced in a puny way could be developed further. The vehicle excise duty reduction on 13 types of car out of several hundred is another example of a flashy new scheme pulled out of the hat to look good, but which does not amount to much. I hope it will be built on, because it is the right way to tackle matters.

Dr. Reid: The scheme is a start.

Mr. MacGregor: A pretty modest start, if I may say so.

The fuel duty escalator is not the way to deal with the environmental issue, because it is causing more harm than the environmental benefits that it may produce. It is causing huge harm to rural areas, people on low incomes and those who depend on their car. People are coming to us in droves to complain about the Chancellor's Budget, as is the road haulage industry. It is time to end the fuel duty escalator.

My conclusion is simple. While the Government speak about an integrated transport policy, the country is seeing the results in practice and it does not like what it sees, as the recent BBC poll showed. The Chancellor talks of improving the nation's investment in infrastructure, but is destroying it by not putting anything like enough money into it. Anyone in business knows that one should be spending about 10 per cent. of the value of one's capital assets every year on their renewal, or certainly as much as depreciation. We have a capital asset here of £230 million, but we are spending practically nothing on maintaining and renewing it. Not only is that damaging the economy, but it is already clear that the electorate has tumbled to the fact that the Government's transport policy is failing the nation.

5.25 pm

Mrs. Diana Organ (Forest of Dean): There is now widespread consensus that the past road policy of simply building, or wishing to build, more and more roads was not sustainable, could never be the answer to traffic growth and congestion, and would not in itself provide efficient transportation for people, goods and services.

The Conservative Government's policy was dominated by deregulation, privatisation and a road building frenzy. The damaging consequences of that policy are starkly illustrated in rural areas such as the Forest of Dean.

First, the 1985 bus deregulation led to the decimation and fragmentation of bus public transport, so that by 1997 even the main market towns in the Forest of Dean were not connected to one another by a bus service. That forced many rural dwellers on low incomes to sacrifice much in order to maintain a car on the road. If they did not do that, they were at the mercy of and wholly dependent on a dwindling public transport network, or they ended up isolated.

The other strand of the previous Administration's policy was privatisation, which had an equally detrimental effect. In 1992, a short but strategically crucial section of road was privatised—the Severn bridge. In that deal, tolls were allowed to be increased greatly and could be collected one way only. That was carried out without consultation, without public representation from local communities and without a study or a consideration of the impact that that would have on regional traffic flows and movement.

The main impact was on the roads of the Forest of Dean. They have become rat runs for lorries avoiding the tolls. Any heavy goods vehicle travelling from the west midlands or east of Gloucester to south Wales looks to those roads as a rat run. A regular census shows that, between 1992 and 1998, there has been an increase of more than 10 per cent. in the number of heavy goods vehicles of 3.5 tonnes and over trying to avoid the tolls. That is an extra 100 vehicles a day. Roughly 40,000 extra vehicles a year go through village communities along the A48, A40 and A4136, and often parts of those roads are unsuitable to such traffic, which causes noise, damages buildings, affects the quality of life and threatens the safety of pedestrians.

The third part of the previous Conservative Government's predict and provide policy of more and more roads was equally threatening. There had been a proposal in the early 1990s to build a multi-million pound A40 extension from Gloucester westwards. That would have brought extra development to the river Severn floodplain, increasing the possibility of flood damage, and taking away many wonderful water meadows and sites of valuable flora. Fortunately, that scheme faced widespread opposition and, thankfully, was rejected.

This Government's integrated approach to transport has already shown real benefits and is a realistic way forward in the Forest of Dean. The integrated approach is inclusive. It consults, but realises that local communities can often solve their own transport problems and become effective.

Children in Berry Hill primary school looked at the problem that many of them had of travelling to and from school in cars because their parents were concerned about their safety. The children questioned each other about their journeys, plotted a route for a bus to take them to and from school, and then took the initiative, writing to bus companies to ask whether they would be interested in running a bus service. With a little funding from the local authority, the scheme went ahead. Now, that school has a bus service which the children say is enjoyable and a real social opportunity for them, and which has reduced early morning congestion.

The Government recognise that local solutions can often be valuable, and their policy of allowing local authorities to draw up local transport plans, setting out their proposals for the management, maintenance and development of local roads, works. My local authority, Gloucestershire, thinks that that is definitely a better approach. The plans not only must be sustainable, but must involve all local parties in their execution.

In October 1998 I carried out a constituency-wide consultation on the Government's transport White Paper. It was widely recognised that all community parties must be involved, as should the planning authority, which has a major role to play on transport issues. Where developments are sited, how big they are and their impact on traffic flows and transportation are crucial.

A legacy of housing's predict and provide days was a proposal to build 2,000 houses on green-field sites around the village settlements of Sedbury and Tutshill. That area is close to Chepstow, the M4 and the Severn bridge. The present Government's housing policy says that new housing must be sustainable, centred on economic centres and it must follow the sequential principle. Those criteria meant that the proposal was rejected, thankfully—principally because it was recognised that 2,000 new homes would generate a vast increase in commuter traffic. People would have moved out of the urban areas of Avon and south Wales to those new homes and, consequently, commuted daily by road to their jobs in those centres.

We have inherited a lot of failures in the Forest of Dean, but they are being addressed. The Labour Government have invested £50 million in rural transport and, in the Budget, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor announced a 20 per cent. increase in that spending—it will rise to more than £120 million over the next two years. That is a significant increase on previous levels and the rise in bus fuel duty rebate will also help.

The increase has already had a significant impact on rural public transport in the Forest of Dean, delivering 11 new bus services, and, for the first time, we have a Sunday service to Gloucester. It has also led to the appointment of a transport broker and co-ordinator who will consider how rural areas can develop the increasing numbers of innovative community transport and car-sharing schemes.

In addition, the announcement of a national half-price concessionary fare scheme for pensioners has been widely welcomed by the 29 per cent. of my constituents who qualify. I hope, as they do, that it can be delivered as soon as possible.

Instead of building more roads, the Government have changed the focus of road investment and their top priority is maintaining and managing existing roads and getting them to work better. Our major concern is safety, because 70 per cent. of fatal accidents occur on rural roads. Excessive speed is the main cause of a third of those accidents. In our surgeries every week we all hear the distressing tales that are brought to us by the relatives of victims of such accidents.

[Mrs. Diana Organ]

The A48 had a dreadful history of accidents. A route study of the road was undertaken because it was identified as atypical, due to the accident level. The Highways Agency made available £268,000 and a comprehensive package was introduced, including speed cameras, high-friction surfacing on the approaches to bridges, warning signs, gateway signs for villages, white lining to upgrade laning and the giving of directions and other traffic-calming measures.

The results of those measures have been phenomenal and very impressive. Accident and casualty statistics have come down, to 35 accidents and 50 casualties in 1998 against a high of 64 accidents in 1989 and 68 casualties in 1992. A similar programme has been outlined for the A40, in order to improve safety on that road. I hope that that programme reaps the same benefits.

This year's local transport capital settlement for Gloucestershire is the highest yet, with a large element of the £9.25 million going on improved maintenance on those important roads. There is a £2 million package for safety schemes, such as that for the A48. Although that allocation is generous, I must make my plea for the Government to look favourably on bids to improve the A4136, which is a prime access route to the heart of the forest and its industries. We were unsuccessful with our £11 million major scheme, and I understand why—it does not come within Government policy—but I hope that future bids from Gloucestershire for sections of that road to be upgraded, for the safety of road users and pedestrians alike, will be treated favourably.

The A48 and A40 are trunk roads that have been identified in the trunk roads review for possible detrunking. This is a complex and emotive issue, and there will need to be widespread consultations—which did not happen under the previous Government on the Severn bridge changes—on the implications of detrunking those routes and how that will affect the communities and the economy of the Forest of Dean, which rely heavily on manufacturing.

The county council was concerned that it would not obtain sufficient funding for maintenance should those roads be handed over to the local authority. It tells me that it has been seriously reassured by the discussions that it has had with the Government about the grants allocated for those roads. The officers tell me that they are happy about the funds moving across, which they say will meet their requirements. That offers us an opportunity to control and manage the heavy goods vehicles that are avoiding the Severn bridge tolls. By the imposition of weight restrictions, with exemptions for lorries accessing the Forest of Dean, we shall tackle another of the problems inherited from the previous Administration.

Transport problems will not be solved overnight: that takes time. This is a huge issue, but the Forest of Dean has already benefited from the Government's policies. They are making headway at a local level to improve transport for all the community.

5.36 pm

Mr. Norman Baker (Lewes): I welcome the opportunity to discuss roads and transport issues generally. I am pleased that the Tories have used their Opposition day for that purpose. It is pity that the debate is not longer. However, the Tories have blotted their copybook by the words they have chosen for their motion—which is brazen, to say the least. It is a year zero motion that pretends that nothing happened between 1979 and now, and that they have no responsibility for the transport system that we have today.

Our present transport infrastructure has been built up—or not built up—over the 18 years of a Conservative Government. If the Conservatives want to maximise their influence on transport issues, they should have a little more humility and recognise that they made mistakes when they were in government. There is no indication of that in their motion. It shows their usual arrogance—the arrogance that caused them to lose the last election.

An alternative Tory motion might have been, "That this House adopts a policy of collective amnesia in respect of the years 1979 to 1997, ignores the catastrophic failure of Tory transport policy during those years, and begs for the Tory party to be allowed to reinvent itself." That is what the motion says if we read between the lines. Incredulity is the word that describes the Tories' approach.

The Conservatives talk about congestion and pollution, which they seem to be concerned about in the motion. Between 1979 and 1997, motor vehicle traffic increased every year—cumulatively by a total of 75 per cent. There was a growth of traffic for each type of vehicle, but the largest increase was in cars, at 82 per cent. In 1979, when the Tories came to power, the mileage covered by cars in the United Kingdom was 200 billion km. In 1997, that figure had reached 370 billion km, which is almost twice as much, whereas the figures for bus and motorcycle usage dropped during that period.

It is clear that under the previous Government there was an increase in traffic, congestion and pollution. If the Tories want us to take their transport policies seriously, they must acknowledge that fact and start from a new base, not from the fictional base in the motion.

Mr. Gray: What about the Government's policies?

Mr. Baker: I shall come to the Government's policies in a moment, but we are discussing the Conservative motion. If the Tories think that I am going to let them get off scot-free, given their motion, they have another think coming.

The Tories could not build their way out of a crisis. The right hon. Member for South Norfolk (Mr. MacGregor) made a reasonable contribution based on his experience as a former Secretary of State for Transport. However, the fact of the matter is that the Tories had a substantial road-building programme; I am happy to acknowledge that. Capital expenditure on roads was more than £50 billion between 1979 and 1997. Between 1986 and 1996, almost 1,700 km of motorway and trunk roads were completed. As the 1989 White Paper "Roads to Prosperity" stated, that was the biggest road-building programme since the Romans. Some of them were not built, as we have heard, but a considerable amount was undertaken and completed. But what has been the result of that road-building programme? It has been more congestion, more pollution and more transport problems.

We cannot build our way out of transport problems. There is no point in going on about which bypasses are not here and which trunk roads are not there; we cannot

solve transport problems by building more and more roads. I thought that all hon. Members had learned that lesson, but it seems that the Conservatives have unlearned it.

Before Conservative Members complain about the effect of the Budget on the motorist, they should bear in mind that between 1974 and 1996, according to Government figures—the last Government's figures, in fact—the real cost of motoring fell by 3.5 per cent. Over the same period, rail fares rose in real terms by 74.8 per cent. During those Tory years—and, indeed, the years of Harold Wilson and Jim Callaghan—bus fares rose by 57.5 per cent. We must deal with the fundamental flaws in our transport system. Building more and more roads is an antiquated 1950s solution, which I hope the Conservatives will now reject because it simply will not work.

In an earlier intervention, I referred to the report of the Standing Advisory Committee on Trunk Road Assessment. That report demonstrated beyond doubt that building more and more roads and creating more and more road space—that includes the widening of roads, as well as the building of new roads—leads to an increase in the number of journeys that are made. People are now commuting from Reigate to Watford; they would never have done so before the M25 was built. Some hon. Members may see that as an example of freedom, but I see it merely as the undertaking of an unnecessary journey. It is a great pity that so many journeys are now made by road that were not made by road previously.

Mr. Jenkin: Is the hon. Gentleman seriously suggesting that the M25 should not have been built?

Mr. Baker: I am suggesting that its creation has led to a huge increase in the number of vehicle movements. Before it was built, I used to travel along roads close to the hon. Gentleman's constituency, I think. I used to use the A128. Progress was slow—there were traffic jams—but the number of vehicle movements increased dramatically as soon as the M25 was built.

I shall now deal with road fuel duties. We have heard from numerous speakers about the escalator introduced by the Conservative Government. When the Conservatives are cooing to the Automobile Association about how much they sympathise with it, they should remember that between 1992–93 and 1996–97 the revenue from all duty and value-added tax on road fuel was £80 billion. During the same period, only £16.1 billion was spent on public transport. *[Interruption.]* If the Conservatives want to blame the Government—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael J. Martin): Order. Some hon. Members are interrupting the hon. Gentleman's speech, which is not allowed.

Mr. Baker: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for defending me so stoutly.

The Conservatives appear to be arguing that the present Government are taxing motorists unfairly, and using the money for other purposes. I must tell them that they did the same when they were in government. We are not allowed to use the word "hypocritical"—I believe that it is unparliamentary—but what they did then is significantly at variance with what they are saying now.

Mr. Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham): Does the hon. Gentleman not realise—I am thinking particularly of diesel fuel duty—that by raising the escalator to such a level, and so many times, the Government are simply replacing the fumes from British lorries with fumes from Belgian, French and German lorries? There is no environmental gain whatever.

Mr. Baker: I accept that there is a problem with the fuel duty escalator as it relates to the road haulage industry. I have met Steve Norris to discuss that very issue. I think that the Government should concentrate on increasing European Union levels rather than on reducing them here, but I agree that there is a problem that must be dealt with.

Although we are debating a Conservative motion, let us waste no more time on the Conservatives. Theirs has been a catastrophic catalogue of failure—a lamentable indictment of their hopelessly ineffective and inappropriate dogma over 18 years—but let us now leave them to one side. Let us leave their great car economy—the Great Britain snarl-up; let us leave the biggest road-building programme since the Romans—the biggest traffic jam of all time—and consider the Government's roads policy.

I welcome the fact that the Government produced a White Paper on transport, and that it contained radical and good ideas. Ministers and hon. Members will appreciate that I am not averse to criticising the Government when they get it wrong, but the fact is that the Government produced a good White Paper on transport. The trouble is that not much action has followed it. The jury is still out on whether the Government will deliver everything that they said in the White Paper that they wanted to do.

Part of the problem has been that, although there has been some very good thinking in the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, its thinking has not been matched by support from elsewhere in Government. "Blair and Brown on the line"—perhaps the wrong type of Chancellor—has been offered as an excuse for delaying action in changing the Government's transport policy from road to rail.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. A trend seems to be emerging in some speeches, which I might be able to stop now. References to other hon. Members should include their constituency name or their title. Perhaps "the Prime Minister" or "the Chancellor of the Exchequer", for example, would be better terms of reference in the Chamber.

Mr. Baker: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I entirely agree with you, and apologise for making those references.

I shall be happy with the Government when they have introduced the Strategic Rail Authority. The Deputy Prime Minister—for all his commitment, and that of his Ministers, which I do not doubt—has, so far, not been able to secure parliamentary time for introduction of legislation on that authority, for which there is no substitute. Shouting at train operating companies is not a substitute for proper legislation on a strategic rail authority.

We are also still unclear about the powers of Railtrack. We still do not know what Alastair Morton will be doing, or what investment will be made in rail transport. If the Government are to turn their words into positive action, we will have to have from them some definite answers and clear action.

[Mr. Baker]

I acknowledge that the Budget contained some positive measures, such as the very long overdue one ending company car abuse. I was very pleased to see that. I was pleased also that the Budget contained money for rural buses.

The Budget made a start on changing vehicle excise duty. However, I agree with the right hon. Member for South Norfolk that that will go only a very short way. It is no use saying that the provision was only a first step—why not take all the steps in one go? Only 9 per cent. of cars now on the road are 1100 cc or smaller. Therefore, only one in 11 cars will benefit from the Government's VED changes. Moreover, only 5 per cent. of 1998 new car registrations were 1100 cc or smaller. Therefore, only one in 20 of those cars will benefit from the change.

Mr. David Chaytor (Bury, North): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the real significance of the VED changes is not the single change this year, on cars below 1100 cc, but the announcement that, next year, a completely variable VED system will be introduced? Is he aware that the new VED system has been delayed because of an argument about the best way of measuring—by engine size or emissions—a variable VED system? The Government have accepted the research and come out in favour of measuring emissions. That is why it has taken so long. As I said, the real improvement will be made next year, when the fully variable VED system is introduced.

Mr. Baker: I should like to think that the hon. Gentleman is right. However, the Government have been in power for almost two years, and I should have thought that—not just in this Budget, but in the previous one—they could have analysed the matter and proposed a proper solution. I am always suspicious of Governments who embark on reviews and consultations, as those are often used as an excuse for inaction. Nevertheless, I hope that he is right, and that we shall have some action on the matter in the next Budget.

My greatest criticism so far of the Government's transport policy is on road traffic reduction. When in opposition, many Labour Members—including the Minister for Transport in London, who is in the Chamber—were committed to real reductions in road traffic levels. There was a recognition that, for environmental, health and social reasons, we could not continue increasing the number of vehicles and vehicle miles driven on our roads.

The intellectual argument on the need to stop the increase has been won. Hundreds of Labour and other Members signed up to road traffic reduction. At the end of the previous Parliament, my hon. Friend the Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) promoted his Road Traffic Reduction Bill. Subsequently, the hon. Member for Ceredigion promoted his Road Traffic Reduction (National Targets) Bill. At the start of this Parliament, the Government were committed to road traffic reduction, but that has changed. In a written answer that I received from the Minister for Transport in London on 3 November last year, the policy changed to:

"we need to reduce the rate of road traffic growth."

I am afraid that that is the Conservative policy with life breathed back into it by the new Government. In layman's terms, it means that the Government are going to deal with congestion by allowing more cars on the road doing more mileage. That is a wrong policy.

Further on in the written answer, the Minister said:

"we want to see an absolute reduction in traffic in those places and streets where the greatest environmental damage is done."—[*Official Report*, 3 November 1998; Vol. 318, c. *458*.]

The implication is that traffic levels may go down in places such as Chester, Bath or York, but overall levels of road traffic in this country will go up. That is a failed, unsustainable policy that the Government must correct. The parliamentary answers that I have received from the Minister and her colleagues in recent days have been opaque, so I should like her to tell us clearly the projections for road traffic growth during this Parliament. What is the Government's aim? Which areas will have actual reductions in traffic levels? What will the overall effect be?

Another more recent written answer on 12 January said:

"Using the National Road Traffic Forecast model it is estimated that with these policies"—

set out in the previous paragraph—

"in place traffic would grow by 37 per cent. by 2010 relative to 1990 vehicle kilometre levels."—[*Official Report*, 12 January 1999; Vol. 323, c. *189*.]

That is almost identical to the previous Government's figures for growth if no action was taken. What is the Government's policy on road traffic reduction? Will the Minister guarantee that by the end of this Parliament the amount of traffic on our roads will be lower than at the moment? If she will not, she should withdraw her name from the letters and motions that she signed in the previous Parliament and accept that she was wrong. I hope that she does not have to do that. I hope that I have misunderstood the policy and there will be an absolute reduction in road traffic during this Parliament. I look forward to hearing from her on that.

To sum up, the Conservatives have a bit of a cheek in tabling the motion. They undermine their case with their words. The Government have published a White Paper, but they have not yet enacted the measures in it. We want some action before the end of this Parliament.

5.52 pm

Mrs. Christine Butler (Castle Point): I sincerely thank my right hon. Friend the Minister of Transport for his efforts in securing the A130 private finance initiative bid, worth £92 million for Essex. Many hon. Members, on both sides of the House, will welcome that. If I had not heard that announcement today, I would have been asking for it. My right hon. Friend's decision is right. It is the right answer to the high rate of accidents, the crushing congestion and the unremitting costs to travellers and the economy of south Essex caused by a road that amounts to nothing less than a blockade at times.

South-east Essex is heavily populated, with almost a third of a million people in 40 square miles. Essex people are some of the most enterprising in the country, but without that important road scheme our local economy could stagnate. Castle Point, Southend, Rochford and Rayleigh are aware of the problems and are getting together in a sub-regional approach to explain what we need to keep business thriving and to steer a course towards success in the region.

Road safety has not been mentioned enough in the debate. My hon. Friend the Member for Forest of Dean (Mrs. Organ) mentioned it, but it is worth returning to the subject. I could weep at the toll that the present A130 is having on families in Essex, many of whom are from my constituency. Any level of personal injury from road traffic accidents is unacceptable, but this road has a terrible record. The jams, bunch-ups and pile-ups all point to one solution: the scheme that my right hon. Friend the Minister has announced this evening. Some sections of the route are so narrow that one tractor might cause tailbacks for miles in the morning. My hon. Friend the Member for Braintree (Mr. Hurst), who is sitting next to me, has probably experienced that many times on the way to his constituency. My right hon. Friend the Minister of Transport has listened to the arguments, and I thank him for throwing a lifeline to south Essex.

Other hon. Members want to speak, so I will not say all that I intended to say. However, I wish to refer to sustainability. The word trips easily off the tongue, but it is an important word. For the first time, we have a genuine attempt, through joined-up thinking across all Departments, to try to deliver sustainability. Those attempts should not be sneered at. We have hardly begun, and there is more to follow in legislation.

We cannot go on deciding where houses go, where major transportation corridors might be, where inward investment must locate and where jobs are created without considering all of them in parallel. Without such planning—and the tough decisions that will follow—we will get nowhere. That is a message that we have taken on board. We will deal with it in the regional plans after 1 April, when the regional development agencies start to work with the regional chambers to deliver sustainability, along with increases in GDP per capita.

To deliver a sustainable economy with more investment and more jobs—along with sustainability in the environment—is not easy. That is why it has not even been attempted before. Now it is being attempted. We should stop the snide remarks and the party politics and give credit to the Government for what they have done so far, and for the measures that we will take in the not-too-distant future.

5.58 pm

Mr. Peter Luff (Mid-Worcestershire): In approaching the debate, I was not sure what tone of voice to adopt—whether it should be sadness or anger. In the hope of winning the sympathy of the Minister for something that I will say later in my speech—a matter with which she is well familiar—I will adopt the tone of sadness, which I shall try to combine with honesty and brevity.

The brevity is made possible by the excellent speech of my right hon. Friend the Member for South Norfolk (Mr. MacGregor), who said many of the things that I would have wished to say. The honesty is forced upon me by the admission that I was never comfortable with the fuel duty escalator, and I am certainly not at all comfortable with its increase and continuance under this Government. A question of straw and the camel's back comes to mind. When the back is breaking, it is time to take the straw off.

Road haulage is a big employer in my constituency. I cannot pretend that that is always particularly welcome, because of the severe environmental impact that it has on many villages in the vale of Evesham. However, it is there, it is inevitable, it is not going away and it creates many jobs.

The modern economy is dependent on road haulage, as has been generally accepted in what has been a constructive debate. I had a visit from a haulier at my constituency surgery on Saturday, who said that it would be a good idea to organise a week-long strike of the road haulage industry—if it could be guaranteed that it would be total. For the first couple of days, the British people would say that it was wonderful that the roads were empty; on days three and four, as the supermarket shelves started to empty, they would feel rather differently; by the end of the week, they would be crying for the lorries to get back on the roads. I think that that haulier was right.

That operator told me that he is spending £500 a lorry to increase the size of the tanks, so that he will only ever have to fill up in France. He reckons that he will recoup the cost of the new tanks within two and a half journeys to and from the continent. The Chancellor should think about that. I was in Ulster last week, talking to hauliers and taxi drivers. The land border and the devaluation of the euro make the problem even worse there. I imagine that hardly any petrol or diesel is sold in Northern Ireland these days.

When a Government have got something wrong, there is no shame in admitting it. It is time for the Chancellor to admit that he has got it wrong and to reverse the changes. The Minister's clever statistics in his opening speech do not bear critical scrutiny, and the fact is that there is now a huge and unjustifiable differential.

I hope that the Government will be sympathetic to intervention in local problems where road haulage is an environmental issue, as in my constituency. I have written this week to the Deputy Prime Minister, asking him to intervene in my patch where there is a bad problem with road haulage, as three counties meet at one point and there is no effective integration. If the Government's integrated transport strategy is to mean anything at all, it should mean intervening in such situations.

Conservative Members have made the point—Labour Members may also have done so, but if so, I missed it—that the increase in petrol duties and the token reduction in vehicle excise duties will have a devastating impact on poorer motorists in rural areas.

Mr. Chaytor: Has the hon. Gentleman seen the latest research, available in the Library, by Mr. Skinner and Mr. Fergusson of the Institute of European Environmental Policy, which exhaustively analyses the impact of different policies on different categories of motorist? It proves fairly conclusively that the Government's policy of reducing the fixed costs and increasing the variable costs helps poorer motorists. I suggest that he looks at the research before making—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Luff: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I happen to agree with the spirit of what the hon. Gentleman said. I find it a little difficult to argue with the principle of reducing the fixed costs and increasing the variable costs, but it must be done in a much more meaningful way. The token reduction in vehicle excise duty will have no impact

[Mr. Luff]

at all on my poorer constituents. They cannot afford to change down to smaller cars, because of the capital costs involved.

There is a direct financial impact on my rural constituents, who have no realistic hope of a comprehensive bus service ever being restored to their villages, even if the odd improvements here and there are welcome. Those people depend on their cars for getting to the doctor, to work or to school, and for doing their shopping. The Government's policies are having a disproportionate effect on my poorer constituents, especially in areas such as the Vale of Evesham, where there is no real prospect of any significant improvement in public transport.

Those people have a democratic right to freedom of movement. At the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st, the freedom of mobility is as important as the freedom of speech was to previous generations. As democrats, we should respect that principle.

The Minister talked about the increase in the budget for repairs and maintenance on trunk roads, and my right hon. Friend the Member for South-West Norfolk largely demolished his argument. At county council level, the budget for road repair and maintenance has been squeezed out of sight, and especially in rural shires. I do not know what the standard spending assessment for road maintenance in Worcestershire is, but it is made irrelevant by the disgracefully low SSA for social services.

Everything that should be available for other services is poured into social services. That must be right, because the protection of vulnerable people by social services departments should be a priority in any civilised society, but the result is that the potholes in Worcestershire are becoming a disgrace, the roads are becoming dangerous and maintenance is falling alarmingly behind schedule. To be fair to the Minister, there is not much that she can do about that, because the problem is the Government's underfunding of social services in rural shires.

I share my right hon. Friend's concern about detrunking. Given the squeeze on county council finances, there is a real risk that detrunking will impose a huge and unaffordable burden on county councils, which will then get the blame for not maintaining the roads effectively. To be fair, I should say that the Highways Agency is doing a good job bringing the roads up to scratch, prior to detrunking, and I wish to put on record my deep gratitude to the agency and the Government for what has been done to the A449 between Worcester and Kidderminster, which will make what was a killer road much safer.

I am slightly less grateful for the Government's failure to act in the matter of the Wyre Piddle bypass, and that also raises important wider points. I am glad to see a smile on the Minister's lips because we have talked about that bypass on many occasions. It is also important because it would bypass the town of Pershore in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for West Worcestershire (Sir M. Spicer). It was next in the queue. Worcestershire has done well on bypasses, because we have the Broadway, Worcester Western, Norton-Lenchwick and Evesham bypasses. They have all been built without the significant traffic generation consequences that the Liberals fear, and they have provided a genuinely better environment for the people of those towns.

The Wyre Piddle bypass has been turned down twice by this Government, and they now propose a non-roads solution. I understand that there are non-roads solutions to urban traffic problems, but there are no non-roads solutions to rural bypasses. A community such as Wyre Piddle faces problems caused by bottlenecks and heavy lorries going to the landfill sites. Of course, the Government may have heard that I have nearly been involved in two accidents with lorries in Wyre Piddle, but they do not want the road built because they hope for a by-election in Mid-Worcestershire. However, they would get a shock if that were to happen. I ask the Minister to reconsider that decision on a road with no adverse environmental consequences. Not a single tree would be cut down for that road.

I am very disappointed by a response I received yesterday from Ministers. They said that they would not visit Wyre Piddle to observe the situation, and the ground they gave for that decision was extraordinary:

"Any visit in advance of that consideration"—

of the case in this year's local transport plan bid—

"would be premature."—[*Official Report*, 17 March 1999; Vol. 327, c. 669.]

When else are they to visit except before they make a decision? After a decision is made, it is clearly too late. The Anchor in Wyre Piddle is a fine pub: I hope that I can have a drink with the Minister there and that we can discuss the problem. She is a reasonable woman, and I am sure that she will be able to see the case for the road.

In conclusion, I wish to raise a point of principle. We in Worcestershire want two bypasses: Bordersley and Wyre Piddle. They could both be paid for out of a fraction of the increase in fuel duty that will be paid by Worcestershire motorists over the next three years. If the Government hypothecate only a tiny bit of that increase in revenue, they will make the lives of dwellers in rural England far better.

6.8 pm

Ms Rosie Winterton (Doncaster, Central): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in the debate. It is important to get roads policy right, not only for the sake of our economy—many right hon. and hon. Members have referred to 90 per cent. of all journeys being made by road—but because of the need for policies that will reduce congestion. Congestion damages not only business, but the environment.

I am a member of the RAC Foundation's public policy committee, and I am sure that my right hon. and hon. Friends will be pleased to learn that the RAC welcomed the "New Deal for Transport" White Paper, and said that it represented a good change in approach from the predict and provide model of the previous Government, under whose stewardship road and bridge maintenance deteriorated alarmingly. The new approach of improving management of the trunk road network, and investing in road maintenance so that maximum use of the network can be made, is the key to improving the lives of motorists, as the hon. Member for Lewes (Mr. Baker) pointed out, although he is no longer in his place.

Motorists have also welcomed the radical change of approach in hypothecating revenue from road pricing to improve public transport, and the Government's strong commitment to improving urban and rural public transport

so that there is a viable alternative to car journeys. As my hon. Friends have pointed out, local transport plans have a vital role to play in achieving the Government's integrated transport plan.

The Government's priority of maintaining existing roads and bridges must be reflected at local authority level. It is difficult to overestimate the importance of routine planned maintenance of roads. Maintenance is not just about improving road safety for car users; it can improve the quality of life for those living near roads and it can reduce noise pollution. A good road surface is important for pedestrians, cyclists and motor cyclists.

When he was not referring to pubs in Wyre Piddle, the hon. Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Luff) referred to the problems created by potholes. I very much agree with what he said. A war on potholes would be welcome, if the Minister could declare one.

The general situation is not helped by the constant digging up of roads by public utilities so that pipes can be mended or cables laid. Local authorities seem unable to get to grips with doing anything about that problem, and my right hon. Friend the Minister of Transport's statement provided good news for motorists in the form of a Bill on public streetworks. Government support for that will be very welcome.

Mr. Owen Paterson (North Shropshire): Before the hon. Lady leaves the subject of local government and roads, would she reflect on a national study by the County Surveyors Society, which indicated that £5.25 billion must be spent if local authority roads are to be brought up to the standard set out in the local authority code of practice?

Ms Winterton: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for calling attention to the previous Government's failure to invest in roads. That failure is also reflected in a parliamentary briefing from the Automobile Association. It notes that the backlog in roads maintenance will cost £5 billion, which is plainly the result of the actions of the Conservative Government.

It is important that the 23 million motorists in the United Kingdom should be represented on the forthcoming commission for integrated transport. I should be grateful if the Minister could tell me when the commission's membership is likely to be announced, and if she could give us an assurance that road users will be properly represented.

My right hon. Friend the Minister of Transport stressed how important integration is. There is an excellent example in Doncaster of how the Government are integrating transport through the funding of support for the North Bridge road project and the building of a new transport interchange. The existing road takes more than 60,000 vehicles a day. Queues over the bridge are horrendous during rush hour, and pollution levels rise. Access to the railway station is difficult and unreliable. Communities outside the town centre become isolated because of access problems.

The project will reduce congestion, and it will let the council introduce a quality bus corridor which will give buses priority over other vehicles, and allow for segregated facilities for cyclists and pedestrians. It is an excellent example of how roads can be used to promote integrated transport. It brings together access to rail-based transport, major improvements to public transport and improvements for general traffic. All that will assist in the economic regeneration of Doncaster, while also reducing pollution. It is a good example of joined-up Government thinking.

Along with the Doncaster interchange—a partnership between Government, the local authority and the private sector—that North Bridge road project will make it easier for people who want to change from one mode of transport to another to do so. That is integrated transport at its best and it is welcomed in my constituency.

The Conservative Government's road policy failed the people of Doncaster; in 1994, funding for the North Bridge relief road project was withdrawn by the Tories after £7.5 million of public money had been spent to put the scheme together. The Labour Government are making integrated sustainable transport a reality; that is good news not only for the motorist, but for cyclists, motor cyclists and pedestrians. I assure my right hon. and hon. Friends that my constituents and I already see the results of that new approach, which we warmly welcome. I congratulate the Government on taking swift action to put right the dismal record of the previous Conservative Government.

6.16 pm

Mr. James Gray (North Wiltshire): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Doncaster, Central (Ms Winterton), although that name does not have the same resonance and romance as "the hon. Member for Wyre Piddle"—my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Luff), who spoke before her and whose well-argued speech we all greatly enjoyed.

Labour's pre-election pledge on transport promised "immediate benefits" to the travelling public. I cannot remember whether it was one of their early pledges or a general pledge, but nothing could be clearer than "immediate benefits". However, if we are to believe the representatives of the AA, with whom a number of hon. Members on both sides of the House had lunch today, the travelling public are bitterly disappointed by the fact that they have seen no benefits of any kind—immediate or otherwise. Before the Budget, the level of satisfaction with the Government on transport was about 15 per cent.—the worst of all their satisfaction ratings. Since the Budget, public satisfaction with Labour's transport policies has gone off the Richter scale; some say that it is about 3 per cent., others that there is zero satisfaction among the travelling public.

It is an absolute disgrace; the Government have had two years to do something and they have done nothing. I say "nothing", but the speech of the hon. Member for Doncaster, Central was a classic example of what the Government have done; they love expressions such as "joined-up Government" and "integrated transport White Paper". However, let us consider the White Paper and what it promised. Where is the strategic rail authorities Bill? Where is the tonnage tax promised by the Minister when she gave evidence recently to the Transport Sub-Committee? She gave a strong indication that a tonnage tax would be introduced. Where is it? Nowhere.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Ms Glenda Jackson): The hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well that what he has just told the House bears no relation to what I said to the Transport Sub-Committee. I ask him to withdraw those remarks.

Mr. Gray: We seem to have touched a raw nerve. If what I said bore no relation to the hon. Lady's evidence to the Sub-Committee, I would happily withdraw it and apologise. However, my clear impression and—I think—that of other members of the Sub-Committee who are in the Chamber of the hon. Lady's evidence was that she and her colleagues in the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions were passionately in favour of the tonnage tax, that she hoped that it would be included in the forthcoming Budget and that she would be extremely disappointed if it were not. That is all on record.

Ms Jackson: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. George Stevenson (Stoke-on-Trent, South): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Gray: If I may, I should prefer to give way to the hon. Gentleman, who is one of my colleagues on the Sub-Committee.

Mr. Stevenson: I fear that I must tell the hon. Gentleman that his recollection is incorrect. Although there was a significant amount of debate and questioning on the tonnage tax—which, by the way, relates to shipping, not to roads—my hon. Friend the Minister gave no such commitment as the hon. Gentleman suggests.

Mr. Gray: I accept that; there was no firm commitment, merely a clear impression. Under instruction from my Whips, I shall take no further interventions on that point, but we can read the record of the proceedings of the Sub-Committee and of today's debate.

There is huge disappointment among the travelling public about all Labour's transport policies. Those policies have amounted to nothing: all mouth and no trousers, like so many of Labour's other policies. As a result of last week's Budget, the Government have hit rock bottom in public perception of their record on motoring. The Government's aim seems to be to tax the private motorist off the road. Currently, private motorists throughout the nation pay about £1,000 a year in taxes on petrol and car ownership. That figure includes the towns. In rural areas, it is twice that amount: people pay £2,000 to £3,000 a year to run their cars. In rural areas such as my constituency, most families—even the poorest—have two cars. So we are talking about motoring expenses of £4,000 or £5,000 from very small incomes.

The Government have put up petrol prices by an extraordinary 6 per cent., and apparently the escalator will continue. The Government make great play of the fact that a Conservative Government introduced the escalator—and they are right. However, when people ride an escalator at a department store or an hotel, they get off when they get to their destination. Now that United Kingdom petrol prices are more expensive than those of any other country in the world, I suggest that we have got where we are going. We are very close to achieving our Kyoto targets. We have achieved 10 per cent. of our 12.5 per cent. target and will easily attain the full 12.5 per cent. through changes in energy generation.

The Government also propose congestion and parking charges, both of which would do nothing but hammer the private motorist. They are revenue-raising proposals and have nothing to do with the environment. It is significant that, having given his imprimatur to the proposals as environmental taxes, the Deputy Prime Minister was then packed off to the Maldives for a bit of shark fishing so that he could not comment during the Budget process. The truth is that they are not environmental taxes: they will not reduce car use, help with congestion or cut pollution levels. The proposals are aimed simply at raising a large amount of revenue, and it is important for the Government to come clean and admit that.

Worst of all is the tax on lorries. Earlier in the debate, my hon. Friend the Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley) challenged the Minister of Transport to disclose how much tax would be paid on a 1,000-litre tank of petrol. It will now cost £644 to fill that tank in the United Kingdom, but £340 in Belgium. The vehicle excise duty for 38-tonne, five-axle lorries has increased from £3,310 to £5,750 in Britain. The comparative figure in France is £269. That is an outrageous increase.

The Government are determined to tax the private motorist off the road and the lorry driver off to the continent. It is a disgrace and, like the rest of the Government's transport policies, amounts to nothing. The Government are all talk and no trousers, except when it comes to taxing the motorist into the ground.

6.22 pm

Mr. David Chaytor (Bury, North): I welcome the progress that the Government have made on roads policy over the past two years. It is fair to say that the political landscape has been transformed in all aspects of transport policy.

As time is short, I shall make three brief points. The first concerns traffic reduction. The hon. Member for Lewes (Mr. Baker) was the only hon. Member to refer to the report of the Standing Advisory Committee on Trunk Road Assessment, which was produced in the early 1990s when the right hon. Member for South Norfolk (Mr. MacGregor) was in office. That report concluded that new roads do not reduce congestion but, as the right hon. Gentleman said, its real significance was in signalling an end, once and for all, to the predict and provide model.

The report found that it is impossible, on this small island with a population of 56 million people, for all those people to exercise their right to use a motor car as and when they see fit because the freedom they wish to exercise is impossible to achieve. The more people believe that they can simply drive wherever they want, whenever they want, the less likely their chance of doing so because the motorways will seize up. That point is central to the Government's transport and roads policy. We cannot assume that we can continue to exercise our personal freedom indefinitely. We all have a responsibility to understand that point and to take action.

My right hon. Friend the Minister of Transport referred to a remark made by the right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer) about the hypocrisy in the

Conservative party of those who argue that, on the one hand, they support its policy, and that of the Government, of reducing carbon dioxide emissions to meet the Kyoto targets, but that on the other hand, they oppose the fuel duty escalator and other restrictions on private motoring.

I would not mind if Tory Members said that they were opposed to the Kyoto protocol and they supported people's right to drive their cars whenever they want. That, at least, would be consistent. It is not intellectually consistent for them to say that they support environmental measures and are all in favour of cutting carbon dioxide emissions, but that they want to do nothing about that in their roads policy. That goes further than hypocrisy; it is schizophrenia. The division in the Conservative party between those who profess to support the environment and those who are simply mouthpieces for the road haulage lobby is growing by the day. It is equally as great as the Conservatives' divisions on Europe, and sooner or later, it will cause an equally serious crisis in the party.

My second point concerns my constituency. If I may, I will tell a brief story. Thirty years ago, a railway line connected Bury to the smaller towns to the north and to the Rossendale valley even further to the north. Thanks to Lord Beeching, that line was closed, and a few years later, a large motorway, the M66, was constructed. After that, areas of land adjacent to the motorway were developed for housing. Thousands of new houses were constructed, and many of them attracted two-car families. Shortly after its construction, therefore, the M66 became clogged up with traffic. What an indictment of our transport policy it is that over 30 years, we shut down the railway system, built roads, put new houses next to them and clogged them up with cars. The people who wanted to get out to work in the conurbation further to the south were simply unable to do so.

My final point concerns the fuel duty escalator. I referred in an earlier intervention to the recent research available in the Library which proves conclusively that the fuel duty escalator is fair, effective and workable. It proves conclusively that it does not damage the interests of low-income households in rural areas, because the lowest-income households do not have cars. It proves conclusively that the policy shifts the balance of taxation from those who can least afford to pay to those who can well afford to pay.

6.27 pm

Mr. David Faber (Westbury): I am grateful for the opportunity to make a brief contribution late in this debate, not least because it saves me from having to instigate, at a later stage, an Adjournment debate on a road in my constituency.

First, I strongly associate myself with the earlier remarks of my right hon. and hon. Friends on the previous Conservative Government's record on building bypasses and the effects of this Government's policies on the road haulage industry. I am proud to have successful members of that industry in my constituency, one of whom I spoke to this morning, when he described the Government's current Budget plans for the industry as idiotic.

My colleagues have referred also to the slashing of the roads budget. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Luff) that the Government have misunderstood the problems of people in rural areas, especially poorer areas, and their dependency on their car to take their children to school, go to work and do the weekly shop.

In his opening speech, the Minister of Transport said that he hoped that hon. Members who had individual constituency cases would write to him rather than raising them in the debate. I am happy to say that hon. Members on both sides of the House have ignored his strictures. They were right to do so if, like me, they have been trying to contact Ministers for the past six months by post, through speeches in the House or by invitations to the constituency. I know what a forlorn hope that can be.

I make no apology for mentioning a road in my constituency that illustrates the grave problems that the Government will face on detrunking. In July last year, the Government issued their paper, "A New Deal for Trunk Roads in England", which, referring to the south-west, said:

> "A number of smaller scale but badly needed measures are under way or planned in the South West which address safety or capacity problems at particular points on the trunk road network. They will proceed regardless of the outcome of studies affecting the roads."

The A36, which runs through my constituency, is a main regional road. It runs from Southampton on the south coast to join the A46 at Bath, and on into Wales and the midlands. It is a vital inter-regional link which carries huge amounts of heavy traffic. I am especially concerned with one small link: the Codford to Heytesbury bypass, which is considered by local police to be the most dangerous part of the A36.

On several occasions under the previous Government, I took representatives from local parish councils to see the Minister of Transport's predecessor, John Watts. By the general election, it had been agreed that a design, build, finance and operate project would go ahead, and it was almost certainly at the top of the council's priorities. Designs had been submitted and bids were prepared, but in July came the bombshell that this main regional route was to be detrunked, and that not only would the scheme be cancelled, but the road would no longer be central Government's responsibility.

The width of the small link is the same as it was when it was built as a turnpike in the 19th century. The narrowness causes frequent blockages, and the junctions and bends are lethal. One junction on the brow of a hill is a constant source of accidents, but the most dangerous stretch is the turning out of the village of Upton Lovell—a blind bend that the police acknowledge is the most dangerous on the road between Southampton and Bath, and which I, like the locals, refuse to use. We all prefer to drive several miles through other villages in order to gain access to the main road.

I am sorry to say that the stretch of road has been the scene of tragic accidents. In 1991, 16-year-old Matthew Armes was killed when he was hit by a car while sitting on his bicycle outside his front door. I have stood with his mother at the very spot where he sadly died. A second cyclist, Mr. Terry, was killed on the same stretch of road in the same year. A year later, there were three accidents in a fortnight just near the spot where Matthew died. This year, there has already been one fatal accident on that stretch of road. Two days before that, a child was critically injured in a crash at the junction on the brow of the hill to which I referred.

All this may sound like a purely local issue, but I make no apology for raising it because road safety and the wider issue of detrunking is important. Local people are horrified that, by detrunking the road, the Government are

[Mr. David Faber]

effectively washing their hands of the problem. Worse still, although county councils have always been compensated for taking responsibility for roads following detrunking, Wiltshire county council has been told informally that there is to be no compensation.

The hon. Member for Forest of Dean (Mrs. Organ) made great play of how her county council was happy with its negotiations with central Government, yet Wiltshire county council has still not been told whether the road is to be detrunked, when it is to be detrunked and whether there will be any compensation. The Under-Secretary is shrugging her shoulders.

Ms Glenda Jackson: I do not understand what the hon. Gentleman is attempting to elicit. I understood him to say that the road had been detrunked and that there would be no compensation. Detrunked roads for which a local authority has asked will lose no status. There will be fair funding to ensure their life-long maintenance. Such matters are on-going between the Highways Agency and local authorities.

Mr. Faber: With respect, life-long maintenance is not the same as improving a stretch of road which the local police have acknowledged is the most dangerous in the region.

I am aware that other hon. Members want to participate, so I shall leave the Under-Secretary and the Minister of Transport, who I am glad to see is back in his place, with the issue. Perhaps I can at least secure an undertaking this evening that the Under-Secretary's officials will contact the county council to explain the true status of the road and that, if the road is to be detrunked, they will work with the county council to ensure that compensation is paid. Perhaps, too, all records on that stretch of road that are held by the Highways Agency will be made available to the county council.

6.34 pm

Mr. Christopher Leslie (Shipley): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak briefly in this debate. Several issues have already been raised, so I shall not repeat them.

One of the most striking features of the debate has been the U-turn of Opposition Members—and not only on the number of roads that they want in the roads programme. We knew that that number started at 500 back in 1990, and that it fell to 150 by 1997, but from the way in which they have spoken in this debate, one would think that they wanted to throw in another couple of hundred for good measure.

Not only has there been a U-turn on that but, more interestingly—despite the fact that, in 1994, the Conservative Government increased diesel duty by 13 per cent.—Conservative Members have said that they actually want to cut diesel duty. They therefore have a responsibility to say how they intend to raise the millions of pounds of revenue for vital public services that that duty generates. There will be some interesting things for us to consider in tomorrow's *Hansard*.

I believe that the Government's strategy is more realistic about tackling congestion, is realistic in the sense of prioritising infrastructure investment where necessary, and focuses on the necessary integrated public transport strategy that has been missing for so long. The extra funding for transport—£1.7 billion in the next three years—is extremely welcome, providing new opportunities to reduce congestion. It will also help to move people out of cars and into more effective methods of public transport.

The Chancellor announced many things in his Budget. One of the announcements for which my constituents were most grateful was that relating to the capital modernisation fund. That will double infrastructural investment across all public services during the life of this Parliament, and it highlights the many ways in which transport infrastructure investment will benefit.

My right hon. Friend the Minister of Transport said that the Highways Agency was being refocused on better maintenance, the more effective use of existing road space, and a greater emphasis on the environment and road safety. The legacy left by the Conservative party was one of individual car growth spiralling out of control, pollution and an unfortunate increase in the number of road casualties. At last—it is about time—we have a Government who are tackling these things at a comprehensive strategic level.

Most importantly, I want to take the opportunity to say thank you once again to my right hon. and hon. Friends for their approval of the A650 Bingley relief road. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hurrah."] I am glad to hear hon. Members on both sides of the Chamber greet that announcement with such acclaim. I was bowled over with excitement when the announcement was made. I am so proud that, after 27 years of my short life and a 35-year wait by my constituents, a £60 million, 5 km stretch of dual carriageway is being prioritised. Work is scheduled to start in 2001–02. That is an extremely welcome announcement, and contrasts with the failure of the Conservative party ever to get things under way.

The road will increase accessibility to the local town centre and help the local economy, enabling businesses to move about more easily instead of being stuck in congestion. It is a cost-effective scheme and it will do a tremendous amount to regenerate Bingley town centre. Apart from the generally improved environment that will result, pollution will reduce significantly as decreased congestion causes emissions of smoke and particulates from vehicles to fall.

On road safety, I hope that the average of 35 casualties that have taken place in Bingley each year will be almost eliminated because roads and pedestrians will be separated. That is a very important point.

I have taken the liberty of setting up a working group in my constituency to consider how we may use the Bingley relief road go-ahead to benefit integrated public transport development. I have brought together a local Railtrack representative and representatives of the Northern Spirit train company, First Bradford bus company, Keighley district bus company and several user groups to see how we can use the free thoroughfare that we shall have on the Bingley main street to further public transport development.

I am delighted that this relief road will create enormous potential for my constituents in public transport. I am very proud of the Minister. I repeat that my constituents are extremely pleased, delighted and happy with the Government's road policy.

6.39 pm

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (North Essex): The policy of the hon. Member for Shipley (Mr. Leslie) seems to be that there should be new roads for Shipley, but not for anywhere else. We do not regard that as a satisfactory policy. I should point out to the hon. Gentleman that we voted against the diesel duty increases in the Budget, so there was no U-turn today. Indeed, we voted against the diesel duty increases in the previous Budget. The hon. Gentleman should read *Hansard*.

The Prime Minister said that he wants Europe to be more like America. The price per litre of unleaded petrol is 67.89p in the UK, whereas in the US it is 15.9p. There is rather a big gap between the Prime Minister's rhetoric and the reality.

I particularly enjoyed the speech of my right hon. Friend the Member for South Norfolk (Mr. MacGregor), who made a strong case for a substantial programme of trunk road and motorway renewals and improvements. He rightly pointed out that the 400 schemes that we produced over 18 years are not matched by the mere 37 schemes that the Government propose over seven years.

The hon. Member for Lewes (Mr. Baker) could not say whether he thought that the building of the M25 was a mistake, which rather sums up Liberal Democrat policy. He mentioned the subject of traffic growth. We are against the increase in congestion and pollution which has been caused by the Government's policies.

Mr. Baker *rose—*

Mr. Jenkin: I will not give way, as I am short of time.

I thank my colleagues and the Labour Members who contributed to the debate. My hon. Friend the Member for Mid–Worcestershire (Mr. Luff) mentioned the Wyre Piddle bypass and the problems at Bordersley.

My hon. Friend the Member for North Wiltshire (Mr. Gray) was absolutely right again about the escalator. We introduced the escalator with the intention not that it should go on for ever, but that, when we got to the top, we should get off.

It is utter cant for the hon. Member for Bury, North (Mr. Chaytor) to justify the tax increases in terms of the environmental policy. We have met our Kyoto targets. He is promoting coal-fired power stations, instead of cleaner gas-fired power stations. Coal-fired power stations contribute far more to environmental pollution than cars. Petrol duty increases will contribute virtually nothing towards reduced CO_2 emissions.

My hon. Friend the Member for Westbury (Mr. Faber) made a moving speech. His concerns about the detrunking of the A36 and A46 are significant, and I am sure that the Minister of Transport took them on board. My hon. Friend's comments reflect the fact that the roads programme is a matter of life or death.

We all enjoyed the speech by the Minister of Transport, possibly more than he did. We must be fair to him—he has inherited a mess that is not entirely his fault. *[Interruption.]* His colleagues have landed him in it because of the commitments that they have made and the cuts that he has been landed with. We were stirred by his loyalty to his boss. Perhaps he will pass on our apologies if his boss bursts into tears as a result of the comments of my right hon. Friend the Member for South-West Norfolk (Mrs. Shephard).

We welcome the Minister's announcement about the A130, which is a tribute to our skills as an Opposition in calling for the debate. I also welcome the Minister's endorsement of the Streetworks Bill introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Dorset and North Poole (Mr. Fraser).

The Minister complained about the accident statistics that he inherited from the previous Government. The statistics are better than those of any European country, by miles. That shows that he was scraping the bottom of the barrel.

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury) *rose—*

Mr. Jenkin: I hope that my hon. Friend will forgive me for not giving way, but I have very little time.

Transport taxation has rocketed under the Government. As the House of Commons Library confirms, the Government will raise an extra £9 billion in fuel duties over the lifetime of this Parliament, over and above what was planned by the Conservatives. However, new taxes on motoring and the motorist do not end there.

In the most recent Budget alone, there is an extra £270 million from company car drivers. There are extra taxes on business, especially small businesses, through the increase in national insurance for the self-employed. There is the punitive vehicle excise duty rate on 40 and 41 tonne trucks, which is more than 11 times higher than the equivalent rate in other EU countries.

All that compounds the overwhelming impression that the Government do not begin to understand the circumstances of the road haulage sector. The industry is manifestly in a state of crisis, yet the Budget piles on even more pain and taxes.

People's livelihoods are being destroyed and 50,000 jobs are set to go. This is all the more evident now than it was before the Budget, yet, to the Freight Transport Association, the Minister of Transport could only say:

"While it is a problem, it is hardly the massive one that it's made out to be. I'm convinced that you don't suffer from any serious disadvantage."

What planet is he living on? Now the Prime Minister acknowledges the problem. In the House yesterday, he said:

"I certainly understand the problems of the road haulage industry as it has set them out."—[*Official Report*, 17 March 1999; Vol. 327, c. 1120.]

What happened between the Freight Transport Association's conference and the Prime Minister's statement yesterday? It happens to be the Budget. Yet, as though in mitigation, the Prime Minister has the gall to add that he has now given a £400 million subsidy in low-sulphur fuel discounts. A subsidy—is he serious? Has he forgotten that the Budget has just increased the duty on ultra low-sulphur diesel by 9.82 per cent? Yet he calls it a subsidy. He has just clobbered the road haulage industry with a massive tax increase and he insults the industry that is underwriting his increases in public spending by claiming that it is receiving a subsidy.

That blindness is matched only by the comments of the Minister for Transport in London, speaking just after the Budget, when she said:

"many foreign hauliers . . . are now moving to the United Kingdom and using it as a base for their operations."

[Mr. Jenkin]

She added:

"We perceive haulage firms from mainland Europe moving their operations into this country."—[*Official Report, European Standing Committee A*, 10 March 1999; c. 8-9.]

She can only mean that they are coming here with foreign registered trucks, burning cheap foreign fuel to mop up the UK competition.

To add further insult to injury, speaking to the Freight Transport Association conference, the Minister of Transport said:

"I have never met a businessman yet who goes out of business and says it is his fault."

How out of touch can the right hon. Gentleman be?

From the reports of Downing street briefings today, and for all the Prime Minister's supple body language, we know that the Government are still in complete denial about the catastrophe that the haulage industry faces. No wonder there will be a demonstration of the industry's despair in London. The chaos will be the fault of the right hon. Gentleman and his Government. He would do well to say this evening that the Chancellor of the Exchequer will agree to see representatives of the road haulage industry for the first time, because that might do something to diffuse the crisis.

Dr. Reid: In view of the hon. Gentleman's commendation of that demonstration, will he stop his weasel words, get up on his two feet, and tell us whether he supports the demonstration that is to take place on Monday which will disrupt and inconvenience London?

Mr. Jenkin: Of course I do not support the demonstration. The right hon. Gentleman knows that the truckers have been driven to this despair by the Government's policies. He would do well to acknowledge the destruction that his policies wreak. Where is all the money going? It is not going on transport, because transport spending is falling. The previous Conservative Government, in their last year in office, spent £4.9 billion on transport, and were planning to spend £5.2 billion in 1997-98. The comprehensive spending review shows that the Government are spending only £4.7 billion this year, falling to £4.6 billion next year, and falling further to £4.5 billion the year after that.

On trunk road and motorway improvements, the Conservative Government spent £1 billion a year between 1994–95 and 1996–97. The Government will spend only £300 million a year between 1999 and 2002. Spending on local road improvement schemes will increase next year by a paltry £1 million to £624 million—a cut in real terms. As my right hon. Friend the Member for South–West Norfolk described, the backlog of repairs is getting even worse. No—for all the glossy brochures and reannounced initiatives, the Government's priority is not transport. The reason why motorists must pay tax of £8.50 out of every £10 spent at the petrol pump is to pay for the Government's profligacy and incompetence in other departments.

The Government have increased—

Mr. Ivor Caplin (Hove): What about the money for the health service?

Mr. Jenkin: The hon. Gentleman talks about the health service, but the Government have increased social security spending—tax credit spending—by £38.4 billion and are squandering billions of pounds on the so-called new deal for the unemployed, ignorant of the fact that their other policies are throwing people straight back on the dole.

Two years into the Parliament, we have only endless consultation and not a single transport Bill. Britain needs a Government who can think creatively about solving Britain's transport problems. Labour inherited creative thinking from the Conservatives—for example, a £20 billion investment programme for the railways—and that is how we transformed so many state-owned transport industries.

We provided the new ideas in the past, and the Conservatives will have to provide the new ideas in the future, to get Britain moving again. Two years ago, Labour promised an integrated transport policy, but it is delivering a standstill Britain.

6.50 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Ms Glenda Jackson): The hon. Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin) made his only salient point at the beginning of his contribution: he confessed, albeit without apology, that the Government inherited a mess in respect of road and rail transport because of the previous Government's total failure even to begin to consider what is central to our policies—an integrated transport strategy.

An integrated transport strategy was supported by my hon. Friends the Members for Forest of Dean (Mrs. Organ), for Castle Point (Mrs. Butler), for Doncaster, Central (Ms Winterton), for Bury, North (Mr. Chaytor) and for Shipley (Mr. Leslie). Each and every one of them could detail to the House how the Government are improving the lives of their constituents by introducing policies and funds to create integrated transport strategies. Those strategies relieve overdependence on the private car and play their part in reducing not only congestion, but pollution.

Every contribution made from the Conservative Benches was fascinating, because the Conservative party is doing a major U-turn on every transport policy that it inflicted on this country for 18 years.

Mr. Faber: Will the Minister give way?

Ms Jackson: No, I am afraid that I am almost out of time.

The right hon. Member for South Norfolk (Mr. MacGregor) made a particularly interesting contribution. Apparently, he managed to obtain 13 bypasses for his constituency, but he complains that he needs another two. If I remember rightly, he agreed that we had to move away from what had been Conservative party policy—predict and provide—because putting more and more tarmac on our roads does nothing but encourage more car journeys.

The right hon. Gentleman's contribution was also interesting because he wants to introduce motorway tolls, which I understand is not Conservative party policy, although we know that the Conservatives would introduce congestion charging. However, they would never, ever hypothecate the sums so raised to the improvement of transport, which is our policy in respect of the Greater London authority. *[Interruption.]* It is in the Bill.

The hon. Member for Lewes (Mr. Baker) somewhat ungraciously neglected to accord to the Government credit for the help that they gave to the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Dafis) when he took his Road Traffic Reduction (National Targets) Bill through the House. The hon. Gentleman asked particular questions; no, of course I cannot guarantee that there will be the reduction in traffic about which he spoke by the end of this Parliament. As my right hon. Friend the Minister of Transport made clear in his opening remarks, changing direction is like manoeuvring a supertanker, which cannot be turned on a sixpence. However, our commitment to achieving not only a reduction in road traffic, but an absolute reduction, stands firm.

Two central themes emanated from the contributions of Conservative Members: their unwillingness to acknowledge that they introduced the fuel duty escalator and their inability to accept that the major rises in the escalator occurred under the previous Administration, as we have had occasion to say. The price of DERV has risen by 7p since May 1997; under the previous Government, it rose by 26p.

Conservative Members also made much of the fact that they put funding into trunk road maintenance and local road schemes. This Government have increased funding for local road maintenance to almost £2 billion—the figure was frozen for four years by the previous Administration—and there is almost £250,000 in additional funding for the bridge programme. We have given a clear commitment on the 37 road schemes which we announced, with a budget of £1.4 billion. The figures for trunk road maintenance are £651 million for 1998–99 and £780 million for 2001–02, and there has been an additional £550 million for making better use of our roads.

Conservative Members were much concerned about what they claimed was an unbearable burden on our freight industry. My right hon. Friend the Minister of Transport will meet representatives of the haulage industry. Conservative Members do no favours to the companies in their constituencies if they do not point out to those hauliers the facts of the case. If hauliers moved to the continent, the real burden would be the infinitely higher rates of corporation tax—the United Kingdom has the lowest—and infinitely higher social costs on the mainland of Europe.

Mr. Paterson: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ms Jackson: No.

The net differential with haulage companies in France has been estimated at almost £450,000 in France, almost £600,000 in the Netherlands, and more than £800,000 in Belgium. If Conservative Members are seriously committed to their constituents and are really concerned about retaining jobs in their areas, they should give the industry the facts, as my right hon. Friend most certainly will.

Another issue which was raised by more than one hon. Member was detrunking. The hon. Member for Westbury (Mr. Faber) spoke of a particularly tragic incident in his constituency on the road that is proposed for detrunking. Detrunking does not mean a reduction in status, and discussions are continuing between the local authorities and my Department. Nor does it mean that there will be inadequate funds to maintain such roads throughout their lifetime. I hope that that will reassure the hon. Gentleman.

My hon. Friends made many valid points on safety. The Government are committed to ensuring that our roads are safe. We want there to be a shift and we want to offer real choices for travel, so that we begin to reduce the dangers on our roads. Conservative Members would apparently abolish the fuel duty escalator. They have clearly given up any commitment to meeting the environmental targets of Kyoto. *[Interruption.]* They have washed their hands of taking any steps to improve our environment and to reduce congestion on our roads. They would go back to the old predict and provide strategy on road building. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The House must come to order. There is far too much noise in the Chamber.

Ms Jackson: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Conservative Members shed crocodile tears about what they regard as the horrendous impact on rural communities of the fuel duty escalator. The Conservative Government pillaged rural communities. They took away roads, jobs, houses, health care, village shops and village schools. Now, suddenly, Conservative Members are caring, but what was significantly missing from their contributions was any mention of the 30 per cent. of people in this country who have no access to private transport. Where would those people be now if Conservative policies had continued?

Mr. James Arbuthnot (North-East Hampshire) *rose in his place and claimed to move,* That the Question be now put.

Question, That the Question be now put, *put and agreed to.*

Question accordingly put, That the original words stand part of the Question:—

The House divided: Ayes 121, Noes 302.

Division No. 119] **[6.59 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Body, Sir Richard
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Butterfill, John
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Kensington)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Colvin, Michael
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cran, James
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Day, Stephen
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fraser, Christopher
Gibb, Nick
Gill, Christopher
Goodlad, Rt Hon Sir Alastair
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gray, James
Green, Damian
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael

Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson Smith,
Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Lidington, David
Liley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Moss, Malcolm
Nicholls, Patrick
Norman, Archie
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Prior, David
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robathan, Andrew
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Faversham)*
Ruffley, David
St Aubyn, Nick
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Townend, John
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Tyrie, Andrew
Wardle, Charles
Waterson, Nigel
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Oliver Heald and
Mr. Tim Collins.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Baker, Norman
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Bell, Stuart *(Middlesbrough)*
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Browne, Desmond
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burstow, Paul
Butler, Mrs Christine
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Canavan, Dennis
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coleman, Iain
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Darvill, Keith
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, John
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Edwards, Huw
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Fatchett, Rt Hon Derek
Fearn, Ronnie
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Foulkes, George
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Gerrard, Neil
Godman, Dr Norman A
Gorrie, Donald
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hancock, Mike
Hanson, David
Harris, Dr Evan
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Home Robertson, John
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Ms Jenny *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kelly, Ms Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross Skye)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
Kingham, Ms Tess
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Linton, Martin
Love, Andrew
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McDonagh, Siobhain
Macdonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Mrs Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meale, Alan
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Mitchell, Austin
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moore, Michael
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Eddie
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Öpik, Lembit
Organ, Mrs Diana
Osborne, Ms Sandra
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Ms Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn

Purchase, Ken
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Rt Hon Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Rendel, David
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Miss Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Stott, Roger
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tyler, Paul
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Wills, Michael
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, Dr Tony *(Cannock)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mrs. Anne McGuire and
Mr. Robert Ainsworth.

Question accordingly negatived.

Question, That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 31 (Questions on amendments):—*

The House divided: Ayes 272, Noes 123.

Division No. 120] **[7.12 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Bell, Stuart *(Middlesbrough)*
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Butler, Mrs Christine
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Canavan, Dennis
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coleman, Iain
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Darvill, Keith
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, John
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Edwards, Huw
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Fatchett, Rt Hon Derek
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Foulkes, George
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Gerrard, Neil
Godman, Dr Norman A
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hanson, David
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Ms Jenny *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kelly, Ms Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
Kingham, Ms Tess
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Linton, Martin
Love, Andrew
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McDonagh, Siobhain
Macdonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Mrs Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Maxton, John
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mountford, Kali
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Eddie
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Mrs Diana
Osborne, Ms Sandra
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Ms Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris

Pope, Greg
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Nick
Reid, Rt Hon Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Miss Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Stott, Roger
Stringer, Graham
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Wills, Michael
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, Dr Tony *(Cannock)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mrs. Anne McGuire and
Mr. Robert Ainsworth.

Gray, James
Green, Damian
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hancock, Mike
Harris, Dr Evan
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson Smith, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross Skye)*
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Moss, Malcolm
Nicholls, Patrick
Norman, Archie
Öpik, Lembit
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Prior, David
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
St Aubyn, Nick
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Tyrie, Andrew
Wardle, Charles
Waterson, Nigel
Wells, Bowen
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Oliver Heald and
Mr. Tim Collins.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Baker, Norman
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Body, Sir Richard
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Burstow, Paul
Butterfill, John
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Clappison, James
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Kensington)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Colvin, Michael
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cran, James
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Day, Stephen
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan Smith, Iain
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fearn, Ronnie
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fraser, Christopher
Gibb, Nick
Gill, Christopher
Goodlad, Rt Hon Sir Alastair
Gorman, Mrs Teresa

Question accordingly agreed to.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *forthwith declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to.*

Resolved,

That this House commends the Government for taking a far-sighted and more integrated approach to roads policy than the previous administration; notes that the previous Government's 'predict and provide' approach to road building has been discredited and that the present Government has instead taken a realistic and practical approach based on the five criteria of integration, the economy, the environment, safety and accessibility; notes further that the previous Conservative Government's grandiose but impractical wish-list of schemes for which funding was not available has been replaced by a targeted programme of improvements, all of which can be started within seven years; welcomes its increased and more rationally-based spending on roads maintenance; and applauds the Government for tackling the problems of congestion and pollution, thereby ensuring that the road transport system operates for the benefit of individual people and the UK economy as a whole.

It being after Seven o'clock, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *proceeded to put forthwith the Questions relating to Estimates which he was directed to put at that hour, pursuant to Standing Order No. 55 (Questions on voting of estimates, &c.) and the Order [16 December].*

ESTIMATES, 1999–2000 (NAVY) VOTE A

Resolved,

That during the year ending on 31st March 2000 a number not exceeding 48,340 all ranks be maintained for Naval Service, a number not exceeding 18,330 for Service in the Reserve Naval and Marine Forces, and a number not exceeding 200 for Service as Special Members of the Reserve Naval Forces under Part V of the Reserve Forces Act 1996.

ESTIMATES, 1999–2000 (ARMY) VOTE A

Resolved,

That during the year ending on 31st March 2000 a number not exceeding 135,420 all ranks be maintained for Army Service, a number not exceeding 76,700 for Service in the Reserve Land Forces, and a number not exceeding 6,000 for Service as Special Members of the Reserve Land Forces under Part V of the Reserve Forces Act 1996.

ESTIMATES, 1999–2000 (AIR) VOTE A

Resolved,

That during the year ending on 31st March 2000 a number not exceeding 58,070 all ranks be maintained for the Air Force Service, a number not exceeding 26,000 for Service in the Reserve Air Forces, and a number not exceeding 430 for Service as Special Members of the Reserve Air Forces under Part V of the Reserve Forces Act 1996.

ESTIMATES, EXCESSES, 1997–98

Resolved,

That a sum not exceeding £2,000 be granted to Her Majesty out of the Consolidated Fund to make good excesses of certain grants for Defence and Civil Services for the year ended on 31st March 1998, as set out in HC 239.

SUPPLEMENTARY ESTIMATES, 1998–99

Resolved,

That a further supplementary sum not exceeding £2,946,254,000 be granted to Her Majesty out of the Consolidated Fund to complete or defray the charges for Defence and Civil Services for the year ending on 31st March 1999, as set out in HC 237, 238 and 310.

Ordered,

That a Bill be brought in upon the foregoing Resolutions relating to Estimates, Excesses, 1997–98, and Supplementary Estimates, 1998–99: And that the Chairman of Ways and Means, Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. Alan Milburn, Dawn Primarolo, Ms Patricia Hewitt and Mrs. Barbara Roche do prepare and bring it in.

CONSOLIDATED FUND (No. 2) BILL

Mrs. Barbara Roche accordingly presented a Bill to apply certain funds out of the Consolidated Fund to the service of the years ending on 31 March 1998 and 1999: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow, and to be printed [Bill 66].

Arts Funding (Westminster)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Hill.]*

7.28 pm

Ms Karen Buck (Regent's Park and Kensington, North): London is home to a flourishing and diverse artistic community. We are truly fortunate in that we host centres of excellence in the performing and fine arts that draw on a magnificent heritage going back for centuries. However, the arts are not only a heritage from the past. We also have a thriving modern cultural sector that reaches into new mediums of delivery and celebrates our dynamic multicultural present.

Culture and the arts are not an optional add-on for a society that has resources to spare. They give expression to our humanity, enrich our lives, stimulate the imaginations of our children and act as a barometer of our self-esteem. We should be proud of what we do to promote the arts in our society and cautious of those who see the arts as a frivolity or as one more consumer good to be left to the market to deliver.

Fifteen months ago, I was delighted to attend a celebration of the arts in Westminster at the London Palladium, set up by Westminster city council. Westminster's gala nights for the arts were grounds for pride on the part of the council. They showcased the enthusiasm and talent among our schoolchildren and youth in music, dance, drama and the carnival arts. They demonstrated the dynamic that exists when the artistic traditions of China, Bangladesh, the Caribbean and the many countries whence our asylum seekers come meet modern Britain's world of classical, rap and rock music.

My purpose in seeking this debate tonight is to give expression to the profound disappointment I now feel at Westminster city council's decision to slash funding for the arts and community groups in central London. That disappointment is all the more acute because it contrasts with the positive support and statements of support given by the borough up to and including its recent gala nights for the arts.

Only a few months ago, Councillor Harvey Marshall, chair of the arts committee, said:

"Westminster is certainly the capital and it must be the heart of the arts in London and the country. We shall continue to support the arts at all levels, for the benefit of residents, businesses and visitors."

At the beginning of last month, the council cut its funding to all but one of the 24 arts organisations that it had supported. Cuts ranged from 6 per cent. to the complete loss of grant. Decisions came out of the blue for many groups, and they were taken in a thoughtless, blustering manner that made a mockery of the pious words of Councillor Marshall just weeks earlier.

Out went the grants to the orchestra of St. John's, Smith square. Out went the grant to the Photographers Gallery. The Yaa Asentewa centre lost four fifths of its grant, and it is struggling for its life. That organisation may need to make changes in the services that it delivers, but I must wonder about the message being sent to black Londoners by the loss of support for the only Londonwide black arts centre.

Mr. Andrew Dismore (Hendon): My hon. Friend will recall that I was a Westminster councillor in my previous

[Mr. Andrew Dismore]

life. For 10 years, I was opposition spokesperson on the arts committee, where, on what was otherwise a highly politically polarised council, we were able to achieve a great deal of consensus because of the chairmanship of the then Councillor Roger Bramble, a great supporter of Yaa Asentewa and some of the more avant-garde arts. Does my hon. Friend agree that it is particularly demeaning that, now that Roger Bramble has moved on, Westminster is taking a much more right-wing approach towards the arts? The situation at Yaa Asentewa illustrates the way in which Westminster is targeting arts that support the ethnic minorities. In addition, the council is targeting the avant-garde arts organisations—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael J. Martin): Order. I am afraid that I must interrupt the hon. Gentleman.

Ms Buck: I am grateful to my hon. Friend who is completely right.

I need not explain to the Minister the importance of carnival in my constituency. The Yaa Asentewa is among the centres at which carnival arts are nurtured and promoted. They are of great significance, particularly to Afro-Caribbean residents.

The most recent edition of the bulletin, "The Arts in Westminster", advertises the fact that the Yaa Asentewa has been funded by the local single regeneration budget to run a holiday play scheme and an after-school club involving drama and music skills as well as basic skills tuition in literacy and numeracy.

Cuts have also fallen on the Serpentine gallery, the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, the English National Opera and Ballet, Paddington Arts, Wigmore hall, Photo Works Westminster, the Soho Theatre Company, London Print Workshop, the Institute of Contemporary Arts, Westminster Youth Dance Scene, Alternative Arts—which was singled out for praise by Councillor Marshall just weeks earlier—and more.

In all, £360,000 has been cut from arts organisations. That has been partially offset by some small additional funding, but 15 per cent. of the arts budget—£230,000—has been lost to the arts in the borough. I should like to deal briefly with the borough's arguments in justification of that action.

Westminster claims that the Government have cut support to the borough. Yet the December policy and resources budget paper admitted that the grant settlement meant that

"the position for next year is better than expected".

Since then, the council has received additional money for education and several other additional special grants. As standard spending assessments have been agreed for a three-year cycle, there is no justification for panic spending cuts.

Westminster has long been, and remains, one of those authorities that raise the smallest proportion of spending from the council tax. Only £1 in every £10 spent by the council comes from the council tax payer—a proportion virtually unchanged since 1995. As a percentage of budget, Westminster's council tax requirement was the fourth lowest in the country in 1997, and the fifth lowest last year. Those figures give the lie to claims that the Government have been excessively punitive towards Westminster and that council tax payers bear too much of the spending burden.

I cannot fail to mention the fact that Westminster is sitting on reserves of £84 million.

The council also ignores the fact that Westminster, which has the highest concentration of arts organisations in the country, benefits from inward investment because of its support for the arts. Westminster's local economy benefits from tourism and visitors, half of whom cite the arts as a reason for their visit. The London Arts Board invests £2 million in arts provision in Westminster, and the city is also a major recipient of lottery arts funding. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will respond to that point in his reply, as it will help to disabuse us of the notion that local council tax payers are subsidising national organisations from which they receive no benefit.

The other important counter-argument to the charges laid by Westminster lie in our schools. Many of the institutions savaged by grant cuts have an excellent record of work with school children. Wigmore hall states:

"The £8,000 cut in funding restricts the Hall's ability to fund an education officer . . . our schools projects complement the national curriculum and to date they are offered almost exclusively to schools within Westminster. As the city does not have a Music Co-ordinator, the Hall arranged for teachers to meet regularly to share ideas and good teaching practice . . . the relationship developed and Wigmore Hall raised funds to employ an administrator to arrange inter-school activities and a pool of musical instruments."

The Institute of Contemporary Arts has listed educational initiatives that will have to be scaled down, including a consultancy scheme on the deeply and multiply deprived Mozart estate, developing teaching and learning materials with teachers and community groups and organising evening taster sessions for residents. The Photographers Gallery drew attention to recent community projects that involved working with the Marylebone Bangladeshi society, Soho parish school, deaf artists from the area and others. The Serpentine gallery warns that a 48 per cent. cut will

"have a serious impact on the Gallery's education programme and the service it can offer to residents . . . half the children who attend the Saturday Art Club are Westminster children and they have priority . . . these activities and policies are now in jeopardy."

In conclusion, I should like to raise three points. First, Westminster is wrong to make damaging, philistine and financially devastating cuts to arts and community organisations. Secondly, it is repugnant to attempt to pin the blame on the cost of asylum seekers to the local community.

Mr. Peter Brooke (Cities of London and Westminster): I know the subject to which the hon. Lady is turning. Does she agree that that was a coda to the central problem, which is that the Government had decided to take millions out of Westminster's budget in respect of people who come in for the day as visitors? The figures for several of the institutions that she has mentioned show that, to a great extent, they service people from outside Westminster, rather than purely Westminster people.

Ms Buck: I have attempted to make it clear that the funding Westminster gives to community organisations is directed to the benefit of local residents and school

children, and funds projects involving work with local schools and community groups, so it is not right to make the allegation that the right hon. Gentleman makes.

As for the right hon. Gentleman's point about cuts in funding to the borough in previous years, he is absolutely correct to say that a charge was made to the spending formula in 1997. Westminster objected to that; the council sought and was not refused leave to have a judicial review of that decision. However, that decision was taken in 1997, and the local elections were fought in 1998, after the decision had already been incorporated into the Budget. The manifesto did not say a word about the fact that the council would seek another round of cuts—indeed, the council prided itself on the fact that, thanks to its good housekeeping, it was able to sustain front-line services and maintain a low council tax. However, immediately after the local elections, an axe was taken to community, voluntary and arts organisations.

To return to the point about asylum seekers, I want to express my anger about the fact that some extremely vulnerable people who have arrived in this country are being blamed for the crisis in arts funding. Although in recent years many London councils have borne too large a part of the financial burden for a matter that should be dealt with at national level, Westminster council knows full well that the new Government are taking several measures to assist central London boroughs, including Westminster, with the cost of asylum seekers. Those measures include an additional £130 million grant to help London boroughs, which was announced before Christmas. The combination of proposals to assist other communities to take a fair share of asylum seekers and the additional money means that it is completely wrong to attempt to pin the blame on asylum seekers. I believe that was a cynical and provocative playing of the race card for which there is no excuse.

The arts and community groups deserve nothing but praise for the work that they do, and have done, in Westminster and for the campaign of persuasion that they have run in recent months in an attempt to influence the council to change its decision. The London Arts Board and the National Campaign for the Arts should also be commended for their vigorous support at this difficult time. The arts will survive in Westminster because our communities and our institutions are strong, but much damage has been done to both morale and vital services.

I know that the Minister cannot write me a cheque—although, if he did, I would certainly not tear it up. However, I would be grateful for a sign that he and the Government recognise the value of the arts in the deprived, multicultural Westminster community and that he shares my regret about the damage being done to arts institutions.

7.41 pm

The Minister for the Arts (Mr. Alan Howarth): As is her way, my hon. Friend the Member for Regent's Park and Kensington, North (Ms Buck) has done a service to Londoners and to us all by securing this debate. I am grateful to her for raising the issue of funding for the arts in Westminster, and for speaking with such vigour and strength of feeling.

I want to place the problems with which the arts have been confronted in Westminster in the context of this Government's policy for the arts. To us, it is a central and welcome responsibility of Government to support the arts. The arts are integral to the quality of our lives, private and public. For the experience of the arts to be accessible to all people, there is an inescapable obligation on Government to act to bring that about. It is a responsibility that falls on both central and local government.

We have been willing to find the money that the arts need. The settlement we achieved in the comprehensive spending review will put an extra £125 million into the arts over the next three years—the largest increase for a generation at least, and is in stark contrast to the recent history of arts funding in this country. In announcing my Department's funding plans for the next three years, we intend that the Arts Council and the bodies it funds should have greater certainty over the coming period and an unprecedented opportunity to plan strategically.

Beyond money, we are working to create an environment in which the arts can thrive and satisfy audiences across the country. We want access, as I have said, to ensure that the arts are for the many, not the few. We want excellence, because we believe in it for its own sake. We want education, so that people's enjoyment of the arts is enhanced and because that is our investment in the long-term future of the arts and in the quality of life of our society. We want a healthy arts economy, because it underwrites the rest of our objectives and provides jobs. In the United Kingdom, the creative industries have been growing at about twice the rate of the economy as a whole. They already employ more than 1.4 million people—5 per cent. of the total employed work force.

All those principles will be enshrined in the funding agreement we are currently preparing with the Arts Council. We are investing on the condition that the recipients of public investment—our partners—share our commitment to excellence and innovation, access for all, education and the creative economy. We believe that the administration of funding for the arts should be cost effective. Accordingly, the Arts Council is restructuring to deliver a better service to arts practitioners. It will be a leaner, more effective organisation. Many of its current responsibilities will be delegated in future to the regional arts boards, bringing funding decisions closer to the people most affected.

I am happy to be able to tell the House that, in the coming year, the Arts Council and the London Arts Board between them will invest £36 million in Westminster. Like my hon. Friend, however, I am very unhappy about the view that Westminster has taken of its own responsibilities in the coming year.

Our system of public support for the arts will work as it should only if everyone plays a part. Responsibility must be shared between the Arts Council—in distributing grant-in-aid and lottery funds—the regional arts boards, local authorities and other funders, such as business sponsors and the European Union. One partner cannot retreat in the expectation that others will pick up the tab. Our artistic ecology is fragile. The confluence of funding streams that keeps many precious artistic enterprises afloat is finely balanced: damming just one tributary can be enough to leave them high and dry.

My hon. Friend will understand that, as Minister for the Arts, I cannot and do not wish to determine local priorities in Westminster or any other authority. If the arm's length principle applies to the way in which the Arts Council and regional arts boards distribute grant-in-aid, it must

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also apply to local government spending on the arts. The accountability of Westminster city council is to its electors. If the people of Westminster do not believe that their council is getting its priorities right, they can seek to persuade their locally elected representatives to take a different course of action. They can also express their dissatisfaction through the ballot box.

It has already become clear that cutting funding to arts organisations is not a soft option for a local authority. When damage is gratuitously inflicted on the cultural life of an area, there is a public outcry, both from the artistic community and from local people. So it has been in the case raised by my hon. Friend. Her voice and mine are but additions to the many who have criticised the actions of Westminster city council.

Trevor Phillips, chair of the London Arts Board, has written eloquently in the *Evening Standard* of Westminster's lamentable decision, of the joyless, miserable and depressing vision of the chairman of Westminster city council's arts committee, Councillor Harvey Marshall, and of the ugly whiff of bigotry that he detects. Peter Hewitt, chief executive of the Arts Council, has said that he is deeply disappointed by Westminster's actions. The *Evening Standard* itself, in an editorial, has described Westminster's decision to cut arts funding as one that smacks of Philistinism and narrow-mindedness, and has deplored the damage that Westminster will do to the education of its children.

I can only agree. Westminster's cuts to arts funding will do damage to arts organisations of high reputation. To name but a few of the hardest hit, we are talking about, as my hon. Friend told us, the orchestra of St. John's Smith Square, the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, the Photographers' gallery and the Institute of Contemporary Arts. Another is the Serpentine gallery. Westminster's grant to the gallery is spent on education, but it will now be reduced from £58,000 to £28,000. Last year, more than 500 teachers, mostly from Westminster, attended workshops run by the gallery. The gallery runs regular events for three local primary schools. Disabled people attended 12 similar events. The reduction in funding can have only the most serious implications for all those activities.

That is happening in the heart of our capital city, which is one of the world's great capitals of the arts, attracting artists and performers from within and beyond our shores. London's audiences create the opportunities for London's performers; they treasure and insist upon the public support that is indispensable to the vitality and quality of the arts in London.

The particular organisations that I have mentioned will have to bear reductions of between 47 and 100 per cent. in their local authority funding. For smaller organisations, cuts of that order can have a devastating, if not terminal, effect. For their larger colleagues, they are still deeply undermining. Twenty-three arts organisations in Westminster are to suffer. Those that will bear lesser cuts to their funding will still be damaged.

As in the case of the Serpentine gallery, to which I have already referred, so too with Wigmore hall—my hon. Friend described the damage to its educational programme—the Institute of Contemporary Arts, the Photographers' gallery and other organisations, where Westminster's dereliction will hit the activities that put most back into the community, such as arts education. Dr. Nicholas Tate, the chief executive of the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority has said:

> "It has become very clear to us how powerful is the contribution of the arts to a whole range of skills and attitudes that are vital to learning right across the curriculum, and indeed to employability."

Westminster's schools face many difficulties and challenges. The arts offer to schoolchildren, not just the high fliers but those who are disaffected and see too little prospect for themselves in formal education, a kindling of the imagination and opportunities for personal development, which we should grasp and not reject. It is not some social elite that suffers when the arts are cut, but people—adults and children—who might otherwise have little or no opportunity to experience what the arts have to offer.

The harm done to individual organisations aggregates into a bleaker picture overall. A community in which those in authority care about its culture, reflecting the values of the people whom they represent, has depth and substance. It has pride and it presents itself proudly to the world. The damage that the authority may do to itself through a cut of £360,000 in investment in arts organisations in the city of Westminster, through discouraging tourists, investors and employers, not to mention the detrimental impact on education, is incalculable.

When my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State negotiated the substantial increase in arts funding during the comprehensive spending review, he did not do so with the intention of filling, in retrospect, the gaps left by local authorities. When we see the Arts Council offering the Serpentine gallery an increased grant of £80,000 in the coming year, while Westminster city council withdraws £58,000; when we see the London Arts Board upping funding to the Unicorn children's theatre by £8,000, while Westminster withdraws £17,000; when we see the way in which funds channelled through my Department are negated by cuts by Westminster, we feel a sense of betrayal.

We all know that when a local authority sets its budget, some hard choices are inevitable. There are many competing demands for funding, of course. From time to time, funders of arts budgets need to alter patterns of support—perhaps because the management or the artistic output of an organisation is not what it needs to be. But, as my hon. Friends the Members for Regent's Park and Kensington, North and for Hendon (Mr. Dismore) have made clear, there is no persuasive rationale for what is planned by Westminster. It intends to cut the funding of the organisations I have listed by nearly 30 per cent. for no decent reason.

The chairman of Westminster's arts committee, Councillor Harvey Marshall, has stated that one reason for the cuts is a reduction in central Government support for the council. The right hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Brooke) also made that point. I will give the House the facts. The standard spending assessment for Westminster city council—the pot from which arts funding is drawn—has risen by 5.2 per cent. compared with 1998–99. That compares with an average increase for inner London of 4.2 per cent. Overall, the total external support for Westminster will rise from £187.72 million to £192.74 million in the coming year.

I turn to the most extremely offensive aspect of what Westminster has done. As my hon. Friend the Member for Regent's Park and Kensington, North told us, Councillor Marshall has stated his view that cuts in the arts are necessary to pay for asylum seekers in the borough. Again, I will set out the facts. Westminster has by no means the largest task among the London boroughs in dealing with the number of asylum seekers needing support. Moreover, my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has already responded to pleas from local authorities for more assistance, making an extra £30 million available to support new arrangements for asylum seekers, focusing on London and Dover in particular. Local authorities will be able to recover from Government the costs which fall to them of accommodating and supporting asylum seekers. Those steps have been welcomed by both the Association of London Government and the Local Government Association.

Councillor Harvey Marshall proposes an equation—more asylum seekers equals less art for Londoners—which should shame the local authority whose arts committee he chairs. The politics of making scapegoats is ugly, nasty and unacceptable. My hon. Friend the Member for Regent's Park and Kensington, North expressed her anger about that. The right hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster offered a plea in mitigation, but it will not suffice. He is a thoroughly decent man, and must be as ashamed as any of us of what his Conservative colleagues have said and done.

It is a relief at least to be able to say that Westminster's attitude towards the arts and its policy are an aberration. They are exceptional. Although there are certainly other authorities where we would welcome stronger support for the arts, and for museums as well, I pay tribute to the many local authorities whose commitment to the arts is unhesitating and strong, and who are actively developing their cultural strategies. Just as joined-up Government is necessary in Whitehall, so it is necessary between central and local government in terms of the arts as in other sectors. I value our partnership at the Department for Culture, Media and Sport with the Local Government Association and with other individual local authorities and look forward to developing it further.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at five minutes to Eight o'clock.

House of Commons

Friday 19 March 1999

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Orders of the Day

Referendums Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

9.34 am

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

I went to Brussels on 3 December to visit the European Commission. Hon. Members will pleased to know that I shall not make a speech about the current problems of the Commission. Nor shall I speak about the single currency. However, not knowing that there was a private Member's Bill ballot, and not knowing its result, I was surprised, on reaching my office the following day, to find a large number of messages from people who wanted me to call them. Anyone who comes high in the ballot quickly discovers that he has friends he did not know about—or indeed, has never met.

One is inundated with suggestions for the topic of a Bill. In some ways, that is somewhat insulting—it suggests that one has little imagination and that there are no issues on which one feels strongly. Perhaps most extraordinary were the hundreds of letters I received from supporters of Friends of the Earth. I have been a paid-up member of Friends of the Earth for many years and I know a great deal about the issues on which people wrote to me from all corners of the kingdom. I wonder whether any Member of the House is so feeble that he or she would choose the topic of a private Member's Bill solely on the number of letters received.

Some sensible suggestions were made by serious organisations, and I was tempted by several of them. I was tempted, too, by my own hobby horses and by issues in which I strongly believe. However, one suggestion seemed justified beyond all others. I trust that no one will suggest that my choice has shown a weakness in my character. I have taken up the issue because of the merits of the case, and I was put under no pressure of any description to pursue it.

I cannot pretend to believe that referendums are the best way of governing in a parliamentary democracy. Nevertheless, I accept that the decision on some fundamental constitutional issues is so important that every voter should have the opportunity to register his or her opinion and to decide the matter. In holding that opinion, I agree—rather unusually—with the Prime Minister, who said on 24 July 1994:

> "Although there are cases for having referendums on certain issues and indeed we have said we will have one on the electoral system, I am actually not a great exponent of government by referendum."

Curiously, the Prime Minister seems to have changed his mind a little. The people of Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and London have all had the opportunity to vote in referendums over the past 18 months. Referendums, therefore, have—for good or ill—become part of the government of the United Kingdom, and part of the political process.

Other referendums proposed for the future might have an even more fundamental impact than those already held. Both main parties fought the general election on a pledge to hold a referendum before joining the single currency, and the Liberal Democrats may have pledged that too. The Government have made it plain that they will stand by their pledge.

Proportional representation might be the subject of a referendum, although, as the Labour party is split straight down the middle on the matter, that seems marginally less likely at the moment. If proportional representation were to be introduced following a referendum, it would change the face of government in the UK.

Regional assemblies may be introduced following regional referendums, and that could lead to a fundamental shift of authority from both national and local government. We have even heard some pretty strange ideas about holding referendums by county or district on whether fox hunting should take place in a particular locality.

I have introduced the Bill, therefore, because referendums are here to stay—at least in the short term.

Mrs. Teresa Gorman (Billericay): Does my hon. Friend think that there has been a curious omission from the Labour Administration's referendum mania? No one is proposing a referendum for English people about whether they would like their own Parliament.

Mr. Robathan: My hon. Friend takes her individual position on that matter, but I have never met anyone in England who really wants a Parliament. I do not think that many people in Wales want a National Assembly, but that is another matter.

Referendums are here to stay—at least in the short term. I am a democrat and I believe that the democratic process must be fair, and must be seen to be fair. That idea is neither unique nor original to me; I am delighted to say that the realisation that referendums need fair rules has been growing for a number of years. It is to the benefit of a referendum if people can concentrate on the issues rather than on technical questions about the mechanics of referendums and whether they are equitable and fair. If they are not, people will argue about the result after it has happened.

Fair rules should facilitate a result that is beyond question, and that can be accepted by all as a true and fair account of the wishes of a well-informed electorate. In November 1996, the joint Electoral Reform Society

[Mr. Robathan]

and constitution unit commission on the conduct of referendums, under Sir Patrick Nairne, concluded:

"There are no established rules, accepted by the main political parties, for the efficient and fair conduct of referendums. If referendums are to be held in the future and their results accepted, they should be conducted efficiently and ensure the fair presentation of competing views."

I do not always pray in aid the Electoral Reform Society, but that organisation generally wishes to see a fair and democratic process. For instance, on proportional representation we would disagree, but we would agree about the need for a fair referendum on that matter. Indeed, the aims of the Bill have widespread support across the political spectrum and from many organisations that may disagree on issues but agree on democracy. As well as the Electoral Reform Society, Charter 88, the Institute for Constitutional Research and the Jenkins commission have all identified and supported the need for fair rules.

The referendums campaign, which was largely organised by my hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) and the hon. Member for Tatton (Mr. Bell), attracted a large number of signatories with all sorts of backgrounds. Certainly, many Conservatives signed up, but there were also a large number of Liberal Democrats from both Houses, Labour peers, at least eight Labour Members who stuck their heads above the parapet, Law Lords, bishops and academics, again from all parts of the political spectrum.

I stress that that was not a concerted or a sustained campaign. Together with other Members of both Houses I received one letter, which might just as easily have gone in the waste paper bin with all the junk mail that we get, including innumerable pleas to sign early-day motions on some obscure subject. Given the low-key nature of the campaign, the support that it has engendered is remarkable. That is because those people who concern themselves with democracy are concerned to establish a fair method of organising referendums.

My Bill has 11 sponsors. Deliberately, there are three Labour Members, three Liberal Democrats and three Conservatives including me. We also have the invaluable support of the only Independent in the House, the hon. Member for Tatton, who is in Kosovo and so could not be here, together with one representative of the smaller parties. All four parts of the United Kingdom are represented. The House will appreciate that all the Conservatives come from England. Also, those four places that have had referendums are represented. Therefore, the sponsors represent a genuine cross-section of the House and, indeed, the country.

The real genesis and spur for the Bill was the Neill committee report, "Standards in Public Life", on the funding of political parties in the United Kingdom, which was published last October. It made some sensible and important recommendations on the future conduct of referendums, but the first recommendation on referendums—the 83rd recommendation of the report—encapsulates all the others:

"In any referendum campaign there must be a fair opportunity for each side of the argument to be properly put to the voters."

The report quotes evidence given by Peter Riddell of *The Times*. I do not always agree with him—he is rather new Labour for me—but he gives reasoned evidence when he speaks of the

"implications . . . for the way in which the political process operates, for fairness in funding and indeed for fairness in operation. Some things have happened which are already worrying . . . There should be clear rules over the funding of referendum campaigns, the current procedures are chaotic and unfair, especially when the Government is itself a participant."

The report also comments on how political expediency can play a large part in determining how a referendum is organised at present. The report recommends that the Government of the day should remain neutral. One piece of evidence quoted in the report states that the Government, being on one side of the referendum in Scotland, was also able to

"write the rules and an information leaflet and send it to every house."

Neill agrees that the Government's being a player and writing the rules is fundamentally wrong.

The Neill committee report also recommends that free mailing should be available to each side in the referendum, as takes place for general elections and as took place in 1975, which seems sensible.

Mr. Andrew Dismore (Hendon): Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will tell us where his Bill provides for free mailings and deals with the issue that he identified in the previous reference to the Neill report about the involvement of the Government in referendum campaigns.

Mr. Robathan: If the hon. Gentleman will be a little less enthusiastic, he will discover that I am about to come to that. My Bill will only enact the key recommendations of Lord Neill and his committee. Many of the details would be left to a referendums commission. I think that the hon. Gentleman will find that in clause 1.

I will now deal with the details of the Bill. It is a simple Bill of a mere six clauses.

Sir Michael Spicer (West Worcestershire): Before my hon. Friend moves on, will he say why he thinks that the Government have been so longwinded and tardy in responding to the Neill report, which came out in October, as he said? Is not one of the most important aspects of this excellent debate, which he has initiated, the fact that we must get the Minister to tell us when they will respond to the report?

Mr. Robathan: Of course I will let the Government answer for themselves. I am sure that the Minister will do so. If the inquiries that Governments set up to produce reports are genuinely independent, Governments sometimes get replies that they do not like—that applies to all Governments. I fear that the Government did not like the report as much as they had hoped to when they set up the inquiry into political funds. The Minister will have the opportunity to respond and I look forward to hearing his reply.

The first clause sets up the referendums commission, which would enact Neill's central conclusion that there must be an election commission. Since the Bill is

concerned with the more narrow issue of referendums, we have called it the referendum commission. Its role also relates to Neill's recommendation 93.

The commission must be independent. In my view, the most suitable committee already exists—the Committee on Standards in Public Life. The numbers would have to be somewhat smaller, but it or a similar committee are what is envisaged in the Bill. It would be an independent, non-partisan committee headed by a High Court judge. The Bill would give the commission great powers to advise the Secretary of State and produce reports on referendums, which would have to be laid before the House and published.

Mrs. Jacqui Lait (Beckenham): I am glad to hear that my hon. Friend wants an independent commission, but a commission is only as independent as the people who appoint the commissioners. Does he have any suggestions as to who should do the appointing?

Mr. Robathan: My hon. Friend may be surprised to hear that I have some faith in this Government to observe some impartiality and the democratic process. Just in case anyone does not entirely trust the Government, not only will the Secretary of State make the appointments but the Speaker will have to approve them. We have greater faith in the Speaker, perhaps, than we have—occasionally—in one or two Ministers and possibly others in the Government.

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas (Harrow, West): The hon. Gentleman referred to recommendation 93 of the Neill committee report, which says that the election commission should have as part of its remit reviewing referendums and referendum campaigns. Why does he think that a referendums commission is needed when that committee suggested an elections commission?

Mr. Robathan: I wish that the hon. Gentleman would listen—I have been talking for only 10 minutes. The point is that the Neill committee suggested setting up an elections commission, but the Bill is more narrow and concerns referendums, so in the Bill it is called the referendums commission. However, it would play the same part as that envisaged for the elections commission and if the latter were ever set up, it would take over from the referendums commission. That will be made clear later in my speech.

The Bill mentions that the commission could make recommendations on the wording of any question. In February 1975, NOP ran a poll asking a series of questions about a referendum on the Common Market. I do not always believe in opinion polls—sadly, as May 1997 showed, they tend to be right—but the 1975 poll was illustrative in that it managed to get a majority, on one factually incorrect question, for leaving the Common Market. It also managed to get an 18 per cent. majority in favour of staying in the Common Market on a different question. The result of the referendum was approximately two to one in favour of staying in. That illustrates what we all know: that the wording of the question can dictate the result of the referendum in favour of the person who has set the question.

Significant recommendations could be made by the commission on other issues. The threshold of votes is important. Hon. Members will remember that that notion was included in the referendum in Scotland in 1979. For example, the Welsh Assembly has been set up on a vote of approval of only one quarter of the Welsh electorate. Another quarter, approximately, opposed setting up the Assembly and half the electorate did not care one way or the other. It is not the business of the Bill to determine what recommendations the commission might make, but that could be one area for examination. Another issue to be considered would be the timing of separate related referendums.

The aim of the commission is to take political expediency out of the calculation of a referendum. The Welsh referendum was held exactly a week after the Scottish one—a case in point. The Government alleged that they were held on different days to avoid confusion. Most people in all parties would agree that the idea was that the Scottish vote, which was, rightly, expected to be heavily in favour, would influence the Welsh vote. The House might note that there does not seem to be any confusion about having separate elections to the Scottish Parliament, the Welsh Assembly and local authorities on the same day

Mr. Gareth Thomas (Clwyd, West): The hon. Gentleman does not represent Wales or have the benefit of parliamentary colleagues who could advise him on the situation that prevailed in Wales before the election. If he had, he would realise that there is a media deficit in Wales, which does not have a national printed press such as the Scots enjoy. There was therefore a need for objective information sponsored by the Government on the implications of Welsh devolution. Does he accept that there are distinctions to be drawn between the Welsh and Scottish experiences of devolution?

Mr. Robathan: With all due respect to the hon. Gentleman, that was an unwise intervention. It is kind of him to make my case. The point about the Neill recommendations is that the Government should not determine what people think. The Government are bound to take a line, but, with all the paraphernalia of the civil service, they should not tell people which way to vote. The hon. Gentleman should read the Neill report with particular reference to its comments on the Welsh referendum.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): I am sorry further to trouble my hon. Friend on the composition of the referendums commission, a point that was ably raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Mrs. Lait), but does he agree that it is crucial that its composition should be scrupulously politically impartial? It is therefore essential to ensure either that it contains people of different political faiths or people of no known political convictions. Does he agree that it would be supremely inappropriate for someone such as Lord Jenkins to serve on it unless he were counterbalanced by someone of known contrary opinions on the matters in hand?

Mr. Robathan: I accept that, but I think that the Home Secretary, who would appoint the commission, would be impartial. It is difficult to lay down too much in a private Member's Bill, though there may be scope for amendment. The Speaker's Office takes a pretty independent line. Madam Speaker would not allow a commission of such weight to be rigged.

[Mr. Robathan]

Clause 2 deals with the designation of referendum campaigns and requires a brief explanation. It relates to comments in the Neill report. It is intended that the referendums commission hear from all those who wish to be the designated campaign for a particular outcome. I hope that that would allow—indeed, encourage—groups pursuing the same end to come together in an umbrella group. The Neill committee's comments seem to have been influenced by the fact that both groups in the 1975 Common Market referendum were described as

"entirely self-appointed federations of activists".

I hope that broad-based, inclusive campaigns will be designated by the commission. That relates to recommendation 85 of the report.

Clause 3(1) enacts recommendation 84, which states:

"each side should be given equal access to an amount of core funding sufficient to enable it to mount at least a minimal campaign and to make its views widely known."

Other recommendations on accounting are covered by clause 3.

Judy Mallaber (Amber Valley): I sympathise with the principles of the Bill, but, like others, I find its mechanics difficult to work out. Has the hon. Gentleman considered how designating referendum campaigns would work in extreme situations, such as the referendum on the Good Friday agreement in Northern Ireland? Groups from opposite extremes supported the agreement while equally extremely opposed groups campaigned against it. Perhaps no proposal could cover that. Similarly, in the Scottish referendum, different political parties supported devolution but were not prepared to work together. I realise that the point is general and does not relate only to the Bill. It is a difficult issue affecting a general principle that I largely support.

Mr. Robathan: The hon. Lady makes a sensible point, unlike one or two others. Clause 2(2) allows the commission to consider the ability of a group to conduct an effective campaign and the views of political parties. In Northern Ireland, it could have considered whether political parties were prepared to coalesce on the issue. It can consider the degree of public support and

"such other matters as the Commission considers relevant."

We must not be too prescriptive because that would take us away from the independent judgment of what happens in referendums that I want. It should not be for me to lay down that this or that group, generally or specifically, should be designated as a campaigner. The commission should consider such matters.

To take Europe: many from all parts of the political spectrum wish to go into a single currency. Many, many groups wish to oppose it, from, dare one say it, the Conservative party, right the way across the spectrum to trade unions. It is up to those groups to get together and present themselves as a designated campaign or forgo core funding. That puts the onus on the groups involved, rather than on the Bill. It is left to the referendums commission to decide what to do.

Judy Mallaber: The Bill is a useful opportunity to discuss difficult issues, and, even if it does not pass, we will return to them in a subsequent one. Would it be feasible to have two different designated campaign bodies on the same side of the argument? Unless it is a simple issue, there will be a great variety of interests that may not be prepared to coalesce but had equal claim to some of the money to argue their particular position.

Mr. Robathan: I wish that I shared the hon. Lady's confidence that, if the Bill does not get through, the same measures will be pursued by the Government. I do not think that such designation would be reasonable. Lord Neill's report says that there should be one designated campaigner. It is a complicated report, so I shall not quote it in its entirety. People should come together. If they are not willing to, they can campaign on whatever they like. I am glad that this remains a free country. In 1979, the right hon. Member for Airdrie and Shotts (Mrs. Liddell), when she was, I think, general secretary of the Scottish Labour party, said that she was not prepared to enter a loose umbrella group.

Mr. Bercow: Soil her hands.

Mr. Robathan: I think that that was the quote. That was up to her. It is up to any group to campaign as it wishes, but if people want public money—the dosh—they must come together in an umbrella group. Some people may not need the dosh.

Mr. Oliver Letwin (West Dorset): Does my hon. Friend recall that part of the answer to the question asked by the hon. Member for Amber Valley (Judy Mallaber) is that this feature of the Bill was suggested by none other than the Government themselves?

Mr. Robathan: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that assistance.

Mr. William Cash (Stone): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Robathan: I will, and then I must make some progress.

Mr. Cash: The question arises whether we would exclude money coming from certain quarters, not least the European Commission and the panoply of bodies in the European Union, because they have a vested interest in a yes vote. Another question is whether limits should be imposed on the amount of expenditure on either side of the argument. I am sure that those matters could be dealt with in Committee.

Mr. Robathan: Those are extremely important points. The question of limits is raised in the Neill committee report. I have judged it best to leave the matter to the independent referendums commission. As for money from the European Commission, it seems to me that that would count as taxpayers' money—it certainly does not come from trees—and should be joined with the other stuff, but that would be up to the referendums commission.

Mr. Peter Brooke (Cities of London and Westminster): To return to what my hon. Friend said a moment ago about the Government's attitude to the issue that he raises, does he recall the Government's reaction to

the Neill committee? They said that they agreed with the main thrust of its recommendations. Can my hon. Friend conceive of any circumstances in which the issue could not be said to fall within the main thrust of the recommendations?

Mr. Robathan: Of course, no. It is entirely within the main thrust of the recommendations. The clause is designed solely to implement one of the Neill committee's recommendations.

Mr. Dismore: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Robathan: I will, but I should make progress to give others who sit here waiting a chance to contribute.

Mr. Dismore: I wish to pursue a different aspect of the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Amber Valley (Judy Mallaber). Clause 2 says that the commission shall certify a body in relation to each of the possible outcomes of a referendum campaign. In the London referendum, mercifully, we had only two possible outcomes—for or against. If the Government had given the Opposition their way, we would have had an additional question on whether we should have a mayor or an assembly, and, if they had given the Liberal Democrats their way, there would have been a question on whether the assembly should have tax-raising powers. If all those questions had been incorporated, there would have been seven possible outcomes. Would the Bill allow for an individual or body to represent each of the seven different outcomes? As I read the Bill, it would.

Mr. Robathan: The hon. Gentleman is right to read the Bill in that way, but the point is that the referendums commission would determine what was fair in discussions with the Government as the Bill went through Parliament. The amount of money would not be enormous. I put a question to the hon. Gentleman for him to mull over quietly—I do not intend to give way to him again in the near future. Is the purpose of a referendum to discover what the electorate think on a particular issue? The answer may not be yes or no. It may be yes, no, yes, yes, perhaps this way or perhaps that way. If there is to be a referendum, it has to be fair. It is no good simply saying, "Back me, we are the Government. Trust Tony"—or whoever it might be.

Clause 3(2) gives equal access to the broadcast media to both sides in a campaign. It relates to the general thrust of Neill about the

"fair opportunity for each side of the argument to be properly put to the voters",

in recommendation 83. It also reflects the comments that Neill makes on broadcasting:

"The broadcasters fully recognise their obligation to be fair to the various parties participating in referendum campaigns and to be neutral between them".

He concludes:

"The broadcasters should consider allocating free airtime to the two umbrella organisations on each side of a referendum, if two such umbrella organisations exist. There seems no reason on the face of it why the broadcasters should not follow the lead of the election commission in this matter".

Clause 4 deals with reports and relates to recommendation 93 of the Neill report. It puts the referendums commission in its context relating to the progress of legislation on a referendum through the Houses of Parliament.

Judy Mallaber: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Robathan: I think not, for the moment.

Clause 5 provides for money for expenses relating to the referendums commission and to the Bill, and clause 6 cites the measure as the Referendums Act 1999.

This is a short and simple Bill. One might have thought that it was so simple that I could sit down now. Do I hear cries of "hear, hear"? No. One would have expected that the Government, who instituted the Neill committee in November 1997, would welcome any legislation that enacted the committee's recommendations as speedily as possible. It will certainly be a year between publication of the report and the time when the Bill comes back for Report and Third Reading.

At my first meeting at the Home Office, I was pleasantly surprised by the sympathetic hearing that I received. However, sadly—the Minister is a decent chap—and unbelievably the Government now seem unwilling to accept the recommendations of the report that they instituted. I fear that the Government intend to block this cross-party measure, which all democrats support.

Contrary to appearances, I am not entirely naive. My initial reaction was that I would meet some Government opposition. I have had a bet with a colleague that the Government would not give the Bill a fair wind—a bet that I have already won. The previous Government also had a great suspicion of private Member's measures, but I have gone to great lengths to allay the suspicions of this Government. There is no hidden agenda. This is just a very simple Bill to enact recommendations of which the Government appear to approve. There are some decent Government Members who, I hope, are as disappointed as I am that the Government may seem to obstruct the measure.

The Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, the hon. Member for Knowsley, North and Sefton, East (Mr. Howarth), has, I fear, been told to write to me to state that

"it would not be sensible"

to legislate at the moment. Weasel words. If this is genuinely a question of timing, I offer to withdraw the Bill now. I will withdraw it if the Home Secretary will come to the House and guarantee that the provisions of the Bill and all the recommendations of the Neill Committee on referendums will be placed on the statute book before any other referendum takes place in the United Kingdom. I think it unlikely that I shall be withdrawing the Bill.

The Government's position is as follows:

"The Home Secretary has made it clear that we will publish a draft Bill before the Summer Recess".

Shall I list those White Papers, stated intentions and draft Bills that have been published and never seen the light of day? I have a list of draft Bills here. They have all been waiting more than a year and they include the Environment Agencies Bill, published in 1984, the Commonhold Bill, published in 1996, the Lotteries

[Mr. Robathan]

(Frequent Draw) Bill, published with a consultation letter in January 1998, and the Offences Against the Person Bill, published in February 1998. I wonder how much longer we will have to wait for all those Bills.

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Robathan: No.

Draft Bills and White Papers have a habit of being kicked into the proverbial long grass. If a Bill containing the clauses in my Bill is promised for the next legislative Session, with the conditions that I have made already, I will withdraw my Bill, but the Minister tells me that such promise can be given, because

"the Government's legislative programme for a Session is not announced in advance of the Queen's Speech."

As a general rule, that may have some validity, but we all know that it is not true. It is quite one of the lamest excuses that I have ever seen given by a Minister or by his civil servants.

In his courteous and friendly letter, the Minister states:

"We intend to legislate on the main findings of the Neill report as a package."

The letter points out that the report contains 100 detailed recommendations, but it does not say that all the recommendations, particularly those relating to referendums, will be enacted. The Government will argue that there is some logic in proceeding steadily and sensibly with the Neill package.

I would accept that logic if the guarantee for which I have asked were given. But how can one accept the logic that may obstruct the Bill, when the Bill does not entail any great costs or cause any great problems for the legislative process, or for the civil service? It is a simple question of passing the recommendations into legislation. If it is never used because it is superseded by a Government Bill which incorporates its provisions, I shall be very content. My Bill could be passed, and members of the Neill committee could be provisionally appointed as the referendums commission but put on hold pending the Government's Bill, which could contain a clause saying that my Bill was repealed because all the provisions were now incorporated in the new package Government Bill. I would be very happy with that.

My Bill might have deficiencies—I have never claimed to be a brilliant parliamentary draftsman, although I have received great assistance from the Public Bill Office, to whose staff I pay tribute. I should be happy to change its name to "The Referenda Bill" if its current title offends Latin scholars. I do not suffer from such a high degree of amour propre that I should mind in the least if the Government were to take over the Bill. However, what I, all hon. Members on both sides of the House and all democrats both inside and outside the House care about is that any future referendum in this country should be conducted according to fair rules. Past referendums have not allowed sufficient voter awareness. If referendums are to be part of our political process, voters must know both or all sides of the argument and be aware of how their vote will influence their life. If the Government obstruct the Bill, as I believe that they intend to do, I shall be hugely disappointed, not because of some misplaced pride or personal vanity, but because the Government will be obstructing the process of democracy.

The Government's true position was given by the right hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson) on 18 October, on "Breakfast with Frost"; I commend a tape or a transcript of that programme to hon. Members. When asked whether the Government were obliged to accept the Neill recommendations, the right hon. Gentleman replied:

"We don't have to but we need to be mindful of the analysis that he is offering."

The right hon. Gentleman is not present, and I apologise for not having mentioned to him that I would be quoting his words, but I am not criticising him. Even if his position is now more humble than it was then, he remains a force to be reckoned with in Government thinking.

During the debate on the Neill report on 9 November, the Home Secretary was equally equivocal, especially about the position of the Government in a referendum. Let the Minister now present put all that equivocation behind him and say where the Government stand on all the recommendations of the Neill committee. Yesterday, I gave the Leader of the House, with the Home Secretary sitting next to her, an opportunity to state the Government's case, but the right hon. Lady failed to do so.

Perhaps in all this can be seen the hand of Alastair Campbell: a man who defended the actions of Robert Maxwell through the pages of *The Mirror* and who was described by a High Court judge—perhaps the same judge as I would have to lead the referendums commission—as:

"A witness in whom one can have no confidence".

Sadly, however, he is a man whose influence on decisions made by the Labour Government is all-pervasive.

The Government spend a lot of time calling themselves "the people's Government", and almost every policy is the people's this or the people's that. It is not a cheap jibe to point out that everyone in the House knows the contempt that the Government have shown, and continue to show, for Parliament. However, if they obstruct this valuable and small constitutional measure—a measure that will assist the people when voting in referendums—this arrogant Government will have shown that they have a contempt for the people that I thought even they would never dare to show. I commend the Bill to the House.

10.13 am

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): I am glad to have an opportunity to speak on the Bill, and I congratulate the hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan) on having introduced it. I shall not support the Bill, but it gives us an opportunity to discuss the important issues surrounding referendums.

Like the hon. Gentleman, I am not greatly enthusiastic about holding referendums, although I believe that, on certain important and crucial issues, it is right to give the people of this country their say through a referendum. The Government of the day were right to hold the 1975 referendum, because it gave the people an opportunity to make a decision on what was then the Common Market and is now the European Union. Similarly, it was right of the new Labour Government to follow the example set by the Labour Government in 1978-79 and hold referendums on whether to establish a Parliament in Scotland and an Assembly in Wales. Those referendums gave the people

of Scotland and Wales the right to grant legitimacy to that form of devolution by showing that they wanted it. The results of those two referendums fully endorsed the commitment given during the 1997 general election and gave legitimacy to the bodies that are to be established after the May elections in Scotland and Wales.

The hon. Member for Blaby referred to the London referendum. Again, it was right to hold a referendum on the subject of whether to have a mayor and assembly for London. This time, having reorganised London government, we do not want it to be undone as soon as there is a change of Government; the people have shown that that is what they want and that they do not want it to be changed subsequently. I well recall the Herbert commission in the 1960s recommending that changes be made to the system of local government. The year after the 1963 election, the new Greater London council took full effect, followed 10 years later by changes to the metropolitan counties. Those changes—reorganisation in London and in the rest of the country—were introduced by Conservative Governments, but were then undone by the Thatcher Government because the bodies concerned would not do exactly what she wanted them to do. This time, the people of London have expressed a clear view on what they want.

There are two crucial future referendums. First, there is to be the referendum on whether to join the single currency. As a strong supporter of the euro, I believe the sooner that referendum is held, the better. Manufacturing industries in my constituency believe that it is crucial that Britain should be involved in the euro, and in the decision-making processes at an early stage, rather than trying to join it at a late stage. If we had been in Europe right at the start, we would have been in on the formulation of the common agricultural policy; as it is, we joined late and then tried to make changes.

The second referendum to which we are committed is on the Jenkins proposals. I realise that I am standing behind some of my hon. Friends who hold a different view from mine on the question of proportional representation versus first past the post, but I am firmly committed to campaigning in favour of first past the post. However, it is right that the people of this country should be given a chance to determine whether any change should be made, because those are extremely important issues.

New Zealand held a referendum on the same issues and, on the basis of an extremely low poll, eliminated first past the post from its system, with the result that, in the second-stage referendum, first past the post could not be considered. Even though the poll was far higher and people had changed their minds by the time the second referendum was held, they were not able to choose to stay as they had been, but had to vote for some alternative. It is therefore absolutely crucial that we get the question absolutely right when we hold our referendum on the same subject. The form of the question is an issue covered by the Bill. We have to ensure that the question is put correctly, so as to give people the proper choice.

In connection with the issues of publicity and how opposing campaigns are run, we need to consider the only nationwide referendum held in this country: the 1975 referendum on the Common Market.

Mr. Christopher Gill (Ludlow): Would the hon. Gentleman concede that the 1975 referendum was held simply to cover up the splits in the Labour party? The then Labour Government could not take a firm decision themselves, so they subcontracted the decision to the people of this country. They held a referendum to cover up the splits that the issue had caused in their own party.

Mr. Pike: The hon. Gentleman might be partially correct, but it does not really matter; if he had been listening to what I was saying, he might not have intervened.

I accept that, at that time, the Labour Government were divided, but they made a clear decision, right at the start, that all members of the party, both inside and outside Parliament, should be able to campaign whichever way they wanted during the referendum. We gave the people the opportunity at an early stage—we had been members of the Common Market for only a short time—to decide whether our future lay within the Common Market. The decision taken at that time underpins the way in which we have proceeded in the many years since then, through the single market, the Maastricht treaty, and so on.

It is true to say that about two thirds—a majority—of Labour Members at that time supported the view of the then Prime Minister Harold Wilson that our future lay in Europe. Outside the parliamentary Labour party, about two thirds of Labour supporters rejected that view and only one third were in favour. I make no apologies for the fact that I campaigned vigorously for a yes vote. That did not help my immediate progress within my party, although it did not prevent my selection as the Labour candidate in 1981 to contest the seat of Burnley in the 1983 general election.

Mr. Gareth Thomas: I share my hon. Friend's scepticism about the role of referendums and his fear that they will undermine the strength of Parliament. Although the Government were divided in 1975, that is no reason to argue against referendums—indeed, we could argue that a referendum should be held when a major constitutional issue must be determined and none of the political parties can reach a consensus about it.

Mr. Pike: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. It may be that this country will further strengthen its links with Europe over the next 20-odd years.

I referred to the events in 1975 because a clause in this Bill mentions the media. We must look back to 1975 and ensure that we do not make the same mistakes. Although I campaigned for a yes vote in 1975, I believe there was overwhelming pressure on the public to vote yes—despite the steps that were taken to try to ensure that both cases were represented fairly. The broadcasting media was not the only culprit: the overwhelming majority of the press campaigned for a yes vote. This Bill refers to controls on, and access to, the broadcast media, but it does not mention any other ares of the media. It is the same with general elections: we often talk about balance and access with regard to the broadcasting media, but we do not always insist that the same rules apply across the board.

Mr. Philip Hammond (Runnymede and Weybridge): I have listened carefully to the hon. Gentleman's comments about the 1975 referendum. Does he accept that there is a distinction between a genuine referendum, when the Government remain neutral and there are real

[Mr. Philip Hammond]

divisions across the board, and a bogus referendum, when the Government adopt a clear position but are unwilling to take the risk of testing it by going to the country in a general election?

Mr. Pike: No, I do not agree with the hon. Gentleman. I hope that the Government will state clearly that they want the people of this country to vote yes overwhelmingly in a referendum on the euro. That was our position at the last election. We also said in our election manifesto that we would hold a referendum on the voting system. So we have a mandate to hold those referendums. Furthermore, we declared our intention to hold referendums on self-government for Scotland, Wales and London. I do not believe that a choice must be made between holding a referendum or going to a general election.

Judy Mallaber: I have listened carefully to my hon. Friend's remarks. When canvassing during the election campaign specifically on the issue of the euro and whether a referendum could be useful in resolving that question, I met strong Labour supporters who were unhappy about the euro and, similarly, Conservative supporters—although not very many—who were in favour of the euro and unhappy about their party's policy in that regard.

Does my hon. Friend agree that, when views differ within the political parties—although the Government might wish to advance a particular view strongly—it may be helpful to hold a referendum so that the electors do not have to sign up to an entire policy platform? That is particularly important when it comes to major constitutional issues, as I may wish to disagree with my party in a referendum.

Mr. Pike: My hon. Friend is absolutely correct; that is a key point. I have strong views about the voting system and the euro. At the end of the day, I hope that the Government will reach the same conclusions on first past the post—although they may not. It is clear that we should hold referendums to decide such questions. Through his Bill, the hon. Member for Blaby seeks to ensure—as did the Neill report—that people have a genuine opportunity to consider fairly both sides of the argument. I accept the legitimacy of that point.

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: My hon. Friend points out correctly that the Neill committee called for fair rules in referendums. Does my hon. Friend agree that the problem with this Bill is that it lacks a series of controls recommended by the Neill committee, such as the requirement to register any campaigning group or individual intending to incur expenditure of more than £25,000? It also lacks any provision to ban donations from foreign sources.

Mr. Pike: I thank my hon. Friend—that is my next point. On the question of publicity, I believe we must regulate the whole of the media, not simply the broadcasting area, if we genuinely wish to ensure that a referendum campaign represents both sides fairly.

My hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Thomas) is correct to say that the Neill committee cites certain figures and contains recommendations regarding donations by organisations and so on. The Bill's failure to address those points is a serious omission. The Bill also fails to address the question of free mailing and the free use of public rooms. That is not an issue in parliamentary and other elections in this country, and I believe that the same rules should apply to referendums.

I agree with the principle of the Bill. Its introduction provides an opportunity to discuss the issues, but I do not think it goes far enough. I hope that the Bill will not make progress today and, if it does, I hope that it will be much amended in Committee. I look forward to the Government's introducing legislation that addresses all the Neill committee's recommendations, rather than one specific point. The hon. Member for Blaby recited a rather nonsense list of draft Bills, the majority of which were introduced by the previous Government but fell when the general election was called. I do not accept the hon. Gentleman's arguments. The Government are fully committed to acting on the Neill committee's recommendations sensibly and positively. They will legislate on the conduct of all elections and referendums.

I had meant to be brief, but interventions have extended my speech. I realise that many hon. Members wish to speak in the debate. I reiterate that I reject the Bill and I am sure that the Government will deal positively with these issues. We will ensure that future referendums are controlled openly and sensibly so that people can exercise their vote on the basis of full and accurate information.

10.30 am

Mr. Robert Maclennan (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross): I strongly welcome the initiative and success of the hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan) in introducing the Bill. It is an important opportunity for the House to express its concern to ensure that referendums, which are becoming a regular feature of our constitutional development, are conducted fairly and command complete support—not only while they are being conducted, but afterwards.

In the past 18 months, we have had more referendums than we had in the previous 18 years—perhaps because there was a period of constitutional stasis prior to the last general election—and that has underlined the importance of making rapid progress on the matter. At least two referendums were promised by the Government in their manifesto before the election. The first relates to the possibility of an alternative electoral system for Westminster and the other to the adoption of the euro.

Those are major issues for the country and the setting up of referendums on those questions should be subject to regulation that has been determined prior to the enactment of the necessary Bills to enable the referendums to be held. We need what the constitution unit has called generic referendum legislation. I am encouraged by the fact that the Government are committed to publishing—this summer, I believe—a Bill setting out their conclusions on the Neill committee's recommendations, particularly on an electoral commission.

It is desirable that the work of regulating elections and referendums should be in the charge of a body that is seen to be independent of the Government. The current arrangements are far from satisfactory. The hon. Member for Blaby was right to draw attention to our particular experiences. It was not satisfactory that the Government

decided to put a two-question referendum to the Scots without any prior cross-party discussion. That was bounced on the Scots. The outcome was not unfortunate, and I dare say that the Government's political judgment could not be faulted in that case. However, the referendum should have been processed by agreement.

Similarly, the single referendum question put to the people of London about the proposed reform to establish a mayor and an Assembly did not allow for the expression of diverse opinions that might have been more redolent of exactly what the people favoured. Once again, there was a question about the question.

Those two experiences point to the appropriateness of what the hon. Member for Blaby advocates in his Bill: the commission should be able to proffer advice on the referendum question to the Government and Parliament when the arrangements for particular referendums are being contemplated.

The genesis of the hon. Gentleman's proposals goes back a long way. There has long been an awareness of the need for fairness in referendums. I draw attention to a Labour party policy paper, published in 1996, "A New Voice for England's Regions", which says that the Labour party would establish a body that would be

"directly and solely responsible for all aspects of electoral administration and for ensuring freedom and fairness in all aspects of our electoral system."

There have been calls from the House for an electoral commission to regulate referendums and elections, notably in the report of the Select Committee on Home Affairs of September 1998, HC 768.

The hon. Member for Blaby properly referred to the important recommendations of the commission on the conduct of referendums, established in 1996 by the Electoral Reform Society and the constitution unit at University college, and chaired by Sir Patrick Nairne. That commission concluded:

"The conduct of referendums should be entrusted to a statutory independent body, accountable to Parliament, in order to ensure maximum confidence in the legitimacy of the results."

Extensive reference has been made in the speeches of the hon. Members for Blaby and for Burnley (Mr. Pike) to the recommendations of the Neill report published in October 1998. I have no doubt that the overwhelming majority of hon. Members broadly agree with those recommendations and want them to be enacted as soon as possible.

The House will have to come to grips with certain of the Neill report's recommendations, for example, on the making of the Government's case. I said when the report was published, and still believe, that the mere decision to hold a referendum should not make it more difficult for the Government freely to express their side of the argument. That is almost certainly not the intention of the Neill committee, but some of the language in the report gave support to the view that the Government should drop out during a referendum and leave the advocacy of their case to an umbrella body. That would be artificial and unsatisfactory.

Mr. Martin Linton (Battersea): I was interested to find out whether the right hon. Gentleman would repeat the comments that he made during last year's debate on referendums. He remarked on the Government's role in fighting in a referendum and he now repeats that it would be artificial for them to have to contract the expression of their case to an outside body over which they would have no control. Does he agree that the Bill would force a Government into that position and that they would not be able to spend money to support their own case?

Mr. Maclennan: The Bill contains a risk of that happening, but it could possibly be amended in Committee to take account of the problem. The clear objective of the Neill committee, the Bill, myself and, no doubt, the hon. Gentleman is that there should be fairness as well as clarity on both sides. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord): Order. A number of private conversations are breaking out. Hon. Members ought to listen to the right hon. Gentleman, who is addressing the House.

Mr. Maclennan: As referendums are, of their nature, held on questions of Government policy, it is clearly right that the advocacy of the Government's case should not be subcontracted to any other body and the Government should be the spokesmen on the issue.

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: The right hon. Gentleman said that, in a couple of instances, the Neill report had arrived at the wrong conclusion. I would suggest that it also arrived at the wrong conclusion about the spending limits for referendums. Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that one of the criticisms of, and concerns about, the 1975 referendum was the wide disparity in the funding of the two campaigns, and that spending limits should be imposed in referendums?

Mr. Maclennan: It is unquestionably true that there was great disparity in the 1975 campaign and that it may have had an untoward effect on perceptions about its fairness. Again, we have to avoid artificiality. A Minister appearing on a broadcast, saying what the Government's view is, might cost almost nothing but have an immense impact. Somehow we have to maintain a balance.

I am not entirely happy about the Bill's mechanistic proposals on broadcasting. Broadcasters might give less attention than they should to both sides of the case if we constrain them too much by the proposed rules of balance. However, the reason behind the proposals is extremely important—there should be fairness, and broadcasters should seek to ensure that there is. This is precisely the type of matter on which the House would value not so much the regulations in the Bill, as the advice of a truly independent referendums election commission, which would no doubt carry great weight with broadcasters.

The Bill has great merit, especially in that it focuses on the urgency of the situation. It was quite right to introduce the Bill. I have no complaints about that, even in the knowledge that the Government intend to introduce an election commission Bill at some stage. It is right for the House to know that referendums are coming down the pipe. We want to make sure well in advance that we are not bounced into passing a referendum Bill to establish a poll on the euro, without having a well-established framework that is accepted by all parties and understood throughout the country. It would lend great weight to the outcome of such a referendum if such a framework were established soon.

[Mr. Maclennan]

I hope that, as a result of this debate, we might hear a little more from the Government about their intention to introduce a Bill and whether they would like it to be enacted in the next Session of Parliament. I heard the Minister saying that Governments do not divulge what will be in the Queen's Speech. That rule is becoming more honoured in the breach than in the observance, although I do not expect the Minister to give a definitive response today.

There is widespread support for the introduction of a draft Bill this Session. Indeed, I and my right hon. and hon. Friends have suggested that it would be possible to introduce a draft Bill in this Session of Parliament and carry it through into the next, a procedure that the Government have already adopted in respect of an electronic commerce Bill and a financial services Bill. There is much merit in getting matters into the open as soon as possible to get comment and support from all sides so that we can ensure that we reach our common ends in good time.

10.44 am

Mr. Andrew Dismore (Hendon): I congratulate the hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan) on introducing the Bill. As has just been said, there is recognition of the need for reform. The question that we have to ask today is whether the Bill deals with that need in the way that it should. As the hon. Gentleman may have gathered from my interventions, my main concern is that many of the issues that need to be addressed have been left out of the Bill. They include, for example, the registration of campaigners, funding rules—including those in relation to donations—and the role of the Government in referendums, something that the hon. Gentleman touched on in response to me. I shall return to those issues later.

Mr. Letwin: I do not want to detain the hon. Gentleman for long, but would it be of interest to him to know that the suggestion to remove the registration of campaigners derives from his Government?

Mr. Dismore: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will be patient and wait for me to get to that point.

Any reform should be comprehensive. In response to a motion for the Adjournment of the House on 9 November 1998, my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary made it clear that the Government were going to consider the issue in the round. He said:

"The next step is to turn the report"—

the report into the funding of political parties—

"into legislation. We are setting about that straight away. It will not be possible to introduce and carry through a measure of such scope with due attention to getting the framework and the detail right in the next Session of Parliament, but we intend to introduce a draft Bill before the next summer recess and to bring forward legislation so that new rules can be in place before the next general election."—[*Official Report*, 9 November 1998; Vol. 319, c. 53.]

There has been a great deal of argument about the Government's intention, but the Home Secretary's remarks were given particular force and emphasised by the Lord Chancellor when he spoke at the annual constitution unit lecture on 8 December 1998. The Lord Chancellor stressed the importance that the Government attach to the issue and said:

"As the Home Secretary has made clear, we shall be giving careful consideration to all the Neill Committee's recommendations on the conduct of referendums and we will examine how best to take them forward in the context of the draft Bill which we will be publishing by next year's summer recess."

I understand the impatience of the hon. Member for Blaby that progress be made in respect of the Neill committee's recommendations, but he is jumping the gun because the Government have said that their Bill will be published by the summer and that we shall be able to consult more widely on much of the detail.

Judy Mallaber: Does my hon. Friend agree that referendums and the broader matters raised by the Neill committee's recommendations are complex? I have not looked at them in great detail, but I am finding it hard to work out exactly how the proposals should be implemented. Does my hon. Friend agree that the Government's Bill would benefit from pre-legislative scrutiny by a Committee of the House? Might not that assist us in making sure that the Bill is not only properly formulated but has support from all parts of the House? We have to get it right, otherwise we shall lose the legitimacy of the democratic and political process.

Mr. Dismore: My hon. Friend makes an extremely important point. When I was researching my speech for tonight—[HON. MEMBERS: "Tonight?"] I spent a happy hour or two in the Library the other night. The more I read up on this matter—I read the Neill report, the Jenkins commission's report, the Library brief, *Hansard* and all the other documentation available—the more that I became increasingly concerned that the detailed issues, some of which have already begun to be elucidated, were much more complex than might appear at first blush. I therefore welcome my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary's announcement about the draft Bill. The suggestion made by my hon. Friend the Member for Amber Valley (Judy Mallaber) that there should be pre-legislative scrutiny of that Bill would be an excellent way to proceed. In longer discussions we could flush out the important issues that are already starting to emerge at this early stage.

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: My hon. Friend has obviously conducted wide research for his speech. Was he able to look at the Home Affairs Committee report on electoral law and administration? If he has seen it, would he comment on the evidence presented by Dr Butler and Professor Blackburn, who expressed concern at the large number of bodies with a role in the electoral process? One of their arguments in favour of an electoral commission with responsibility for the rules governing referendums, was that that would allow a much more coherent view of those matters to be taken.

Mr. Dismore: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that intervention. I admit that that is one of the reports that I have not read; perhaps my hon. Friend will lend me his copy afterwards so that I may read up on what the Home Affairs Committee said. There is much in what my hon. Friend says; in fact, that would have been my next point.

One of my main anxieties about the Bill is the fact that the hon. Member for Blaby regards the Bill as a referendum Bill, and therefore he proposes a referendum

commission, which might, in due course, be subsumed into an elections commission. My hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Thomas) makes an extremely important point when he says that we risk a plethora of different bodies advancing a variety of ideas and suggestions, some of which may be mutually contradictory.

Later, if there is time, I hope to point out some of the contradictions that exist between, for example, the Jenkins report and the Neill report on one or two of those important issues. In that context, I believe that it is extremely important that one body oversees all these issues—a Neill committee recommendation that the hon. Gentleman does not seem to have taken into account when drafting the Bill.

Mr. Cash: Surely the Government would understand that there is a distinction between a referendum and an election. I strongly support the proposal made by my hon. Friend the Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan), irrespective of the Neill committee report, for precisely that reason. There are rules relating to broadcasting and to expenditure which are, and should be, specifically geared to the question of the issues that arise in a referendum, which is quite different from an election. The electorate vote in both elections and referendums, but in one case one is asking for support for a Government, and in the other for support for a yes or a no to a question.

Mr. Dismore: The hon. Gentleman makes an interesting intervention, but I am not sure that the distinction that he draws is as clear cut as he suggests. In the end, many of the issues that a referendum commission would address—precisely the points that the hon. Gentleman raises about party funding or campaign funding—need to be looked at in the round. It would be bizarre if, for example, the ceiling on funding for a referendum campaign was totally out of kilter with the ceiling on party election funding for a general or local election. Those issues need to be considered comprehensively, in the round, as the Neill committee recommended.

Sir Michael Spicer: It was the Neill committee that drew the distinction between endorsement of policy and consultation about policy, which is what a referendum is all about. That was a fundamental point within the Neill committee, and much flows from that.

Mr. Dismore: I do not believe that that greatly affects my argument. I believe that a single body should oversee all the aspects of involving the electorate in the decision-making process, whether it be through elections or referendums, to ensure that we have a comprehensive way of supervising those things that knits together and does not produce contradictory and conflicting ideas.

Mr. Linton: Does my hon. Friend agree with the evidence that the Labour party submitted to the Neill committee—but that, sadly, does not appear in its report and is not incorporated into the Bill—that there should be a limit of £5 million on what a party spends in a referendum campaign, and of £500,000 on what any outside organisation spends, to prevent the huge spending that has been mentioned? At one stage, Paul Sykes said that he might give £20 million to the no side in a referendum campaign. Whatever one's view on that, such huge donations risk distorting a campaign. The Bill would benefit from a limit on spending.

Mr. Dismore: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that intervention. I know that he has done a great deal of work on all the issues relating to elections and referendums. He makes a valid point and I hope to return to it. Whatever emerges from the decision-making process, there must be a level playing field and, inevitably, that must include caps on spending during an electoral or referendum campaign.

In that context, we need to consider the issue of donations made by individuals to campaigns, to ensure that those are properly supervised and above board. That is another issue that the Bill does not address, and to which I hope to return shortly.

I shall now consider some of the detail of the Bill. My first concern is that, although the Bill is called the Referendums Bill, nowhere in it do we find a definition of "referendum". There could be a very grey area about whether something was a referendum.

Perhaps I may start my development of this argument by questioning the hon. Member for Blaby about whether a ballot on the future of an individual grammar school would be a referendum in the context of the Bill. As I read the Bill, I believe that a grammar school ballot would fall within the definition, because that ballot would be held under an enactment, which is the criterion that the hon. Gentleman sets for control of the referendum by his proposed referendum commission.

Mr. Robathan: I have been listening to the hon. Gentleman's wise and wonderful words with great interest for the past 13 minutes. I note, though, that his interest in referendums must be quite new, as he has only recently realised what a referendum means. I trust that he has consulted a dictionary. Could it possibly be that he has been asked—I should like him to state categorically whether this is the case—by a member of the Government to make as long and boring a speech as possible? If he is one of those supine and feeble members of Government parties who do such things, may I assure him, from my greater experience in the House, that it never leads to advancement and always elicits the scorn of his fellows?

Mr. Dismore: I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman finds my speech boring. The interventions that I have had from both sides of the House may show that it is not as boring as he says. Perhaps I may return the compliment and say that I found his recitation a little turgid.

The hon. Gentleman questions whether I know what a referendum is. I actually asked that question of him. Perhaps it is my legal training, but, as a lawyer, if I were to take a case—which of course I would not, because I am not taking cases while a Member of Parliament—I might well be asked to construe the Bill. I was going to give one or two examples later of how the legal profession might make a large amount of money out of the Bill. That might be done by taking advantage of the lack of a definition of "referendum".

When the hon. Gentleman intervened, I was giving the example of grammar school ballots. I believe that, as the Bill stands, a referendum commission would look at grammar school ballots, because those ballots are

[Mr. Dismore]

conducted under the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 and the Education (Grammar School Ballots) Regulations 1998. The Library brief says that categorically.

Judy Mallaber: I am slightly surprised, as a non-lawyer, that my hon. Friend is suggesting that the Bill might apply to referendums on the future of grammar schools—an issue in which I am greatly interested. Will he give me some advice as a lawyer? I do not like to be rude about lawyers, but they are all able to go on at inordinate length about the most nit-picking matters. I believe that it comes naturally to them; they never need to be asked to do so.

Can my hon. Friend give me guidance on clause 2(1)? It appears to me that, when the Bill says that the referendum would apply to

"any bill which provides for the holding of a referendum",

it means that it would apply only to a referendum campaign in respect of that referendum—that is, that referendum would have to have been specifically mentioned in the Bill and therefore, on my reading of it—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Lady must sit down when I am speaking. The hon. Lady's interventions are getting longer and longer. I think that she has said enough in this intervention.

Mr. Dismore: I think that I have the thrust of my hon. Friend's point.

It being Eleven o'clock, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *interrupted the proceedings, pursuant to Standing Order No. 11 (Friday Sittings).*

Education Directorate (Hackney)

11 am

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney, North and Stoke Newington) *(by private notice)*: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on the proposed privatisation of the education directorate in Hackney.

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Ms Patricia Hewitt): The Secretary of State is not proposing to privatise the education directorate in Hackney. He has today written to the leaders of the three political parties in Hackney to say that, having considered the findings of the Office for Standards in Education inspection report on Hackney local education authority, which is published today, he is of the opinion that the LEA is failing to perform a number of functions to an adequate standard, and that he is minded to direct the director of education of Hackney LEA to contract out several functions. Contractors could include public sector or private sector bodies or consortiums. The LEA has been given until 13 April to comment on the proposal. We are determined to ensure that every child in Hackney receives a good education. That is why the Secretary of State is taking this course of action.

Ms Abbott: I begin by thanking Education Ministers for briefing me on this subject yesterday and saying that I did not break the embargo on the information.

I regret very much that no Education Minister felt able to respond to my private notice question. I think that it is unprecedented for a Member to table a private notice question and for it to be accepted by Madam Speaker, but for no Minister from the Department concerned to make themselves available to respond. That shows a rather derisory attitude to the House. *[Interruption.]* I am afraid I do think that. Indeed, I shall go further.

It was a very bad practice of the previous Government to make announcements at press conferences that should properly have been made on the Floor of the House. I very much regret that my Government have followed that practice. It cannot be right that Ministers are engaged in a press conference instead of reporting to the House on a step of national significance. Ministers clearly believe that today's announcement is of national significance because they were on the "Today" programme this morning, and are holding a major press conference as we speak. [HON. MEMBERS: "Disgraceful".] That is why they are not here, and a Treasury Minister is here instead.

I tabled a private notice question because I felt that the matter was of significance far beyond Hackney. Today, Ministers will be taking the first step towards taking control of a key aspect of education away from local democratic control. Local democratic control of education is one of the most important pillars of local democracy, and it should not be undermined lightly. There can be no doubt that the decision on which Ministers are, as we speak, making a statement to the press will take away significant local control over some of the most important areas of education policy.

There has been absolutely no local consultation about this step. It will not do for Ministers to say that they are taking it on behalf of Hackney parents and children, because they have not visited Hackney or consulted

local people. They have certainly not consulted Members of Parliament who represent the area on whether we want any aspects of the education directorate's work put out to tender. I take very seriously that lack of consultation on this unprecedented step.

Putting the most important aspects of the education directorate's work out to tender is an experiment. We have no knowledge of whether it will improve Hackney schools. Ministers should not be experimenting in Hackney if they have no knowledge of whether contracting out the inspectorate and other education directorate functions will improve matters. Precisely because of the borough's problems, Ministers should not be experimenting in Hackney.

I understand that Ministers' proposals will not involve privatising all the LEA's functions, but in a way, that makes matters worse. What is a cannibalised LEA supposed to do? Some functions will be taken away; some will be left to the LEA. Ministers have not explained—either yesterday, or in today's brief and rather cursory statement—how they imagine that an LEA can remain viable following the removal of its key strategic functions.

Mr. David Maclean (Penrith and The Border): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I have been listening carefully to the hon. Lady, who has been making an interesting point—but she has been asking questions further to her private notice question for six minutes during time that has been allocated to private Members Bills.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord): There is some justification in the right hon. Gentleman's point of order. I trust that the hon. Lady will remember that this is not a debate and will fairly quickly come to the end of her remarks.

Ms Abbott: I take that point of order in good part, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Why did not Ministers feel it appropriate to consult locally before taking this step? Are they confident that a cannibalised LEA will be viable? What will be the role of the education officer? It seems that the education officer will have no control, and be reduced to a monitoring officer. How much will the consultants who are brought in to advise on the contract cost? What proportion of the total contract do Ministers anticipate outside contractors will receive as the management fee for running the LEA?

Will Ministers assure me that, before the contract is finalised and put out to tender, my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney, South and Shoreditch (Mr. Sedgemore) and I will have the opportunity, on behalf of local people, to see it and comment on it? Do Ministers understand that this step is viewed by people in Hackney with the utmost concern? The lack of consultation and the piecemeal nature of the steps proposed give rise to local concern. I hope that the Economic Secretary will be able to answer my questions.

Ms Hewitt: My hon. Friend is wrong on the question of the press conference. My right hon. and hon. Friends in the Department for Education and Employment are not holding a press conference on Hackney: they are all out of London on departmental business, and that is why I am answering the private notice question. I am not sure whether my hon. Friend raised the form of the announcement with Education Ministers when she met them yesterday, but I think the matter might appropriately be pursued with them.

Ms Abbott: Will the Minister give way?

Ms Hewitt: Perhaps I may make a little progress in answering the very large number of questions that my hon. Friend has put to me.

On the issue of democratic control of education in Hackney, elected members in Hackney and their electors will receive better advice and a better service from efficient contractors on a number of extremely important functions relating to Hackney schools than they have been receiving from inefficient officers. Elected members will continue to have responsibilities, and to be accountable to the electorate, but they will not be able to intervene in professional matters which are properly the preserve of officers.

On the issue of the experiment to which my hon. Friend referred, let me make it quite clear that this course of action is based on overwhelming evidence of the failure, despite recent improvements, of Hackney council to provide a proper education to Hackney children. There have been two inspections of Hackney LEA—the first in 1997—and a Government-funded improvement team worked with the authority for some time. It is clear that some progress, which we welcome, has been made but it is also clear that, in other respects, the progress has been quite unsatisfactory. Taken as a whole, the Ofsted report on the LEA that is published today is damning. Hackney LEA itself has accepted that it is a fair report. Our intention is not to experiment with the education of Hackney children, but to ensure that they get a decent education.

Ms Abbott *rose—*

Ms Hewitt: I give way.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The Minister must complete her remarks. She cannot give way.

Ms Hewitt: I apologise, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

On the question of the cost of the consultants, the Department will bear that cost. The consultants are simply being used to ensure that the contracting-out specifications are drawn up in the most efficient way.

With regard to the involvement of local Members of Parliament, I very much hope that my hon. Friend, and my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney, South and Shoreditch (Mr. Sedgemore) will work with Ministers in ensuring that, in future, Hackney children get a first-class education.

Mr. David Willetts (Havant): I sympathise with the Minister's plight. It is extraordinary that a Treasury Minister is responding to a private notice question that should be answered by an Education Minister. Ministers at the Department for Education and Employment have been active in briefing the media. They have been active on the airwaves. We know that there have been two significant education announcements today, on A-levels

[Mr. David Willetts]

and on Hackney. For no Education Minister, apparently, to be in London this morning is extraordinary. That is an insult to the House.

Of course, one reason why no Education Ministers are present is that at least one Education Minister was a councillor in Hackney. The head of the schools standards branch of the Department was also a councillor in Hackney. Perhaps Ministers are not present because they would be embarrassed to show their faces, given what we know about the record of Hackney council.

Does the Minister agree that the problems in Hackney are part of a wider problem identified in the Audit Commission report published last week on the performance of local education authorities? That showed that, of the 15 worst-performing LEAs, including Hackney, 13 are Labour-controlled—none are Conservative—and Conservative LEAs make up a quarter of the best-performing LEAs. The problems in Hackney are part of the wider problem of the failure of Labour in local government.

Now we are told that, because Labour politicians have failed in local government, another bunch of Labour politicians in central Government will come in and solve the problem. However, the problem can be solved only by giving freedom to the schools. Instead, as the Ofsted press notice states:

"Hackney's schools have shown remarkable forbearance and loyalty to the LEA despite the long-term chaos they have experienced. But they are sceptical about the possibility of rapid and sustained improvement. That scepticism is justified."

The Minister admitted that the powers of the LEA are unchanged, the role of the councillors is unchanged, and the new consultants will be employees of the council. The one thing that there will not be is more freedom for the schools. There will be just the opposite: more centralisation and more control.

Does the Minister agree that we have been here before? I remember the previous Minister for School Standards, now the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, boldly announcing towards the end of 1997 that he would send in a hit squad to sort out Hackney. As always, the rhetoric was overheated and the reality was disappointing. We will judge the results of the exercise announced today not on the rhetoric surrounding it, but on what happens in Hackney schools.

Ms Hewitt: First, I have already made it clear that my right hon. and hon. Friends at the Department for Education and Employment are fully occupied on Government business, and that they are continuing to carry out their extremely energetic programme to raise standards in our schools from the lamentable level reached under the previous Government.

Secondly, on local education authorities, it is hardly surprising that most LEAs are run by Labour councillors. They have been elected overwhelmingly by people across the country, just as the Government were elected by an overwhelming majority. Very few local voters want Conservatives to be in charge of their LEA, and I am not at all surprised.

Thirdly, on the issue of solving the problem by giving more freedom to schools, I stress that the functions that we are proposing to direct the director of education in Hackney to contract out are planning for school improvements, intervention in schools causing concern, advice on curriculum and professional development, support for secondary schools and improving literacy and language teaching.

Handing over those responsibilities to individual schools which, by definition, have been unable to achieve the desired standards on their own and which have not been getting adequate support from the LEA would not be satisfactory. The answer to the problem is not to withdraw support and leave the schools without adequate support. The answer is to give them proper support.

On the specific question about the contractors, the staff of the private or public sector bodies or consortiums who come in to perform those functions will not be employed by the LEA. They will be employed by the council—I mean the contractor.

There are deep-seated problems in Hackney schools and in the local education authority. We understand the reasons for those problems. We have been working with the council and the LEA to solve them. The decisive action that my right hon. Friend has announced today is further evidence of our determination to ensure that Hackney children get a first-class education in future.

Ms Bridget Prentice (Lewisham, East): I congratulate my hon. Friend on her comprehensive response to the question, and on being the first person during the 16 minutes of discussion to speak about the importance of providing a decent education to Hackney children, which is presumably what we are here for.

It comes painfully from the Conservative Opposition to speak of overheated rhetoric, when they had 18 years to sort out what was going on in education in Hackney and did nothing about it.

Although I welcome the statement, can my hon. Friend tell the House whether only those functions mentioned in it will be contracted out, or whether it is possible that other functions may be contracted out, if that improves the outcome? The end result must be a better standard of education for Hackney children. The vacuum that has existed over the past few years will now, thank heavens, be filled.

Ms Hewitt: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I welcome her commitment to the better education of children in Hackney.

On the question whether other functions might be contracted out, we will ask the consultants to examine the case for contracting out finance, personnel, and information and communications technology services, because those are also unsatisfactory. We will ask the consultants whether it would make sense, in the interests of an orderly and cost-effective discharge of the LEA's functions as a whole, for other functions also to be contracted out, and if necessary, to prepared a specification for that purpose.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): The one thing that will unite all hon. Members is the proposition that we must serve the interests of the young people of Hackney and their families. The hon. Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) has done the House a service by asking the question.

The Department for Education and Employment, as one of the great Departments of State, has done the nation a disservice by not making a Minister available on a parliamentary working day. The Department arranged today as the date of the publication of the Ofsted report. The Department managed the publication and was prepared for it. The rest of us were not formally notified. That is why our party is represented by the London spokesman, not the education spokesman. The Department has no excuse, and the House should receive an apology at the earliest opportunity.

I hope that the Minister realises that her colleagues have landed her and the Government in a position that is difficult or impossible to defend. Hackney does not have the worst-performing schools in Britain. The Ofsted report shows that schools have improved recently, not got worse. For the Government to announce their proposals without first consulting the democratically elected members of the local education authority, of whatever party and of all parties, and without consulting colleagues in Parliament undermines the principle of education being run by democratic local government.

The Government have made two bad mistakes—first, by not coming to the House to announce their intentions properly and, secondly, by putting forward proposals to contract out services without even talking first to those elected to run them. I ask that they now seek to unwind their mistakes—that they come to councillors in Hackney before making any further decisions, and to Members of this place before breaking the barrier between what should be run by central Government and what should be run by local government, supported rather than undermined by central Government.

Ms Hewitt: The Department talked to the leaders of the three political parties in Hackney yesterday, as well as to the officers and the chair of the education committee. Those contacts were merely part of a long process of discussion that has been taking place since the Government were elected, to try to improve the situation in Hackney. Furthermore, the publication of the Ofsted report and the letter sent by my right hon. Friend today are simply steps in a long process. It is a "minded to direct" letter; it is not a final decision on contracting out. The LEA has a chance to comment on it, and has been given until 13 April to do so. The director of education will continue to have a key role. As I said in an earlier response, the elected councillors of the LEA will continue also to have a key role. I think that the rather over-blown rhetoric used by the hon. Gentleman is not justified by the facts.

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): I am pleased that my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) has raised this issue. I am pleased also to hear my hon. Friend the Minister say that the decision on contracting out is not final and that it is out for comment. Surely it represents a huge change in policy, and not only the House but the Labour party should discuss it in some detail.

I have an interest because Calderdale was the first LEA to be "Ofsteded" in the light of a great deal of extraordinary publicity about the Ridings school. The Conservative Government tried to pretend that we had the worst school in the country, which was nonsensical, as events have proved. Since the Labour Government took office, we have had much help to put things right on that.

In Calderdale, it is clear to anybody that the selective system is the problem. While we have two grammar schools and four opted-out schools, we are left with schools that are secondary moderns. Only a fool would argue against that.

We must have a debate on the whole issue. I am deeply concerned that I heard about it only on the "Today" programme. Like me, my hon. Friend has spent the past 18 years fighting privatisation. My understanding of privatisation was that it involved selling off assets and contracting out. When did that definition change?

Ms Hewitt: I am well aware of, and appreciate, my hon. Friend's concern for the education received by the children in her constituency. I welcome the fact that she has been so active in seeking to improve that situation.

I wish to stress that the action taken and the Ofsted report that has been published today do not represent a criticism of the schools or the teachers in those schools. As my right hon. Friend made clear in his letter to the councillors, he welcomes—as we all do—the improvement that has been shown in several respects. However, the report, despite that improvement in some areas, is a damning criticism of the Hackney LEA, and the situation has to be put right.

My concern, and that of the Government, is not to approach this matter from the standpoint of ideological dogma, but to ensure that the services that must be provided by an LEA to ensure that schools and their head teachers and teachers can carry out their responsibility to give children an excellent education are properly provided. It is a question of what works. What is being provided by Hackney LEA in respect of the functions that we are discussing is not working, and we shall change that situation. I will certainly draw my right hon. and hon. Friends' attention to my hon. Friend's request for a debate.

Mr. Nick St. Aubyn (Guildford): Will the Minister clarify for the House the annual administrative running costs of Hackney LEA and what proportion of them is accounted for by the services that are to be contracted out? Will those costs be so great that the tendering process will be subject to European Union regulations? If so, how do the Government propose to deal with the hiatus in the running of services during the passage of the tendering process?

Ms Hewitt: I do not have the detailed figures that the hon. Gentleman requests but I shall ensure that my right hon. Friend writes to him on that point. I stress that the process of contracting out some or all of the functions referred to by my right hon. Friend will offer better value for money than wasting public money on an inadequate service. As education is the largest local authority service, we expect it to be possible to have efficiency within the LEA budget. That will be considered in further detail by my right hon. Friend and by the consultants when we come to draw up the specification for the contracts. Of course the tender for the contracts will comply with all the necessary procedures.

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas (Harrow, West): I hope that my hon. Friend will give me some reassurance by saying that she will not have any truck with any of the

[Mr. Gareth R. Thomas]

sanctimonious claptrap that we have heard from Opposition spokespersons about why she is at the Government Dispatch Box today.

My hon. Friend is entirely right to focus on the quality of the advice offered by the LEA. I ask her to contrast the record in Hackney with that in Harrow, where a new Labour administration is delivering high-quality, effective support and advice to schools. I invite her to praise Pinner Wood middle school in my constituency, which has just received an excellent report, partly because of the quality of advice that has been given to it by the LEA.

Ms Hewitt: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend's point. I am happy to congratulate not only the school in his constituency, which has received an excellent report, but all the schools in the country that have been making dramatic progress in raising standards, with the help of their LEAs and the Department for Education and Employment under the Government's leadership.

Referendums Bill

Question again proposed, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

11.28 am

Mrs. Gorman: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Before the hon. Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore) continues, will you give your view on the scope of the Bill and, therefore, the limits of our discussion? As I read it, it is tightly worded on the mechanics of holding a referendum when the Government of the day have proposed that a specific issue should be dealt with in that way, and therefore would exclude discussions of matters such as referendums among parents should a school decide to consider becoming grant maintained, and other diversions which have been introduced by the hon. Member for Amber Valley (Judy Mallaber), who seems to be more interested in filibustering this Bill than in dealing with the important issues that it raises.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord): The Second Reading of a Bill gives quite wide scope for discussion and debate on the principles of the Bill, and so far this morning that is precisely what we have had.

Mr. Dismore: I think that, before the private notice question I had just taken an intervention from my hon. Friend the Member for Amber Valley in the context of grammar school ballots. My hon. Friend's forensic skills are excellent because I think that she has highlighted a contradiction within the Bill. She drew my attention to clause 2(1), which refers to the holding of a referendum campaign and the designation of that campaign

"soon . . . after the introduction to Parliament"

of a Bill. I draw my hon. Friend's attention to clause 4(1), to which I referred in the context of grammar school ballots. It states:

"The Commission shall make a report to the Secretary of State on the conduct of any referendum conducted under any enactment."

The grammar school ballots are being conducted under the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 and the Grammar School (Ballots) Regulations 1998. The Bill would inevitably cover grammar school ballots and the importance of that will become apparent as I proceed with my remarks.

Local referendums are being used increasingly throughout local government. The Government are encouraging that through the White Paper "Modern Local Government, In Touch With the People". Paragraph 3.30 on page 32, which has the heading

"support for a directly elected mayor",

refers, first, to the Greater London authority ballot. It states that

"before a council could adopt arrangements which include a directly elected mayor, it should be required to conduct a referendum on its proposals giving local people the opportunity to have their say."

I assume from the Bill's wording that it would apply to a referendum on the election of a mayor for a local authority.

In paragraph 4.8 on page 39 of the White Paper, the Government again stress the importance of referendums in the local government context:

"The Government believes that councils should see and use referendums as an important tool to give local people a bigger say. The Government will therefore introduce legislation to confirm the power of councils to hold referendums."

The White Paper says that referendums may or may not be binding

"except in the particular circumstances described"

and adds:

"Councils might wish to use referendums to consult their local people on such issues as major local developments or matters of particular local controversy."

I assume, therefore, that the Bill would apply to such ballots as well. Page 45 of the House of Commons Library briefing helpfully refers to recent precedent. It says that Milton Keynes council conducted a referendum, in February 1999, seeking

"the views of the electorate on three options for increasing council tax levels for 1999/2000."

Returning to a point that I have already made during an intervention, let me point out that that referendum gave three options for increasing council tax levels. Bearing in mind the point that I made about clause 2(2), there could be at least three different outcomes and three different campaigns on that proposition. There could have been a fourth and a fifth option.

My local authority in Barnet has taken the Government's point of view to heart and has started to consult widely. There was wide consultation with the population on the council's draft budget. I am not sure whether that would count as a referendum, but my local authority is also experimenting with the use of electronic voting machines, citizens' juries and citizens' panels as part of that consultation process. I know from my hon. Friend the Member for Hammersmith and Fulham (Mr. Coleman), who gave me a full briefing on those issues last night, that similar proposals are being discussed in Hammersmith.

My principal point is that the Bill lacks a definition of a referendum, and that is a problem. As things stand, clause 4(1) provides such a broad interpretation that all the possibilities to which I have referred could be taken into account by the Bill and local referendums could come under the influence of the proposed referendum commission, but is that a development that we should welcome?

Although we may want guidelines on the conduct of referendums in general to be laid down, I am concerned about the wide powers proposed by the Bill for the referendums commission to interfere in the conduct of referendums. I question whether it would be appropriate for a national body to get involved in the decision-making processes of a local referendum—for example, the setting of a question. I do not know how a national body could take on board all the relevant local factors; there may need to be sub-divisions or local referendum commissions if the national body is to have such wide scope.

In the context of grammar school ballots and local mayoral referendums, that issue also raises the question of fairness in the trigger arrangements, such as the petitions that could set off a grammar school ballot. I know from discussions with parents in my constituency that they are extremely concerned about the fairness of the arrangements for the trigger mechanism in respect of a ballot on grammar schools in Barnet. They think that those mechanisms are, to some extent, rigged against people who want grammar schools to be abolished, bearing in mind that substantial thresholds must be achieved to trigger a ballot. I question the Bill's current drafting. If it is to proceed, it should be redrafted to make it absolutely clear that it deals only with national referendums and that local referendums should not come into its scope.

My next concern relates to the powers proposed for the referendum commission under clause 1(5)(a), which refers to

"the wording of any question to be put".

The right hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Mr. Maclennan) raised his concerns about the fairness of the questions for the London referendum. I shall return to that point in detail, and I am sure that hon. Members will be pleased to hear that. The right hon. Gentleman questioned whether the commission should have the power to be involved in the setting of the question.

Hon. Members will remember that there was extensive debate in the House on what the questions for the London referendum should be. The House came to a conclusion and voted on it. That conclusion formed part of the Greater London Authority (Referendum) Act 1998. The House decided what the question should be, so I am not sure whether the right hon. Gentleman was suggesting that the referendum commission should be in a position to overrule the Act of Parliament that set the question and impose a different question of its own, a series of questions or variations on the questions.

That serious point is not properly addressed by clause 1(5)(a) and comes into even sharper focus when we consider the possibility of a referendum of electoral reform. The Government have said that the referendum will have the first-past-the-post system as one option and a proportional representation system as the other. I remain an avid supporter of the first-past-the-post system and have yet to hear anything that would convince me otherwise. We know from the extensive public debate on PR and the full report produced by the Jenkins commission that there are a plethora of different solutions for electoral reform.

Let us suppose that the Government decided to propose a particular option for electoral reform as part of the process relating to the wording of the question and that the referendum commission decided that it preferred a different option. Would it be open to the referendum commission to interfere with the Government's suggested option and to suggest a different option?

Indeed, could the referendum commission second-guess the Government's position and allow the referendum to have not only the first-past-the-post system and one other option, but a series of options? In respect of clause 2(2), that opens the question of how many different campaigns could be undertaken. There could be a whole series of different campaigns and different outcomes. Presumably, all would qualify for public funds—an issue that the Bill fails to address.

I have another concern about clause 2(1). My hon. Friend the Member for Amber Valley was concerned

about the timing of the referendum. I question the wording, which says that it would come into operation

"As soon as possible after the introduction to Parliament of any bill".

Opposition Members have made their position clear: they wold like to see the referendum campaign conducted fairly, above board and with no one feeling left out. The wording of clause 2(1) could lead to a premature decision about which campaign would be the favoured campaign. It very much favours the establishment.

We know that in the European campaign the sides are already lining up. Page 34 of the Library brief says:

"The pro and anti organisations have begun to mobilise. The Britain in Europe campaign, led by prominent business people, looks likely to be the main umbrella organisation for a Yes vote, while David Owen has agreed to lead the organisations likely to oppose a single currency, known as New Europe. This may not encompass all the views of those opposed to a single currency."

That is precisely my point. We have two relatively established campaigns on the European issue, but, as the public debate develops, and should a referendum Bill be introduced, other campaigns may be created. Those would have an equal right to be considered as the official campaign. Under the Bill, they would become disfranchised and the two establishment campaigns—not the Government campaign—would be left to slug it out among themselves. That would disfranchise people who are interested in single issues and who, to a large extent, feel excluded from the parliamentary process. I should be extremely concerned, therefore, if the wording of clause 2 were to stay as it is, as it suggests that the referendum campaign process should start as soon as possible after the enactment of the Bill, before the public debate on those issues had begun.

I am also concerned about clause 2(2), which lists as the criteria that should be taken into account

"the ability to conduct an effective campaign; the views of political parties; the degree of public support; and such other matters as the Commission considers relevant"—

which is an open question. However, the clause gives no indication of the weighting to be given to each of those criteria. That is an important factor to take into account when deciding which body should be certified to run the campaign.

We heard earlier this morning about the problems that can arise when different parties within a campaign are dealing with other issues. The Europe campaign is a prime example. May I pray in aid the comments of the hon. Member for New Forest, West (Mr. Swayne), who is in the Chamber, during the debate on political parties funding on 9 November 1998? I find myself in a difficult position because, for the second time in three weeks, I agree with the hon. Gentleman. The previous occasion was on the Fur Farming (Prohibition) Bill. That is a strange position for me to be in and he may find it strange to have me on his side on this issue. He said:

"It is unnecessary and undesirable to require opponents to operate under one political umbrella, even if they support the same side on a political question. There are quite different ideological routes that might lead to the same case. That is obviously clear with the campaign that would emerge against the single European currency. It comprises a host of very different groups reflecting different ideological backgrounds. I believe that it would be a restraint on free speech to impose any sort of financial limit on those groups collectively."

Those groups would be handicapped if one side or the other within that debate were made the official campaign. In the same debate, my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) made a similar point:

"I expect different people to have different points of view. In case the Whips are listening I point out that I declared in my general election manifesto: 'I shall vote against a single currency.'"—[*Official Report*, 9 November 1998; Vol. 319, c. 104-07.]

My hon. Friend came to that conclusion by a different route from some Conservative Members on the Eurosceptic wing of their party. If we have the referendum campaign that has been promised if the Government decide that it would be wise to join the single currency, my hon. Friend may join the no campaign, but he will do so for different reasons and will put forward his views in different ways. If there is only one official campaign, it will be extremely difficult for both sides to express their views fully and fairly.

In a helpful intervention, my hon. Friend the Member for Amber Valley raised the issue of Northern Ireland. That is well highlighted in the Library brief that we have been given for this debate, which says:

"By contrast, in the referendum campaign the reasons for voting Yes or No may be exceedingly large in number, extremely disparate and possibly even contradictory. The Yes campaign in Northern Ireland, with the Ulster Unionists, the SDLP and Sinn Fein all on one side, and Republican splinter groups and the DUP on the other, provides a vivid illustration. Future referendum campaigns on electoral reform or on joining the European Economic Monetary Union could easily take the same form . . . Given this possibility, we believe that speaking to impose spending limits in referendums would not only be administratively impracticable but would, or at least might, impose an unwarranted restriction on freedom of speech."

Thus, the point is made in a number of different ways that various groups could be disfranchised under the Bill.

Similarly, the problem could arise if there are a number of different options. Earlier, I mentioned the London debate. Had the Opposition parties had their way, we would have had a complicated ballot paper and a series of different possible outcomes: there could have been one campaign against everything; one for a mayor only and no tax-raising powers; one for a mayor and tax-raising powers; one for an assembly only and no tax-raising powers; one for an assembly and tax-raising powers; one for an assembly, a mayor and tax-raising powers; and one for an assembly, a mayor and no tax-raising powers. That is seven possible outcomes and, under clause 2(2), seven possible campaigns. I question whether that would lead to a fair outcome. It would mean six parties working within the referendum supporting London government and only one campaign opposing all those options.

Therefore, the Bill would achieve exactly the opposite of what it is trying to achieve—equity and balance between the different sides in a referendum—because six different campaigns would be competing in favour of London government of some sort and only one would be opposed. The hon. Member for Blaby would say that that could not possibly happen. Looking at the Bill as a lawyer, I believe that, if I were representing one of those six options and found that my campaign would not be certified under clause 2(2), I would rush off to the law courts for a judicial review demanding my share of the action. We may find people with different viewpoints wishing to challenge the referendum commission by way of judicial review. People who get involved in referendums can be quite litigious and forceful in their views. They may wish to challenge the decision about which campaign should be supported.

Clause 3(1) brings into play the issue of funding and clause 3(2) that of broadcasting. My remarks on London very much bring that home.

Mr. Letwin: I shall not intervene for more than five seconds. As the hon. Gentleman is determined to speak for another 20 minutes, it would be helpful if he explained why he is bothering to filibuster the Bill rather than just continuing to witter endlessly to no purpose.

Mr. Dismore: I am not attempting to filibuster the Bill. When I began to read up on it, I became increasingly concerned about its wording. Sooner or later, if the Bill were to proceed, lawyers would come to construe it, and I see a minefield of detail from which my professional colleagues could make a huge amount of money. I am highlighting my concerns about the wording of the Bill and the enormous loopholes that it contains.

Mr. Robathan: I have listened attentively to the hon. Gentleman's absolutely fascinating comments. Has he been asked by any member of the Government to make as lengthy a speech as possible? I guarantee to ensure that he is on the Committee for the Bill, where he can make all his points at as much turgid length as he wants. Let me repeat my earlier warning to him that those who do the bidding of the Whips in a supine and feeble manner never achieve the respect of their peers, nor that of the Whips. Nor do they gain advancement.

Mr. Dismore: I am not making my speech with any view to advancement. I am pleased that the hon. Gentleman now finds my remarks fascinating, having previously suggested that he found them boring. I must be winning him round with my cogent points.

Mr. Gareth Thomas: Does my hon. Friend accept that many of us are listening to his speech with great interest? Many who support the general principle of a level playing field and more openness in the conduct of referendums also feel that the cumulative effect of the various defects and lacunae of the Bill mean that it should not be given a First Reading—[HON. MEMBERS: "Second Reading."] I apologise; I meant a Second Reading.

Mr. Dismore: My hon. Friend succinctly makes the point that is the main thrust of my speech. I do not believe that we should not legislate on this matter: we should. However, we should do so comprehensively and in a thought-through way after having had the benefit of substantial public debate. We might, perhaps, take up the suggestion of my hon. Friend the Member for Amber Valley that we could have pre-scrutiny of a properly drafted Government Bill. My hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd, West (Mr. Thomas) is quite right to say that the Bill is so full of holes that it will not hold water.

Mr. Robathan: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Dismore: I need to make some progress.

Mr. Robathan: Come off it.

Mr. Dismore: I should have thought that the hon. Gentleman would want me to make some progress. I have given way to him several times already.

Mrs. Gorman: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. You have long experience of the way in which the House conducts itself. The hon. Gentleman has been on his feet for more than 40 minutes, and many of us wish to contribute our views on the Bill. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman does not know that the civilised behaviour of the House requires that hon. Members should not abuse their opportunity to speak by keeping debate going longer than is necessary on issues that are not relevant to the Bill.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: All the remarks made by the hon. Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore) have been entirely in order.

Mr. Dismore: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Should I stray from the terms of the Bill, I am sure that you will quickly call me to order.

I was discussing funding before that batch of interventions. I was making a point about the severe distorting effect that a plethora of campaigns could have on funding if the Bill were enacted.

Clause 3(2) relates to broadcasting, and the same problem of possible disproportionality emerges there. There is also a risk of giving credibility to one or two dotty causes. During general election campaigns, broadcasts are awarded in proportion to the number of candidates standing for each party. That is right and proper, as it provides a rough reflection of possible support for the party in question.

I am concerned, however, that the Bill's reference to equivalent coverage may prove anti-democratic. It might give great credibility to an idea, perspective or point of view that frankly deserves little consideration. I share the objective of trying to achieve fairness, but fairness does not necessarily amount to equivalence. Fairness must reflect the broad terms of the debate, and, as I have already said about the European debate, equivalence of coverage for official campaigns—perhaps on Europe, perhaps on proportional representation—would create a strong chance that a disparate range of views could be disfranchised in the referendum process. People might not be able to put their point of view or say how and why they had come to it. They would not be able, perhaps, to influence people of similar views to vote in a particular way in a given referendum.

I should be very concerned if the broadcasting provisions in the Bill were to be enacted as phrased. They could have an effect opposite to that intended.

Mr. Stephen Twigg (Enfield, Southgate): When I read the Bill in preparation for the debate, it struck me that the second part of clause 3 is not only counterproductive, but unnecessary. It adds nothing to the existing requirement for balance and impartiality in current broadcasting legislation. Does my hon. Friend agree that that is so, and that it would be foolhardy of the House to add unnecessarily to legislation in this area when the existing framework is sufficient?

Mr. Dismore: My hon. Friend, who has studied these issues carefully and written widely on electoral reform, makes a valid point. I am concerned about clause 3(2) because I believe it could have the opposite effect to that sought by the Bill's supporters. I return to what I said at the beginning of my speech: we need an election commission that can consider all the issues in the round and ensure that we have a consistent national policy for

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referendums and elections. That would provide a balanced approach, with nothing to suggest that anything was out of kilter.

The final part of my speech is perhaps the most important. It relates to my earlier interventions on the hon. Member for Blaby about what the Bill does not deal with and what it misses out. My starting point was the recommendations of the Neill committee, and funding in particular. The Bill deals in a fashion with public funding to provide core support for referendum campaigns, which would perhaps be uprated by comparison with that for the 1975 referendum on Europe, although I suspect that the uprated figures would in fact bear little relationship to the amounts that would be needed. The Bill is totally silent on some key recommendations of the Neill report—in particular recommendations 90, 91 and 92. Recommendation 90 states:

"Donations to campaigning individuals and organisations in referendums from one source which total £5,000 or more should be publicly disclosed in audited accounts which should be delivered to the Election Commission within three months of the holding of the referendum".

The Bill contains nothing about donations having to be declared.

Recommendation 91 is:

"Campaigning individuals and organisations other than political parties that wish to incur 'referendum expenses' of £25,000 or more, should register, like a political party, with the Election Commission. No individual or organisation not so registered may incur expenses in connection with a referendum in excess of £25,000".

Again, there is no mention of that in the Bill.

Recommendation 92 is:

"Campaigning individuals and organisations taking part in referendum campaigns should be restricted to the receipt of donations only from a 'permissible source'."

The report goes into detail on what permissible sources are. I do not propose to go into those, given the time constraints under which I am operating but, as has been pointed out, page 20 of the Library briefing, on the European campaign, states:

"There may be disparities of expenditure in the campaign on the single European currency, especially as the business man Paul Sykes has reportedly promised £20 million to the anti-euro campaign."

For a Bill on the supervision of referendums not to deal with that crucial issue of funding is a woeful omission. That issue goes to the heart of the democratic process. If Mr. Sykes is going to commit £20 million of his own money to that campaign without any restriction—without fear or favour—or control from the Bill, it will have a distorting effect on the process.

Mrs. Gorman: Surely the logic of the hon. Gentleman's remarks is that, if the Bill became part of the law of the land, people such as Mr. Sykes would not need to put up their hard-earned cash to ensure a fair campaign. Massive contributions of that sort could be excluded and I should think that Mr. Sykes and anyone with similar amounts of money would be delighted to keep that money.

Mr. Dismore: That is an interesting point. The limits on central Government support from public funds for the different campaigns are significantly lower than the sort of money that Mr. Sykes is talking about. The figures being bandied around are in the region of £600,000. I do not think one could mount much of a national campaign on an issue as important as the European referendum or the voting system for this place with such a sum. My argument is that it is not merely a question of core funding, with which the Bill deals to an extent, but of all the other party-funding issues raised by the Neill committee, which are transferred within the three recommendations from the Neill report to the context of referendums.

If we do not have open declarations of election funding and proper registration, we will be open to being hijacked by millionaires who want to promote their own political point of view. We saw the extent to which the late Sir James Goldsmith tried to influence the general election by setting up the Referendum party. He threw huge amounts of cash into the campaign to try to create a political process and, to an extent, influenced the election—the issue certainly came up on the doorstep far more than it might otherwise have done.

Unless we have restrictions of some sort on individual campaign donations I can see Mr. Sykes thinking, "With my business, I have a lot at stake as well as the country," and being more than happy to put up £20 million of his money because he can afford it to influence the outcome of that campaign. That crucial issue is not dealt with in the Bill in any way.

Finally, I shall deal with the Neill report and, most importantly, the role of Government, I am sure that you will recall, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that I asked the hon. Member for Blaby during his opening speech why the Bill was silent on that matter. He said that it was a matter for the referendum commission to consider. Frankly, that is not good enough. We have wide and diverse views on that issue. The hon. Gentleman suggests in promoting the Bill that the Neill committee would be the transitional referendum commission, unless and until something better happened along. Recommendation 89 of the Neill committee dealt with that point, stating:

"The government of the day in future referendums should, as a government, remain neutral and should not distribute at public expense literature, even purportedly 'factual' literature, setting out or otherwise promoting its case".

That is a fascinating comment. It is entirely at odds with the conclusions of the Jenkins commission on electoral reform—the independent commission on the voting system. Indeed, the Jenkins report came to the opposite conclusion. Paragraph 166 states:

"The representations have without exception placed strong emphasis on the need for a publicly-funded (and therefore impartially informative rather than partisan) civic education programme to prepare the general public for the decision they would be asked to make on the voting system which should follow this report."

Paragraph 168 seems to pray in aid the Neill committee, but perhaps does not help it, by calling for

"an independent body to oversee the conduct of referendums, although we think that the Government should be entitled to express its own view in any such referendum. It seems to us that an Electoral Commission would be best placed to discharge this role in relation to the referendum on the voting system."

Two eminent committees reached opposite conclusions on this crucial issue. The hon. Member for Blaby ducked that question, which is fundamental. A leading complaint of Opposition parties has concerned the extent to which

the Government should be entitled to participate in referendum campaigns. The Bill's supporters rightly want to ensure that the debate is fair and above board. That demands a proper public information campaign. Electoral matters are complex. I have read about them and my hon. Friend the Member for Battersea (Mr. Linton) has written a book on the subject. How are we to expect the public to form a view without explanations beyond the partisan?

Those of us who support first past the post argue our position vigorously, as do those who support electoral reform. Where is the point of view that puts the middle ground? Of all issues, the election of this Chamber demands a public information campaign, as recommended by Jenkins but apparently dismissed by Neill. The same applies to our possible entry to the euro. There are two diametrically opposed views with a plethora of different opinions within them. How are the public to sort the wood from the trees without a clear lead from the Government on the fundamental issues?

Since the general election, I have spent most weekends in my constituency knocking on people's doors and talking to them about the issues of the day, as I did before the election. Time and again, Europe comes up but it is not raised in an informed way. It tends to be, "We don't want the Germans, French or Italians telling us what to do," rather than detailed analysis of the crucial issues facing the British economy. It is incumbent on the Government to advance them.

Page 18 of the Library brief refers to the Good Friday agreement referendum in Northern Ireland, which was mentioned by the right hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross. The document states:

"The referendum on the Good Friday Agreement in Northern Ireland affords a different kind of example. The Government sent copies of the whole agreement to every household, but then, as a Government, confined itself to urging people to turn out to vote. Despite that, the Government made its position perfectly clear. Mr. Denis Murray, the BBC's Ireland correspondent, said in his oral evidence:

Mo Mowlam got the tone for the Government absolutely right. Somebody asked her, 'Are you biased in this?' She replied, 'I didn't spend five years on this and a year at Stormont, hammering it out, not to say I'm going to back this agreement.' She got the public mood exactly right. People said, 'Yes, that's fair enough.'"

It is wrong not to anticipate that the Government would have a point of view in advancing a referendum. It is important that the public has before it the facts, presented in a non-partisan way. If the only people entitled to campaign are those with a partisan view, the public cannot get that. I am amazed that the hon. Member for Blaby has ducked that fundamental question. It is not an easy question to answer. That is why two high-powered committees have different perspectives on it. I again pray in aid the helpful intervention of my hon. Friend the Member for Amber Valley. She suggested that there could be pre-legislative scrutiny of a draft Bill on the subject. The issue could be explored in depth so that much stronger and better legislation came out at the other end of the process.

Mr. Maclennan: The hon. Gentleman has attempted to demolish the Bill, but it will be helpful to the House if we hear from him whether he takes the view not only that the issues are important—something that he has made clear—but that it is urgent that they be dealt with.

Mr. Dismore: I do regard the issues as important. That is why I have spent some time analysing them in detail. I believe that the Bill is fatally flawed, for the reasons that I have given. I agree with the right hon. Gentleman that we need to get on with the matter. That is why I welcome the statement by the Home Secretary, which was emphasised by the Lord Chancellor in my quotation, that the Government propose to produce their draft Bill in the summer. That will enable time for pre-legislative scrutiny, perhaps through the autumn.

I should very much like to see a Bill introduced in the next Session of Parliament, but I shall not press my hon. Friend the Minister on that, because it is not for him to say what will or will not be in the Queen's Speech. I should like to see a Bill not only on referendums but on a series of other issues. If I had the difficult job of ranking Bills that the Cabinet faces, I am not sure that I would know which should come this year and which should come next year.

I certainly agree with the basic point that this is an urgent matter. I should like to see some progress on it, but I regret to say that the Bill does not provide the answers to some of the difficult points raised by the Neill committee and the Jenkins commission.

12.12 pm

Mr. John MacGregor (South Norfolk): The hon. Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore) has given the game away, and in a very unsubtle manner. About 30 minutes ago, I was going to commend him on one thing only, and that was on his industry, and say that that would no doubt earn him brownie points from the Government Whips Office. He has gone about his speech in such a cack-handed manner that he has now exposed exactly what the operation is, and I do not think that he will get any brownie points. He has led us even to become suspicious of the Government's intentions. If this is how the Government tackle a debate such as today's, will they delay the legislation on referendums in exactly the same way? I have to tell the hon. Gentleman that a reputation for filibustering is not a good criterion for office.

The House knows that I was a member of the Neill committee, and still am, and was a member of the committee that drew up the report on political funding. I shall be very brief in my remarks because I have little time. I shall draw heavily on the Neill committee, but I also want to speak as a Member of Parliament. The first question is why the committee included a big chapter on referendums in the report. The issues and questions document on political funding that we originally issued did not treat referendums as a central issue. It was the almost universal evidence that we received from day one that led us to the view that referendums were a crucial matter and that committee had to address it.

I commend my hon. Friend the Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan) on introducing the Bill, which he did in an admirable manner. He drew attention to what Peter Riddell said on day 1 of our evidence. It is worth quoting it again. He said that referendums had:

"massive implications, I think, for your exercise, for the way in which the political process operates, for fairness in funding and indeed for fairness in operation."

That comment was mirrored time and again subsequently, and it became clear that we had to address the issue.

It became clear as we went round the country, especially in Wales and Scotland, that the system used in recent referendums by the Government was seriously

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deficient and dangerously so. That was overwhelmingly evident. Almost everyone who gave evidence to us in Cardiff said that the way in which the Wales referendum was conducted was seriously deficient. There would not have been a no campaign if one member of the Labour party, Mrs. Carys Pugh, had not decided to go to her bank manager and ask for an overdraft of £4,000. She made that clear in her evidence to us.

Robert Hodge was so impressed by that that he gave a much larger sum—about £80,00—to the campaign. Overall, the no campaign had about £100,000, but the point is that nothing would have happened unless Mrs. Pugh had gone to a bank manager, whereas the yes campaign was backed by massive Government funding, far greater than anything that the no campaign could raise. No one can be certain whether that made a difference to the final result, but we know that the result was extremely close, so one wonders what the outcome would have been had there been fair funding. All of us on the committee were enormously impressed by the evidence that we received from everyone who contributed.

Dr. Alan Whitehead (Southampton, Test): Is the right hon. Gentleman saying that occasionally it might be necessary artificially to create a campaign, so as to ensure that there are two sides in a referendum on any issue?

Mr. MacGregor: Of course I am not saying that. My point is that there must be a reasonable element of core funding for both sides. It is expensive to run a campaign and it was only Mrs. Pugh's courage in going to a bank manager that got the no campaign's funding off the ground. I cannot stress sufficiently strongly my belief that, for the sake of democracy and of giving a fair hearing to both sides in future campaigns, the implementation of proposals along the lines set out in the Bill and by the Neill committee is absolutely essential.

Because of the long filibuster that we have just heard, I shall confine myself to only a few points of detail. First, there is the referendums commission—or what members of the Neill committee would regard as the election commission detailed in our report. I fully understand why my hon. Friend the Member for Blaby has had to make that limited recommendation. He made it perfectly clear that he assumes that the referendums commission would be subsumed in the election commission set up when the full Bill on party political funding is finally produced and implemented. However, the reason for his having to propose a referendums commission in a Bill entirely dedicated to that subject is his concern, shared by many of us, that the Government will procrastinate on the issue. Clause 1(5) sets out a role for the referendums commission that is exactly like the role the Neill committee envisaged for the election commission. No doubt, it could be developed, but that can be done in Committee.

My second point relates to the crucial issue of core funding. I have already spoken about what happened in Wales, which is at the heart of my case. The Neill committee suggested a minimum of £600,000, but that was simply a figure derived from indexing what was spent on both sides during the 1975 campaign, and whether it is sufficient is a matter of argument. I think that that should be the minimum sum, and a reasonable argument could be made that it should be slightly more.

One or two people argued—I think the argument was made in the official evidence of the Labour party to the Neill committee—that political parties form the basis of campaigning in referendums. I do not agree, because it is fairly clear—it will be extremely clear in the two forthcoming referendums—that the issues cross parties. Therefore, it is essential to have national organisations that are recognised and registered by the election commission—or the referendums commission—as the organised bodies to which core funding should be paid. The one point on which I wholly agreed with the hon. Member for Hendon was in respect of first past the post; I just hope that he does not speak in any debate on first past the post, because he will absolutely ruin the case for it.

Core funding lies at the heart of the matter. I believe that the Bill could go further, because it does not positively state that core funding from taxpayers' resources will be made, but merely sets outs the conditions for such payments. It is essential that the Bill should state that that core funding will actually happen.

My next point goes beyond core funding, to other important issues. As in general election campaigns for election addresses, there should be compulsory free mailing for both sides in a referendum campaign. That should not extend only to a single document, as was done in 1975, if memory serves; it is right that both sides should be able to put out separate and individual free mailing. That is important because the cost of free mailing in general election campaigns is quite high. It is also important that correspondence is sent to every household in the country. I also believe that election broadcasts by both sides should be part of the process so that there may be communication through television.

Related to core funding is the question of disclosure and foreign donations. It would be sensible if the same principles governing party political funding in general elections were to apply to referendums. I foresee no difficulty in that regard.

The Home Secretary's views about the Government's role differ from those of the Neill committee. In previous debates, the Home Secretary has used that as an excuse for offering qualifications and for expressing reservations about the Neill recommendations.

Mr. Linton *rose—*

Mr. MacGregor: I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman because he follows these matters carefully.

Mr. Linton: I had hoped that the right hon. Gentleman was about to move on to the question of funding limits. His convincing arguments about fairness in referendum campaigns—involving core funding, free mail and disclosure of donations—should lead to calls for funding limitations. It is possible for a referendum campaign to be unfair because one side is completely unfunded and must apply to the bank for a loan to set up the campaign. However, it is equally possible for a referendum campaign to be skewed unfairly because one side is funded disproportionately. There were spending ratios of 10:1 in the New Zealand campaign and 20:1 in the 1975 referendum campaign. The next referendum campaign on

the single currency could be skewed the other way because donations have already been promised. Why did the Neill committee—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I think the hon. Gentleman has made his point.

Mr. MacGregor: That was almost a speech. I did not intend to address that issue today as I am conscious that other hon. Members wish to contribute.

The Neill committee came to a conclusion about expenditure limits in referendums in paragraph 12.47 of the report, which states:

"Given this possibility,"—

we sought to differentiate between referendum and general election campaigns—

"we believe that seeking to impose spending limits in referendums would not only be administratively impracticable but would, or at least might, impose an unwarranted restriction on freedom of speech."

I agreed with that conclusion, which is why I offered a minority recommendation against expenditure limits in general election campaigns. Those are the sorts of arguments that the committee worked through, and I tend to agree with them. Real abuse occurs when a lot of Government funding goes to one side of the campaign and no public funding is available to the other side. That is why core funding is so important.

I return to the Home Secretary's comments about the role of Government, where I think there has been some misunderstanding in the past. In the debate on the Neill report, I pointed out that the wording of that report could have been better and more precise. I think Lord Neill also expressed that view in a letter to the Home Secretary.

The committee sought to avoid double funding by taxpayers of one side of the campaign. For example, if the majority of the Government were in favour of a yes vote in a particular campaign, we thought that it would be unfair if that case were to receive core as well as Government funding. We would never allow that to occur in a general election, and our recommendation addresses that anomaly.

Of course, Ministers should be free to campaign for a yes or no result, as they wish. That is made clear in the report, which says:

"We believe it is perfectly appropriate for the government of the day to state its views and for members of the Government to campaign vigorously during referendum campaigns".

It is important to emphasise that Ministers are perfectly entitled to campaign and, in my opinion, to use material from the civil service, in favour of a particular policy. That happens in general elections, because there is often civil service input in policy development. However, Ministers are not entitled to use Government resources during the campaign, such as using money to distribute leaflets that put only one side of the case, or using Government cars.

Mr. Gareth Thomas: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. MacGregor: No, time is short.

That is such a narrow point that the Home Secretary should not make anything of it by suggesting that the overall package put forward by Neill is flawed. There is no disagreement on that narrow point, so I hope that no more will be made of it.

My conclusion is that there has been strong universal support from many parts of the country for the Neill committee's recommendations on referendums. The Government, in their heart, believe that there is a fair case for those recommendations, and I hope that they will not try to continue to run the argument about Governments not being able to make known their views.

It is important that the Government state clearly in this debate what they intend to do. I strongly urge that their actions follow the lines of the Bill and the Neill recommendations. Above all—I very much agree with the right hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Mr. Maclennan) on this point—there is much suspicion that the issue might drag on and arise late in the day before a referendum takes place—so, if the Government intend to filibuster on the Bill, I urge them to introduce legislation as quickly as possible.

12.27 pm

Mrs. Louise Ellman (Liverpool, Riverside): When the hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan) made the case for his Bill, he said that it was short and simple. In considering the Bill, we must ask whether it is adequate to deal with complex and wide-ranging issues. I have listened to the comments of several hon. Members, and it is clear that the issues are ones of principle and of significant detail.

Referendums will become increasingly important. We know that there is to be a referendum on joining economic and monetary union and we expect one on electoral change. Referendums are also likely to be held on devolution to the English regions. The Government are encouraging referendums for a wide range of activities relating to local government.

The principle of holding more and more referendums highlights the relationship between elected authorities and the people who elect them. It raises questions of the legitimacy of those referendums and of parliamentary democracy itself. I am sure that all hon. Members would agree that it is vital that referendums are conducted so that the results are credible and do not undermine elected authority. I am convinced that statutory regulation is required to achieve that. We must consider carefully the processes by which referendums take place and their results can be assessed. What we are considering today is whether the Bill, described by its promoter as short and simple, deals adequately with those important and fundamental issues of constitution and practice.

The major difficulty with the Bill is the scope of the referendums and the different types of decisions with which it is designed to deal, and the scope of the proposed referendums commission, which would deal with matters relating to economic and monetary union, electoral change, devolution and, presumably, local government referendums. It is clear that we are going to have more and more referendums in local government. Indeed, we are told that there may be legislation on that. The White Paper on local government reform referred to specific new legislation giving specific powers to local authorities to carry out more referendums. Is the Bill to supersede such legislation? Would it be compatible with it? Is it intended to embrace it? We simply do not know.

The question of local government legislation for referendums and the scope of future referendums is extremely important. The Government's stated policies

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envisage the Government themselves enforcing local government referendums on local authorities considering whether to change their structure. They envisage the public being able to trigger a referendum on having a directly elected mayor; they envisage compulsory referendums before a directly elected mayor can be installed; and they encourage referendums as tools of consultation on controversial local issues. Clearly, these are wide-ranging measures which encourage more referendums.

Dr. Whitehead: Does my hon. Friend agree that, as she seems about to say, the Bill is silent on the question of what might be termed citizens' propositions, whereby the local electorate can trigger referendums? It is also silent on how those propositions are put together in terms of signatures and how the appropriate wording might appear on the ballot paper. Would not that require regulation in itself?

Mrs. Ellman: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his comments. He makes an extremely important point. One of the deficiencies of the Bill is that, being simple and short, it does not deal with the complexities of the practical issues that are likely to arise.

The Bill's proposals on the role of the referendums commission ignore many fundamental issues. Should the same regulations and procedures apply for a referendum that is binding and for one that is simply advisory? Should the same recommendations and procedures apply for a referendum that could change national economic policy—for example, the decision to enter economic and monetary union—and one that expresses the view of a section of a local electorate about an issue on which a reversal of that referendum decision might be possible?

In other words, should a binding decision on electoral change, EMU or regional devolution equate to a referendum taking a view on a proposal about local car parking restrictions? They are fundamentally different issues, and the respective referendums must vary in force and importance. However, the Bill does not distinguish between those issues; indeed, it does not consider them at all.

There are other matters of concern relating to the Bill—matters of concern because of their omission. My hon. Friend the Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore) and the right hon. Member for South Norfolk (Mr. MacGregor) have each detailed those issues in their own way. The matters raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon are of great importance, and I refer hon. Members to them.

The right hon. Member for South Norfolk drew attention to some very important issues, and in doing so highlighted the fact that the Bill does not reach any conclusions about them. They include matters to do with financial rules on the conduct of referendums and to do with the question of when a referendum campaign has begun. Has a referendum campaign on economic and monetary union started already?

The Bill does not ask questions about proper public access to information. It does not consider whether there should be free airtime for competing viewpoints, access to free public rooms or free mail—issues considered by the Neill committee.

The Bill does not consider the proper remit for the commission. It does not look at other related issues of importance, such as the idea of a rolling electoral register. It does not consider very important issues concerning the relationship between the referendum commission and the constitution unit of the Home Office, which is also involved in these matters.

Therefore, many crucial aspects are omitted from the scope of the Bill. The House should not be asked to approve a Bill of fundamental importance, relating to an area that will become increasingly important, until those issues have been considered. They are not simply issues of detail; they have, and will increasingly have, great significance.

All the matters that have been mentioned in the debate are of great importance and complexity, and require thought and consultation. That is why a Bill that has been described by its promoter as short and simple is inadequate to deal with those important and fundamental matters.

It would be far preferable for the Government to come up with a proposal and to allow widespread consultation on all those important issues. Pre-legislative scrutiny might be a consideration, but it is important that the House has the opportunity to consider documentation that sets out all those important issues, which touch the heart of our constitution, and that proper public consultation is undertaken on all those matters before a decision is taken.

We are considering issues of public importance—and growing importance. We are considering issues to do with the legitimacy of government and the credibility of the results that will emerge from, no doubt, a growing number of referendums. Those matters deserve deeper thought than the Bill permits. For that reason, the Bill is deficient and should not be allowed a Second Reading today.

12.38 pm

Dr. Liam Fox (Woodspring): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan) on introducing this immensely important Bill, and doing so in a very stylish way. The Bill relates to an issue of fundamental importance to the way in which we are now governed, given the Government's appetite for referendums on many different issues, all of them in a pre-legislative form.

I was most interested to note that the hon. Member for Liverpool, Riverside (Mrs. Ellman) said that, since my hon. Friend had described his Bill as short and simple, it could not deal adequately with the complex issues raised in the debate. I remind the hon. Lady that "short" and "simple" are two of the three words that the Leader of the House has used to describe the Government's House of Lords reform Bill. Presumably, given that description, the hon. Member for Riverside believes—by her own logic—that the Government are dealing inadequately with the complexities of House of Lords reform in that Bill.

Mrs. Ellman: Is the hon. Gentleman not aware that the description given by the Leader of the House concerned the first phase of House of Lords reform? The proposal is indeed short and simple, but there is to be full consultation. A commission is sitting at this moment, considering the detailed complexities of what is to follow.

Dr. Fox: That is definitely a case of when the accused should opt for the right to silence.

This debate has been a test of the Government's democratic credentials. It has been a chance for them to prove that, as they have always said, they want a fair and equitable democratic system. We all know for our experience in this House exactly what is happening today. The Government have decided—it is in their power to do so—that this Bill should not be given a Second Reading. Labour Members have attempted to filibuster, although the quality has been fairly poor. It is a great pity that the Government have decided not to accept the fairly reasonable Bill promoted by my hon. Friend the Member for Blaby.

This Bill is part of a wider debate. In this Parliament, we are experiencing a battle between democratic man and Executive man, in which Executive man is increasingly taking the upper hand. I am disappointed that some Labour Members have rolled over in the face of the Executive's desire. In doing so, they have not only failed to defend the rights of Parliament, but have allowed the Government to extend Executive power beyond both Houses of Parliament into areas such as how people can speak in a referendum. I find that an extremely disturbing trend.

Let us be clear about the intention behind the Bill: it is that referendums should be conducted fairly. The Bill asks for fairness in setting the question, so that the Government are not allowed to set a question that suits them. I can imagine the sort of objective question that the Prime Minister might set on economic and monetary union: "Well, I'm a great sort of guy, and if maybe I can come up with the right sort of solution at some point in the future, do you think maybe I should be given the chance to accept it if I think the timing is right?" We want a separate body to set a fair and objective question.

We want fairness in the timing of referendums, so that no one group is favoured. The hon. Member for Clwyd, West (Mr. Thomas) told us, in an answer that would have made *Pravda* proud, that the Welsh and Scottish referendums were staggered because there was a media deficit in Wales. Apparently, that does not apply to the elections for the Welsh Assembly and the Scottish Parliament—the Scots and the Welsh are apparently now quite capable of distinguishing which country they live in.

We want fairness in the funding of referendums. We believe that both sides of the argument should have reasonable access to funding, so that the disadvantage in the Welsh referendum, to which my right hon. Friend the Member for South Norfolk (Mr. MacGregor) referred, does not recur. There should be fair access to the media. In this day and age, when the broadcast media matter so much, it is essential to the democratic process that both sides in a referendum campaign, just as in a general election, are given equal access and equal air time.

Judy Mallaber: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that there should be a limit on the amount of money that either side can spend on a referendum campaign? Does he believe that such a limit should be in the Bill? I understand why he is supporting the Bill—I support its principles—but does he not agree that a Bill that covered other issues, such as funding, would be preferable?

Dr. Fox: Those are valid questions for consideration in Committee. Maximum levels of funding should be considered in Committee. We want an urgent response to the problem that we face. The Government would have no problem if they allowed this Bill, with its limited provisions, a Second Reading, and then introduced a wider Bill to cover its functions. It would be entirely possible to repeal this Bill.

Why have Labour Members decided that they do not want this Bill to become law? They have done so because of the will of the Executive, not of Parliament. The Executive ask, "Why should we give anything away when we might be able to use it to our advantage?" That is the worst aspect of the way in which we are governed.

We must ask is why we need fairness. The overriding reason is that the legitimacy of any referendum result requires validity. In Wales the legitimacy was questioned because there was a 0.6 per cent. majority on only a 50 per cent. turnout. That occurred after the Government had used public money—by definition, from those who support both sides of the debate—for Government propaganda. The case put forward was not objective—it was the Government's case.

In this country, not only is no threshold set for a referendum to give it validity, but we have no numerical barriers in our Parliament to changes to our constitution. Results such as that in Wales can therefore lead to questions about validity. That is the wrong basis for making any form of constitutional change, and we should all be deeply worried about it.

What if we get a referendum on electoral reform, and what if that system is entirely dependent on a tiny proportion in a low turnout? What would be the validity of the result? That is why we require a referendums commission.

The Government have shown their fondness for pre-legislative referendums. There is a difference in legitimacy between the results of a pre-legislative referendum and a post-legislative referendum. In a pre-legislative referendum, the people have an idea of what principles they are voting for. In a post-legislative referendum, they know what legislation they are supporting. There can be a world of difference between the two.

The hon. Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike) is no longer in his seat. His points were entirely based on the concept of legitimacy. As he raised the issue of the current fair British voting system, as against the gerrymandering proposed in other quarters, I would ask him to consider the proposition that a post-legislative referendum would be a far fairer basis for such plans.

Apart from the potential electoral reform referendum, there is concern about the way in which the Government are spending money on the so-called national changeover plan, which is actually the national handover plan, for economic and monetary union. We must make sure that a firm and equitable basis for conducting a referendum is in place before we ever conduct a referendum on electoral reform, and before we conduct a referendum on the most constitutionally important step this side of 1066—the economic and monetary union referendum.

We must have fair rules. The Bill would go some way to achieving that. The Minister will no doubt tell us not to worry, as the Government will put some measure in place. We will have draft legislation. We can have pre-legislative scrutiny. We will get a vague timetable, but we will be given no firm assurances.

[Dr. Fox]

If the Government's democratic credentials mean anything at all, the Minister will give us an assurance, with the authority of the Government and the specific authority of the Prime Minister, that no referendum on any constitutional change will be introduced in Parliament without a body having first been established to determine objectively the question, the timing, the funding and the media access to referendums in this country.

If the Minister can give us that assurance, my hon. Friend the Member for Blaby has reasonably said that he will not press his Bill any further. If the Minister fails to give us such an assurance, he will boost our fear of the Government's motives. He will boost among the many cross-party groups that supported the Bill the suspicion that the Government are out to concoct a system that suits the Labour party's interests, not the national interest. That is what we have seen from them before, and what we suspect we will get in future.

12.49 pm

Mr. Gareth Thomas (Clwyd, West): I am prepared to accept that the hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan) tabled the Bill in an altruistic spirit. He seems to be good-humoured individual. I am prepared to accept that, although there is a battle raging within the ranks of the official Opposition on the role of Britain in Europe and on the single currency, the hon. Gentleman's main motive, if not that of his colleagues, in pursuing the Bill has nothing to do with the anti-European stance of many within his party, but has to do with a fundamental democratic issue, which all those who are interested in democracy and fair play should recognise—the need for a level playing field and a fair and open regulatory system for the conduct of referendums.

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas *rose—*

Mr. Gareth Thomas: I give way to my hon. Friend. It is always a pleasure to give way to my namesake.

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: Does my hon. Friend think it a shame that the official Opposition spokesperson did not have the courage to take a few more interventions? Does he think also that it is a little rich for Conservative Members to be asking questions about our democratic credentials when they opposed any attempt to establish the equivalent of the Neill committee at a much earlier stage?

Mr. Gareth Thomas: My hon. Friend raises a significant point with which, he will not be surprised to learn, I agree wholeheartedly.

As I have said, I am prepared to give the hon. Member for Blaby the benefit of the doubt. I agree with the valid points made by the right hon. Member for South Norfolk (Mr. MacGregor). However, the Bill contains many defects and lacunae, and in my view should not receive a Second Reading. I recognise that the Bill addresses a fundamental issue. That being so, it should have been thought through in a fundamentally sound manner. There should be full consultation with the public and all interested groups. The Bill is premature and precipitate. Much more work has to be done on it. The devil is in the detail, and I shall take up some of the detail of the Bill, or, rather, the lack of detail, which causes me concern.

I express my gratitude to my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore). Although he was unfairly criticised by some Conservative Members, he did the House a favour in his comprehensive analysis of the problems and defects associated with the Bill. My hon. Friend mentioned that there is no upper limit on the spending that could be brought to bear by designated referendum campaigns. That is a fundamental defect. The right hon. Member for South Norfolk said that, in some way, such a limit would cut across the grain of the right to freedom of speech.

However, if the main motive behind the Bill is to ensure a competitive environment for a referendum campaign, an upper limit is essential in the interests of fair play.

Dr. Whitehead: Does my hon. Friend accept that we do not need to look into a crystal ball on this point? I have in mind what has happened over the years in America, particularly in the holding of local and state referendums. The proportional difference in spending between one side and the other, especially when business spending is involved, goes up to 200:1, despite whatever the state may do to apply fair funding and fair information between both sides.

Mr. Thomas: My hon. Friend raises a fundamental point. Many Labour Members could be forgiven for thinking that the fact that there is no upper limit in the Bill gives the lie to the suggestion that it is an entirely altruistic measure designed to combat the perceived democratic deficit.

Mr. David Davis (Haltemprice and Howden): I have a great deal of sympathy with the argument for an upper limit. However, everything that the hon. Gentleman has said so far suggests that he should be a member of the Committee that amends the Bill to fill the lacunae to which he has referred. His proposed alternative—that the Bill should not receive a Second Reading—does not follow on from what he has said.

What is the implication of delaying the passage of a referendum Bill through the House when one of the major referendums that this country will face—as my hon. Friend the Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) said—will be on joining monetary union? The Government are already spending large sums on what the Neill report referred to as putatively factual information. How does the hon. Gentleman deal with that problem—the idea that delay will influence one of the most important referendums that is coming up?

Mr. Thomas: Although I agree with many of the principles of, and some of the concepts behind, the Bill, we must none the less take a detailed approach to the drafting of such legislation. My view is that the cumulative effect of the defects and the lacunae is that the Bill should not receive a Second Reading. Over and above that, if a fundamental measure of this sort is to be considered by the House, full consultation on all its details, and with all interested parties, is essential. That has to be undertaken before such legislation reaches the statute book. I hope that that answers the right hon. Gentleman's point.

May I deal with some other lacunae in the Bill? As I have said, there is no upper spending limit, and there is no definition of what constitutes a referendum, which is a startling omission. I endorse what my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon said: that could cause all manner of difficulties. The Bill could be a charter for lawyers, because it raises innumerable questions about what constitutes a referendum. It would cause complications over the freedom that the Government may wish to give to local authorities to conduct ballots, to establish citizens' juries or to ask questions of local electorates on matters of concern within local communities.

The Bill contains no details of how the referendum commission would operate. In my view, it should have a far more wide-reaching brief than the Bill suggests. I would favour an electoral commission charged not only with ensuring fair play in the conduct of referendums but with raising public awareness and enhancing public participation in elections generally. I believe that the Government would support that proposal.

Another of the Bill's defects is the absence of a reference to what should be the permitted role of the Government. Much of the debate has turned on that important point, and my view is that the Government of the day have a responsibility to raise public awareness. Indeed, the Government should use public money to enhance public awareness on matters of constitutional importance, such as the Welsh and Scottish referendums. I shall discuss those referendums, as well as the European single currency, in a moment.

The case for using public money is all the greater if the printed press is inclined to give a one-sided view of a case. It is essential that the Government be allowed to put their case, but the Bill does not refer to what their role should be. I believe that their role should be defined. Many Conservative Members have said that it would be wrong for the Government of the day to enter the arena overmuch, and I accept that point. There should be some control over the manner in which the Government generate information; it should not be propaganda, but, on the other hand, the Government have the important duty of raising public awareness.

I agree that practical difficulties are associated with the operation of designated referendum campaigns, and problems could also be caused by the Bill's broadcasting provisions. As has been said, it could be strongly argued that the current regulatory framework for broadcasters covers the position sufficiently, without further legislation being required.

May I deal with the position in Wales? As a Welsh Member and someone who was actively involved in the Welsh referendum campaign, I have a particular interest in that matter. Although the result of the referendum for setting up the National Assembly for Wales was close, it was none the less a victory for the yes camp. The Government should be congratulated on moving forward speedily with legislation to set up a democratic tier of government in Wales. It is well overdue and is a recognition of the national status of Wales within the British unitary state.

The problem in Wales arose because of the nature of the topography and the fact that Wales does not have a national printed newspaper. Moreover, many people in Wales either cannot, or choose not to, receive television or radio signals from Welsh channels. That creates the problem that I described in an earlier intervention. The hon. Member for Woodspring did not seem to accept my argument, perhaps because, with the greatest respect, he does not have sufficient knowledge of conditions in Wales. I advise him strongly to listen to some of his Welsh Assembly candidates, who will say that there is a media deficit in Wales. We do not have a national newspaper like the one that exists in Scotland. Right up until polling day for the Welsh referendum, many people did not understand that there was to be a referendum or what it would mean. In those circumstances, the Government had a duty to hold a public information campaign supported by public money—indeed, it would have been an abdication of their responsibility had they not done so.

Dr. Fox: Most of what the hon. Gentleman has said is nonsense, but surely he agrees that the logic of his argument is that both sides of the argument should have been presented to all the electors in Wales, rather than just one side, supported by public money.

Mr. Thomas: I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman adopted a churlish tone in dismissing what I would like to think is an objective contribution to this valuable debate. Incidentally, I congratulate the hon. Member for Blaby on raising this issue. The Government did not overstep the mark in Wales. The information that was delivered to each doorstep in Wales was objective. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Woodspring and I will have to agree to disagree. My view is that the Government had a role to play in Wales. Given the lack of public awareness of issues surrounding devolution, they had a duty to step in and fill the media deficit.

We can learn from the results of the referendum in Wales. In terms of the yes and no votes, there was not a north-south split, but an east-west split. The west of Wales, which one might regard as the Celtic fringe—it certainly covers the more Welsh areas of Wales in terms of language and place of birth of the majority of the inhabitants—recorded large majorities in favour of an assembly, whereas the east, including parts of my constituency, recorded an equally large number of votes against devolution.

One can read many things into that, as one can with all referendums, which is why many people believe that they can be an unsatisfactory and inaccurate way of gauging public opinion. Many people in Wales believed that the result of the referendum reflected the degree to which people felt an affinity with the Welsh culture and nation. It may not have had as much as it should have to do with the fine detail of the democratic argument in favour of—or for that matter against—an assembly. However, it was necessary for the Government to invest money in educating the public.

When we have a referendum on the European single currency, the Government will have a similar duty to provide dispassionate information to the general public on the merits and demerits of joining the single currency, if only to counteract what may transpire to be the xenophobia that will emanate from many sources, not least some elements of the press.

Mr. Robathan: I do not want to detain the hon. Gentleman, as I should like other hon. Members to have a chance to speak. He has twice said that the Government

[Mr. Robathan]

have a duty to inform people, but he has also said that he will oppose the Bill. The Bill is about allowing people to make informed choices. Each side of the argument will be presented to everyone so that they can understand what it is that they are being asked to vote for. If only one side of the argument is given, how can anyone make an informed choice?

Mr. Thomas: I entirely agree with the principle that the public should hear both sides of the argument, delivered loud and clear. I should like there to be upper limits on spending so that fairness exists and so that the voice of parties to the arguments can be heard in equal proportion. However, there are fundamental problems with the Bill, and I cannot accept it.

Much has been made of the fact that the no campaign in Wales, which was poorly financed and resourced, achieved quite a degree of success. Most political parties in Wales—with the notable exception of the official Opposition—were in favour of the establishment of the National Assembly for Wales; it was an important commitment in the Labour, Liberal Democrat and Plaid Cymru general election manifestos. My own view is that there ought not to have been referendums in either Scotland or Wales because devolution was clearly a fundamental principle at the heart of the general election campaign. There was a stark division in both Scotland and Wales between the Conservatives and Labour on that principle.

The role of broadcasters during the referendum campaign in Wales was problematic. Broadcasters must give a balanced view of both yes and no campaigns, but they must surely be entitled also to give weight to the strength of opinion. To create an artificial balance would be completely wrong-headed. All political parties in Wales—except the Conservatives—supported devolution. It was artificial to allow the no campaign so much coverage when it had little support outside certain areas. Points made this morning about the Bill's problematic broadcasting provisions have highlighted a fundamental defect in the Bill.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Blaby on introducing an important Bill that deals with issues which the Government should comprehensively address. I hope that they will do so in the near future, because those issues go to the root of our democratic system. However, I cannot accept the Bill as it stands.

1.10 pm

Mr. David Davis: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I understand from the news that the hon. Member for Newark (Mrs. Jones) has been found guilty in the election expenses-rigging trial. Have you received any notification from the Government that there will be a by-election?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael J. Martin): I have had no notification of a statement.

1.10 pm

Mrs. Teresa Gorman (Billericay): I, too, add my congratulations to my hon. Friend the Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan) on producing this important Bill, which is based on the well-researched Neill committee report and which had all-party support and should therefore be given a fair wind in the House—there is no excuse for not doing so.

In passing, I must inform the hon. Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore) that hon. Members who are prepared to act as the Government's pooper-scoopers rarely come up smelling of roses when it comes to promotion. The hon. Gentleman illegitimately took up almost an hour of the House's time to pour out a lot of nonsense—he knew it was nonsense—in the hope of doing deals with his Front Bench.

As my right hon. Friend the Member for South Norfolk (Mr. MacGregor) said, we could be forgiven for thinking that the Government do not intend to introduce any fairness into the system in time for the referendum that they have promised after the next general election, if they happen to win it. We will have a referendum if we win the election. The Government are deliberately delaying introducing that fairness because they do not want it for that referendum. As has been remarked, they are already pumping money into their side of the debate. That is why we are here this morning. We are trying to allow the people of this country to have a legitimate say in a matter that is of crucial importance to our future democracy and independence.

I had intended to raise two issues, but as one was partly dealt with by my hon. Friend the Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox)—what I would have called the thresholds involved in a referendum and what he calls the legitimacy of outcome—I will move on to the second in the interests of brevity.

That issue is the scope of referendum, and we may deal with it in Committee. We need to define to some extent the issues that could legitimately qualify for Government support. As the hon. Member for Hendon remarked, ballots of parents concerning a school would clearly be outwith the scope of any legislation dealing with referendums, which should be held on matters of national importance—issues that should be the concern of every citizen at the time of the referendum.

The question of who is to be balloted in a referendum is another issue. I mention that because, in the recent past, there have been a number of referendums dealing with matters of fundamental importance to the whole population—the future of the legitimate structure of the United Kingdom—in which voting has been restricted to certain parts of the country. Had even all those of Scottish birth been given the right to vote in the Scottish referendum, we might have had a different outcome—and that will not have escaped the Government's attention. The point of that referendum was not to take note of public opinion but to achieve the political objective of the Government of the day.

The same was true in Wales where, as has been pointed out on a number of occasions, the turnout was extremely low—that is relevant to the question of the threshold that should be allowed. In the London referendum, the turnout was derisory. However, the Government now legitimately claim that they have a mandate to go ahead with a new form of administration and, again, they have a political motive. The Government know full well that the central part of our capital city sensibly returns Conservative councils such as Westminster—despite all the abuse and concoctions of the Labour party to discredit it—

and Kensington and Chelsea. Though we do not know this from elections, I suggest that the City of London would be Conservative. If we tack on Wandsworth, we have a core in the centre of London likely to remain predominantly Conservative. The Government's actions are designed to undermine that position.

That brings me to the electorate in referendums and the Government's intention to exclude certain parts of the country from the overall game plan. Most particularly, that means the people of England. They, too, have a legitimate case, under the Government's criteria, to be asked whether they want a government to handle domestic issues that affect people who live in England and no other—a government of the sort that the Scots, and, to a large extent, the Welsh, will have.

Mrs. Ellman: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Gorman: I want to make progress. The hon. Lady has made her speech and others want to contribute.

I challenge the Government to say why people in England are not to be afforded the same courtesy and democratic right accorded to other parts of the United Kingdom. Several people who have written to me about this tell me that they also write to the Prime Minister, only to be told that there is no real interest in the issue. That is not a legitimate reason for excluding the people of England, because the referendums have presented them with an anomalous situation. Major domestic concerns such as health and education and welfare will be decided by separate Parliaments in Scotland and Wales, but Scottish and Welsh representatives will be free to vote on such issues as they affect the people of England. I hope that that will be at the forefront of deliberations in Committee.

The outcome of all this should fair to all citizens. So far, the Government's referendums have been anything but. They have been politically motivated and exclusive and do not qualify as legitimate consultation of the people. Polls are one thing, but matters likely to affect the construction of the United Kingdom are for general elections. The Government would say that they brought those things up in their manifesto and that they are therefore legitimate.

When the Government ballot the people of the United Kingdom through referendums on issues fundamental to all parts of the United Kingdom, the process should include all the peoples of the United Kingdom. We have gone past that stage for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, but we can still accord the same fairness and courtesy to the people of England. If the Government are not prepared to do that, and continue to hold the people of England in contempt, there will be a repercussion. The people who represent the people of England in this Chamber will surely not stand by and continue to allow those who are not elected as English Members to the Westminster Parliament to determine matters of fundamental importance to the people of England. I hope that fairness and legitimacy will be to the fore in the Committee's discussions.

1.20 pm

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas (Harrow, West): As other hon. Members on both sides of the House have said, fair rules on referendums and elections are clearly an important issue. However, Opposition Members should be extremely wary of using words such as "democracy" and "fairness". My constituents remember only too well that the Conservative party refused to extend the remit of the Nolan committee to consider political party funding.

I am slightly surprised to see so many members of the Conservative party supporting a referendums commission in the light of the evidence that Lord Parkinson gave on its behalf to the Home Affairs Select Committee. The Committee noted that he was not convinced that an electoral commission was necessary or, indeed, that it would be desirable. It seems a remarkable volte-face, so soon after he gave that evidence, that so many Conservative Members should now support the Bill.

I fear that the Bill was born of the Conservative party's hysteria on all matters to do with the euro and their opposition to any future sensible attempts to modernise our electoral system. It is a badly drafted Bill that raises more questions than it answers. Therefore, I will not support it or urge the Government to support prolonging its life. Nevertheless, I congratulate the hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan) on securing such a high slot in the private Member's ballot and on the way, albeit misguided, in which he set out his case.

The background to the Bill lies in our party's decision to extend the remit of the Nolan Committee on Standards in Public Life. One of the most important recommendations made by the Neill committee was for the establishment of an elections commission. Recommendation 93 of its fifth report states that one function of such a commission should be to keep referendums and referendum campaigns under review, and that reports should be made to the Government and to Parliament about them.

In the debates on 9 November on the Neill committee's fifth report, my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary clearly stated his intention

"to produce a draft Bill before the next summer recess and to bring forward legislation so that new rules can be in place for the next general election."—[*Official Report*, 9 November 1998; Vol. 319, c. 53.]

The hon. Member for Blaby said in answer to my intervention that an elections commission would take over the role of a referendums commission. In the light of my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary's assurance, a referendums commission is entirely unnecessary, since legislation to establish a much more crucial elections commission, with a role in referendums but with even more fundamental responsibilities, will come before the House.

In the concluding part of his speech on 9 November, the shadow Home Secretary said, or at least claimed, that he wanted to see legislation

"that covers all the report's proposals, for referendums as well as elections."—[*Official Report*, 9 November 1998; Vol. 319, c. 66.]

Yet here is the Conservative parliamentary party turning out in force to support a proposal that is not in the Neill report—indeed, much of it flies in the face of what he recommended—and does not cover the bigger picture of elections.

[Mr. Gareth R. Thomas]

Clauses 2 and 3 relate to the need for equal access to core funding to enable at least minimal campaigns to be mounted by designated pro and anti campaigns. Yet, in paragraph 12.35 of the fifth report, the committee states unequivocally:

"We believe that the new Election Commission should be the body both to receive applications for core funding from organisations intending to campaign in any referendum and to decide which of the organisations should be in receipt of the core funding."

The report mentions an elections commission, not a referendums commission.

The question in my mind is why the hon. Member for Blaby, backed by so many of his hon. Friends, is proposing a referendums commission and not an elections commission. I suspect that the Conservative party fears an elections commission. It fears the honesty, transparency and integrity that a commission would demand of all political parties. The Conservative party was most reluctant to see lasting reform of party funding. The former Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major), consistently opposed extending the remit of the Nolan committee to party funding.

What is particularly astonishing about the Bill is the absence of a broader regime of controls recommended by the Neill report, which, over a defined period, would require the registration of any campaigning group or individual intending to incur expenditure of more than £25,000.

The Bill contains no requirement to report donations of more than £5,000 to campaigning individuals or groups. Where is any restriction on the source of donations to campaigning organisations? Specifically, why does the Bill not at least ban foreign donations? The omission of such controls has an echo in the Conservative party's reluctance to accept tighter controls on, and tighter scrutiny of, election spending. Who could forget the extent to which the Conservative party was reliant on foreign donors at the last election? There was the £1 million gift from a Hong Kong businessman, and £1.5 million from a Greek shipping owner, not to mention the Asil Nadir debacle. At the time, the Conservative party was desperate for money—any money—to try to buy election success or, more realistically, to minimise—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is going a bit wide of the Bill.

Mr. Thomas: Thank you for your advice, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Dismore: Perhaps I can help out my hon. Friend by reminding him of the suggestion that Paul Sykes might make a contribution of up to £20 million to a no campaign in the European referendum. Does that help to illustrate my hon. Friend's point?

Mr. Thomas: My hon. Friend makes a good point. I was asking why the Bill contains no ban on foreign sources of funding for referendum campaigns. Is it because, as I suspect, the hon. Member for Blaby and his right hon. and hon. Friends want to ensure that a treasure chest can be built up to buy advantage at any price in a referendum on entry to the euro, or to fight any form of sensible electoral reform?

The omission of references to the need for disclosure of the sources of funding, which was recommended by Neill not only for elections but for referendums, reminds me of the improper close relationship that existed between those who funded the Conservative party and those who held power in it, as described in Lord McAlpine's biography. Any referendum campaign must avoid such stigma, or even the hint of it, especially as the campaigns in the possible referendums on entry to the single currency and on electoral reform would inevitably be fronted by high-profile political or business figures. Without rules on disclosure and the source of donations, and thus without transparency and accountability, there will always be concern about the nature of the relationship between funders and funded in a referendum campaign.

The hon. Gentleman made much of the need for broadcast media to give equal access to both sides in a referendum campaign. I do not see what his Bill adds to existing legislative requirements, as broadcasters are already required to be impartial in their coverage of matters of political controversy. Another example of bad drafting is the absence from the Bill of a requirement for the commission to account for the expenses it incurs. Neither is it clear, either from the Bill or from the speeches in support of it, how the establishment of a permanent body dealing solely with referendums can be reconciled with the fact that referendums are, by definition, infrequent.

There is one other major omission from the Bill, which is any limit on the spending allowed during a referendum. The Neill report's recommendations that there should not be curbs on referendum expenditure are fundamentally flawed. The committee advanced two arguments for allowing any amount of spending. First, it argued that referendum campaigns are often fought by people and organisations who have never worked together, or who might not work together even during the campaign, and that it would thus be impractical to try to control campaign spending. I recognise the additional complexity that referendum campaigns bring, but I do not accept that control is impossible. The issue is one that an elections commission should explore in more detail.

The second argument against control over spending advanced by the Neill committee is that it would result in some sort of unwarranted restriction of freedom of speech, because the reasons for voting yes or no might be large in number, disparate, and even contradictory. The same conflicts exist during election campaigns, with the number of such conflicts reflecting the number of parties contesting the election. Therefore, if there should be constraints on spending during election campaigns, there should also be limits on spending during referendum campaigns.

I am extremely suspicious of the motives of Conservative Members who back the Bill. The Bill selectively picks out recommendations from the Neill committee report, it does not address key criticisms of the report and it completely ignores the need for more wide-ranging reform of our election system. That wide-ranging reform is necessary, in part to clean up and guarantee as far as is possible a continuing clean relationship between the Conservative party and its funders.

I think that this Bill is really about trying to secure an advantage for the Conservatives' position in a referendum campaign on the euro. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will recognise that he has been rumbled, that he will withdraw his Bill immediately and engage instead in a more mature and genuine debate about the rules governing both electoral and referendum campaigns when my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary publishes draft legislation this summer.

1.30 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. George Howarth): I join other hon. Members who have congratulated the hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan) not only on his success in the ballot, but on raising this important issue. It has given the House a welcome opportunity to debate several important points regarding the conduct of referendums. I also thank the hon. Gentleman for the good-humoured way—for the most part—in which he introduced his Bill and for his courteous comments about me.

As many hon. Members have said, the case for a generic referendums Bill is clearly stronger now than it was 10 years ago. As several hon. Members recounted, since 1973 eight referendums have been held either throughout the United Kingdom or, more commonly, in a particular part of the country. Some might find it surprising, given the subsequent history of referendums, that it was a Conservative Government who conducted our first referendum in 1973 on whether Northern Ireland should continue to remain part of the United Kingdom.

That was followed by three referendums under the last Labour Government. The first of those, in June 1975, was on the United Kingdom's continued membership of the European Community. It remains, to date, the only occasion on which a referendum has been held throughout the country. It is worth recording that the Neill committee saw the legal and administrative arrangements for the 1975 referendum as a model for future nationwide polls. There followed, in 1979, separate referendums in Scotland and Wales on whether the devolution legislation, enacted the previous year, should be put into effect.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Amber Valley (Judy Mallaber) pointed out, the conduct of referendums fell into disuse during the 18 years of the previous Conservative Administration. However, the Labour Government were elected with a commitment to making some sweeping changes to this country's constitution, and we believe that key parts of that programme of constitutional change should be underpinned by the explicit consent of the people affected. To this end, we have already held four referendums. The first two, in 1997, sought the endorsement—which we received—of our proposals for devolved government in Scotland and Wales. They were followed, in 1998, by referendums in London and on the establishment of the Greater London authority and in Northern Ireland on the acceptability of the Good Friday agreement respectively.

However, as most speakers have conceded, the use of referendums will probably not stop there. Our manifesto contains a number of further commitments to hold referendums at an appropriate time. Last month, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, when launching the national changeover plan, reiterated our commitment to hold a referendum on membership of the single currency after a Government decision to join. In addition to the euro, we have also said that we will hold a referendum before changing the voting system for elections to this House and before introducing directly elected regional government in England. The hon. Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman) referred to England as one region or nation. As she well knows, the Government have no plans to introduce an English Parliament, although any demand for some sort of regional government will be pursued via a referendum in the area concerned.

Our commitment to referendums to strengthen the democratic legitimacy of our new constitutional settlement is not confined to changes at national and regional levels. My right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister announced in the Government's White Paper on modernising local government that local people should decide, in a referendum, whether they supported the creation of a directly elected mayor.

The White Paper also signalled the Government's support for the use of referendums as an important tool to give local people more say in such issues as major local developments or matters of particular local controversy. Several hon. Members have referred to that important and welcome development.

Mr. Letwin: Does the Minister recall the words of the Prime Minister, who stated:

"I want to renew faith in politics through a government that will . . . play by the rules"?

Will he now give a categorical assurance that his Government will not hold any more referendums beyond those that he has already described without implementing rules to give effect to those words?

Mr. Howarth: The hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) asked specific questions to that effect and I shall answer those in due course, so if the hon. Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) exercises a little patience, I will come to that point.

It is clear from the agenda for modernising the political structures of our country that referendums will continue to play an important part in our political life. That was recognised by the Neill committee's report on the funding of political parties and the Electoral Reform Society's commission on the conduct of referendums, which reported in 1996 under the chairmanship of Sir Patrick Nairne. The right hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Mr. Maclennan) and the hon. Member for Blaby referred to the work done by Sir Patrick Nairne and those who sat on his commission.

Until now, the practice has been to organise referendums case by case. In seven out of the eight referendums that have so far been held, statutory authority for the poll was derived from dedicated primary legislation. In the eighth case—the 1998 Northern Ireland poll—the statutory authority was derived from an order made under the Northern Ireland (Entry to Negotiations, etc) Act 1996.

It is clear from a quick reading of the various referendum Acts that there is now a reasonably well-established set of statutory provisions that are needed to provide for a referendum to be held. Typically, legislation for holding referendums has defined persons eligible to vote. The hon. Member for Billericay implied that anybody who has Scottish ancestry should have had

[Mr. Howarth]

a vote in the Scottish referendum, even if they did not live in Scotland. We do not agree, but it is important, as she suggested, to define who is eligible and who is not. The legislation usually needs also to specify the question.

Mrs. Gorman: My point was that the entire population should be considered suitable to express a view on an issue that concerns the whole nation. I was referring not only to people of Scottish ancestry, but the population of the United Kingdom.

Mr. Howarth: I am sorry—I had misunderstood the hon. Lady.

The legislation must also determine the date of the referendum, provide for the appointment of a chief counting officer with responsibility for counting the votes and announcing the result and provide powers to adapt existing electoral machinery as necessary.

In addition, the Referendum Act 1975 provided for grants to be made towards the cost of campaigning. That subject has been well ventilated during the debate, it is dealt with in the Bill, and I shall return to it later. The Neill committee's recommendations consider other issues, such as the registration of campaign organisations, to which I shall also return in due course.

If, as appears to be the case, referendums are to become a permanent feature of our political life, there is certainly an argument for setting up standing machinery for their conduct. We have such machinery for elections, so why not for referendums? There is a good deal of force in that argument, but, on the other hand, the process of selecting items for inclusion in a generic referendums Bill is, as the debate has demonstrated, by no means straightforward.

Mr. Cash: The Minister may recall the rather controversial Referendum Bill that I introduced in 1996, which caused something of a furore, and my Maastricht referendum campaign, which attracted 350,000 signatures, in 1993. That campaign was chaired by me, a Liberal Democrat and a Labour Member. At the heart of our debate is not simply the question of the generics of the Bill, but the extent to which the people may be misled if broadcasting is not accurate and impartial. Will the Minister be good enough to tell me whether the Government's Bill, like this Bill, will include specific and legally accurate provisions to ensure due impartiality on the part of Eurorealists and Europhiles? This is not a party political issue.

Mr. Howarth: The hon. Gentleman mentions fairness in broadcasting. If he will bear with me, I shall cover that point later.

I have already outlined the type of provisions that have typically featured in dedicated referendum Acts. We need to pause before throwing all the individual ingredients into a generic referendums Bill. One approach might be to create a broad order-making power enabling a referendum to be called on any issue. The effect of that, however, would be to restrict Parliament's ability to debate the merits of holding a referendum on any particular issue, the wording of the question and the timing of the poll. There is a strong argument for saying that, on matters of national constitutional significance, there should be a full opportunity for Parliament to give its consent to each and every referendum, and that Parliament should set the question.

If we put to one side the question and the timing of any given referendum, we are left with the nuts and bolts of referendums. As the Neill committee recognised, however, these are still matters of great importance. Like justice, referendums must be conducted, and be seen to be conducted, fairly—I think that the hon. Member for Blaby made the same point in slightly different words. A generic referendums Bill could establish clear ground rules to ensure that that is so.

The Bill properly focuses on two ground rules—core public funding and equal access to the broadcast media—but I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will concede that there are others. If we are to have ground rules, as I believe that we must, perhaps the first question to ask is, who or what sort of body is to police them? The Bill provides for the establishment of a referendums commission, as recommended by, I think, the Nairne commission—I believe that the hon. Gentleman conceded that his proposal was taken from that model—and as supported by the Jenkins commission on the voting system. The hon. Gentleman has sensibly been open in recognising that his referendums commission is intended only as an interim arrangement until a more suitable body is established under subsequent legislation.

During the debate on the Neill committee's report on 9 November last year, my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary announced that the Government had accepted the case for the establishment of an electoral commission. As my right hon. Friend said in that debate, we are considering the precise role and remit of the electoral commission.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore) said, it is clear that we do not want a plethora of bodies responsible for different aspects of elections, as well as referendums. If Parliament determines that a body of this kind should have functions in relation to referendums, it would make every sense to confer those functions on the electoral commission. Precisely what that entails remains at this stage a matter for more detailed consideration, but there must be some doubt about the wisdom of setting up a separate referendums commission at a time when the Government have accepted the need for an electoral commission, and there are no new referendums on the immediate horizon. I shall return to that point. It is perfectly possible that a body established in this way would never have any role before being superseded by the electoral commission.

The Government will want to use the next few months—

Mr. Damian Green (Ashford) *rose*—

Mr. Howarth: I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman, but I must then make progress.

Mr. Green: Will the Minister confirm that he is telling the House that there will be no referendums between now and the next general election, including one on the electoral system?

Mr. Howarth: I have told the hon. Member for West Dorset that I intend to answer that question shortly so, if the hon. Member for Ashford (Mr. Green) will bear with me, I shall return to it.

During the next few months, we want to consider carefully how the electoral commission should be structured. I chair a working party on electorate procedures, on which the Conservative party and Liberal Democrat party are represented. Yesterday, we had a detailed and useful discussion on what the functions of an electoral commission should be, and what enabled us to discover variations in our thinking. We are not just treading water: something is happening. Discussions are taking place, and this debate is part of that discussion. The proceedings of that working party, on which both the opposition parties are represented, are also part of the consideration.

As the Neill committee said, the commission should be independent of Government and, as far as possible, the arrangements for making appointments to the commission and for setting its budget should reflect its independent status. On the appointments side, the hon. Member for Blaby has built in a role for the Speaker. That is one approach, and I would not rule out a role for the Speaker in connection with the electoral commission, but I would not in any way take the role or consent of the Speaker for granted at this stage of our debate.

The Bill is less forthcoming on the arrangements for setting the referendums commission's budget. There is the usual provision for money to be provided by Parliament to meet the commission's expenses, but the implication is that the commission's budget should be part of a departmental vote. The Neill committee pointed out that the mechanism for setting the budget of the National Audit Office provides a useful precedent, and it is one that we want to examine further.

I am sure that the House will agree that it is important to get the structure of the supervisory body right and to consider carefully the functions that it will need. The Nairne commission helpfully identified several possible functions—advising on the wording of the question; allocating funding to campaign groups; liaising with, and acting as a moderator between, any campaign groups; acting in an ombudsman role to deal with any complaints; monitoring balanced access to broadcast media; providing public information, including a balanced statement of the opposing arguments; and supervising the organisation of polling stations and counting and declaration arrangements. The commission also suggested that a continuing role might be to identify lessons from each referendum and to recommend any necessary changes in procedure for future referendums.

That is an impressive list, which requires detailed analysis. The promoter and sponsors of the Bill have obviously concluded that their referendums commission should have a more limited remit. On my reading of the Bill, the proposed commission's functions would be limited to advising and reporting on referendums in general; advising on the wording of the question; designating a referendum campaign body for each possible outcome; making grants to such designated campaign bodies; and reporting on the conduct of each referendum.

There may be a closer affinity between the functions that I have just listed and the functions recommended by the Neill committee, but even the list that I just enumerated is no small undertaking. We need to be sure that the functions conferred on any oversight body are appropriate. For example, should a referendums commission have a role in relation to all national, regional and local referendums? My hon. Friend the Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore) drew attention to some of the difficulties that might arise in that regard.

Clause 4 requires the referendums commission to

"make a report to the Secretary of State on the conduct of any referendum conducted under any enactment".

As I read the Bill, that could include local referendums.

I have mentioned the Deputy Prime Minister's plans for local consultative referendums on such issues as major local developments and matters of local controversy. Those consultative referendums would be in addition to the binding referendums on whether there should be a directly elected mayor. The proposals in the Bill create potential for hundreds of local referendums to be conducted throughout the country every year. If the referendums commission was expected to report on every local referendum, it would need very many staff.

I am sure that the hon. Member for Blaby would agree that a balance must be achieved. We do not yet have a ready answer to that problem, but my instinct is that the Bill has not quite achieved a balance, although I accept that that is not as a result of prejudice on the hon. Gentleman's part, but simply reflects the complexity of the issues involved.

Clause 2 would provide for the designation, by the referendums commission, of referendum campaign organisations. The clause seeks to implement recommendation 85 of the Neill report, which provided that

"the Election Commission should decide which organisations, if any, should be in receipt of core funding".

There is, however, a key difference between what the clause provides for and the substance of the recommendation. The Neill committee acknowledged that identifying one organisation on either side of a referendum campaign which stood out from all other such organisations may not always be straightforward.

In 1975, the position was clear. The Government issued a White Paper, which advised:

"The Government are prepared to consider providing limited financial assistance, to be equally divided between the two sides, if it is possible to identify two organisations which adequately represent those campaigning for and against continued membership of the Community."

Events moved rapidly, to such an extent that, when the Referendum Bill was published on 26 March 1975, it provided for grants to be made to two named organisations: Britain in Europe and the National Referendum Campaign. It must be remembered that, at that time, the political landscape was in many ways not as complicated or crowded as it is today.

Other more recent referendum campaigns have spawned their own umbrella cross-party groups. Although such umbrella groups have emerged more often than not, the Neill committee pointed to the no campaign in Scotland in 1997 and the yes campaign in Northern Ireland in 1998, where such groups were not an obvious feature of the campaign.

Clause 2(2) requires the referendums commission to certify one organisation on each side

"as the designated referendum campaign".

As my hon. Friend the Member for Amber Valley pointed out, such a provision could place the commission in a very difficult, if not impossible, position. As the Neill committee sensibly recommended, it would be unwise to box the commission into such a corner.

[Mr. Howarth]

Another potential difficulty for the electoral commission is that the Bill refers to

"each of the possible outcomes"

in a referendum. In most cases, as the hon. Member for Stone (Mr. Cash) suggested, the possible outcomes are clear because electors are asked to vote either yes or no to a single question, or for one of two opposing propositions. The 1997 Scottish devolution referendum does not, however, fit neatly into this framework.

The House will recall that, in 1997, the Scottish people were presented with a two-part ballot paper. Voters were asked, first, to indicate whether they agreed or disagreed that there should be a Scottish Parliament, and secondly, whether they agreed or disagreed that a Scottish Parliament should have tax-varying powers. In theory, therefore, there were four possible outcomes: yes to a Scottish Parliament and yes to giving it tax-varying powers; no to both; yes to a Scottish Parliament, but no to giving it tax-varying powers; and no to a Scottish Parliament, but yes to giving it tax-varying powers.

Mr. Cash: Will the hon. Gentleman please answer this question: is he suggesting that, under the Bill, there could be two questions in a referendum—one asking people whether they wanted a single currency, and the other asking people whether they wanted to be part of the European Union? If that is what the Government have in mind, they are following a very dangerous path.

Mr. Howarth: The hon. Gentleman knows full well that that was not what I meant. I was merely referring to the fact that, in different campaigns and referendums, there could be more complicated sets of questions.

In practice, in the Scottish devolution referendum, campaigners fought for either a yes or a no vote to both propositions. None the less, given four possible outcomes, the referendums commission would be obliged under the Bill to designate four referendum campaign organisations, and pay each of them a grant in order that a campaign may be conducted. That example, and others that we have heard, demonstrate the difficulty of setting up a framework that covers all possible future circumstances. Despite the difficulties, we should not be put off trying to find a workable solution. All credit is due to the hon. Member for Blaby for introducing the Bill so that we can begin to discuss the issues.

Once we get over the problem of identifying the lead campaign body on each side of the referendum, there is the question of core funding, which several hon. Members raised. Clause 3(1) provides for grants to be made to the designated referendum campaigns and stipulates, in paragraph (b), that the same amount must be given to each side. It is worth spending a little time examining that proposition.

Recommendation 84 of the Neill report did indeed propose that

"each side should be given equal access to an amount of core funding".

From the preceding paragraphs in the report, it is clear that the concern was that each side should have sufficient funds to enable it to mount a minimum campaign. By "sufficient funds", the Neill Committee meant sufficient

"to cover minimal office accommodation, the purchase or rental of a quantity of office equipment and supplies, and the salaries of three or four members of staff for the duration of the campaign".

In making that recommendation, as the right hon. Member for South Norfolk (Mr. MacGregor) accepted, the Neill Committee pointed to the precedent of the 1975 referendum. Section 3 of the Referendum Act 1975 provided for a grant not exceeding £125,000 to be made to the two main campaign organisations.

The official accounts of Britain in Europe and the National Referendum Campaign were published in October 1975 (Cmnd. 6215). As an historical insight into the politics of the 1970s, that document makes interesting reading. As well as the audited receipts and payments accounts, the document lists all the individual donations of £100 or more received by the two campaigns.

The list for Britain in Europe—the yes campaign—includes the names of 369 individuals and organisations who together donated nearly £1 million. The list reads like a "Who's Who" of British industry and commerce, including as it does such companies as ICI, Marks and Spencer, Shell UK and the Rank Organisation. The list of donors to the National Referendum Campaign—the no campaign—makes rather more poignant reading. There were just seven individuals or organisations identified as having given more than £100.

The key fact that the accounts reveal is that the Government grant to the Britain in Europe campaign represented only 8 per cent. of its total income, whereas the grant to the National Referendum Campaign represented a massive 94 per cent. of its total income. In a typically thoughtful speech, my hon. Friend the Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike) alluded to that problem, as did my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Thomas).

If the purpose of core funding is to ensure that each side has sufficient funds to run at least a minimal campaign, it is arguable whether it was strictly necessary in 1975 to award funding to the Britain in Europe campaign at all. I am not making the case one way or the other, but simply posing the question whether the requirement to be fair to each side overrides all other considerations.

Dr. Fox: The Minister has been speaking for 29 minutes. He has three times said that he would answer a straight question. Will or will not the Government give a commitment that they will not introduce proposals for a referendum in this country until fair rules are established, under this Bill or subsequent legislation?

Mr. Howarth: If the hon. Gentleman will bear with me, I intend to cover that in my speech. If he will exercise a little patience, I shall deal with the matter—there is plenty of time.

The question is whether, in the circumstances that I described, it was necessary to give a commitment to funding for both sides. Where core funding is available, it seems sensible not to spread it too thinly across a number of campaigning groups. The Neill committee's approach, which the Bill adopts, was to allocate the funding to only one organisation on each side of the referendum. However, we should not lose sight of the fact

that there may be many other organisations, in addition to the lead umbrella groups, that are campaigning in the referendum.

Mr. Robathan *rose in his place and claimed to move,* That the Question be now put.

Question put, That the Question be now put:—

The House divided: Ayes 129, Noes 5.

Division No. 121] **[2 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Norman
Baldry, Tony
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Body, Sir Richard
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Butterfill, John
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Colvin, Michael
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cran, James
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Day, Stephen
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan
Evans, Nigel
Faber, David
Fallon, Michael
Flight, Howard
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam
Fraser, Christopher
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gill, Christopher
Goodlad, Rt Hon Sir Alastair
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gray, James
Green, Damian
Greenway, John
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson Smith, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
Maclennan, Rt Hon Robert
McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Malins, Humfrey
Mates, Michael
May, Mrs Theresa
Moss, Malcolm
Nicholls, Patrick
Norman, Archie
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Prior, David
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Faversham)*
St Aubyn, Nick
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Townend, John
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Tyrie, Andrew
Walter, Robert
Wardle, Charles
Waterson, Nigel
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Woodward, Shaun
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Edward Leigh and
Mr. Dominic Grieve.

NOES

Dismore, Andrew
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Hill, Keith
Sedgemore, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan

Tellers for the Noes:
Ms Bridget Prentice and
Mr. Gareth R. Thomas.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Question put accordingly, That the Bill be now read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 128, Noes 0.

Division No. 122] **[2.11 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Norman
Baldry, Tony
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Body, Sir Richard
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Butterfill, John
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Colvin, Michael
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cran, James
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Day, Stephen
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan
Evans, Nigel
Faber, David
Fallon, Michael
Flight, Howard
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam
Fraser, Christopher
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gill, Christopher
Goodlad, Rt Hon Sir Alastair
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gray, James
Green, Damian
Greenway, John
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Hunter, Andrew
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson Smith, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclennan, Rt Hon Robert
McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Malins, Humfrey
Mates, Michael
May, Mrs Theresa
Moss, Malcolm
Nicholls, Patrick
Norman, Archie
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Prior, David
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Faversham)*
St Aubyn, Nick
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael

Spring, Richard
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Townend, John
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Tyrie, Andrew
Walter, Robert
Wardle, Charles
Waterson, Nigel
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Woodward, Shaun
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Dominic Grieve and
Mr. Edward Leigh.

NOES

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Gerald Howarth and
Mr. David Maclean.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee, pursuant to Standing Order No. 63(1) (Committal of Bills).

Cheques (Scotland) Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

2.22 pm

Mr. John Swinney (North Tayside): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

I have pleasure in introducing this Bill to the House for its Second Reading. It tackles an historical anomaly created by the Bills of Exchange Act 1882, through the applications of the funds-attached principle, which affects the customers of Scottish banks.

I thank the Committee of Scottish Clearing Bankers for its assistance in the preparation of the Bill and for raising this important issue in the banking sector. I also thank the Economic Secretary and her officials, who have assisted in the preparation of the Bill.

The funds-attached principle means that a cheque operates as an assignation of the sum for which it is drawn in favour of the owner of the cheque. If there are insufficient funds to meet a cheque when it is presented, whatever sums are available are attached and suspended, to be passed over eventually to the owner of the cheque, should he or she fail to get full value for it by other means. That is a cumbersome administrative procedure. The banks estimate that it involves the operation of 100,000 accounts in any year and that the measure would save the Scottish clearing banks approximately £250,000 a year in administrative costs.

The operation of that principle was considered by the Review Committee on Banking Services Law, chaired by Professor Jack under the previous Government, who accepted the recommendations of the Jack committee subject to consultation. That consultation indicated that there was support for the measure.

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Swinney: No, I am short of time.

The Jack committee's recommendations were that the principle be abolished so that administrative savings and administrative convenience could be assisted within the banking sector. The Bill has the support of the four Scottish clearing banks and I hope that it will command the support of the House.

2.24 pm

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): The hon. Gentleman scarcely did justice to the Bill, which has implications that go beyond the rather narrow definition that he gave, although I understand why, at a time such as this, he did that. I wanted to ask him several questions, but he was not prepared to answer them, so I will have to go into them in a little detail. That is the way these things happen.

Mr. Robert Maclennan (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross): It will be taken unkindly in Scotland if the right hon. Gentleman obstructs the passage of the Bill by speaking at great length when it enjoys such widespread support.

Mr. Forth: At 2.25 pm, I leave the right hon. Gentleman to consider what great length might be.

Perhaps we could discuss it another time. If he is suggesting that the people of Scotland expect legislation to go through without proper scrutiny, it reflects badly on them if not on him. I hope that he is not.

Mr. David Maclean (Penrith and The Border): The hon. Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore) spoke for more than an hour on the Referendums Bill—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael J. Martin): Order. We are not going to discuss what happened in a previous debate. We must keep to the terms of the Bill.

Mr. Forth: I am grateful for that guidance, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

One of the issues properly raised by the Bill is whether this is a matter for the House of Commons and the Westminster procedure.

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Ms Patricia Hewitt): Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that the previous Government, following the recommendations of the Jack committee, and the subsequent favourable consultation, were minded to introduce the measure but unfortunately did not have the time? Will he therefore support the Bill?

Mr. Forth: It appears that this Government cannot find the time either. It appears that the measure is so important that neither Government could find time for it.

Mr. Nick Gibb (Bognor Regis and Littlehampton): To put the record straight, the Opposition support this eminently sensible Bill. The funds attached rule is absurd. I hope that the Bill progresses this afternoon.

Mr. Forth: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I assume that, in the best traditions of the House, he will wish to explain at greater length why he and his colleagues favour the Bill. I am sure that you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, agree that it is an essential part of the legislative process, that any measure however small or narrow, must be properly considered in the House of Commons. All views must be heard, both those of Front Benchers and those of Back Benchers. I welcome the opportunity that my hon. Friend will no doubt seek to set out his position in some detail. He might then answer the question to which the Minister's comments give rise—namely, why the previous Government failed to find time for the measure when they are alleged to have supported it. The same seems to apply to this Government. However excellent they may say they find the measure, they have not yet found time for it in their programme. We are therefore here today, following the private Members' procedure, rightly considering the principle of the Bill on Second Reading.

Mr. Maclean: Does not my right hon. Friend find outrageous the suggestion that, as we have had a two-minute speech by the Bill's promoter and declarations in favour, although no speeches, from the Front-Bench spokesmen, the Bill must be bounced through without discussion?

Mr. Forth: I agree with my right hon. Friend. It would be very much in tune with the contempt in which the Government normally hold the House for them to expect a measure such as this to be shoved through without proper debate.

Ms Bridget Prentice (Lewisham, East): Does the right hon. Gentleman recognise the irony of two Scottish Conservative Members opposing a measure that will benefit Scots and Scotland? Admittedly, like me, they represent English seats.

Mr. Forth: That brings me to the first question of substance. I am grateful to the hon. Lady for leading me in the direction that I wanted to follow. She has rightly pointed out that there is an irony in the fact that it is this House, with Members such as me considering this measure at this stage—the hon. Lady might, if she were to catch—

It being half-past Two o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

Debate to be resumed on Friday 14 May.

Remaining Private Members' Bills

FUEL POVERTY AND ENERGY CONSERVATION BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 7 May.

TRANSPORT OF FARM ANIMALS BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 23 July.

CONTROL OF RESIDENTIAL HEDGEROWS BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 7 May.

BUS FUEL DUTY (EXEMPTIONS) BILL

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Question [12 March], That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Hon. Members: Object.

Debate to be resumed on Friday 16 April.

STREETWORKS BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 23 April.

NUCLEAR SAFEGUARDS BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 26 March.

COMPUTER MILLENNIUM NON-COMPLIANCE (CONTINGENCY PLANS) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 26 March.

PUBLIC HOUSE NAMES BILL

Order for Second Reading read

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 26 March.

ENERGY EFFICIENCY BILL

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Question [12 March], That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Hon. Members: Object.

Debate to be resumed on Friday 26 March.

ENERGY CONSERVATION (HOUSING) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 26 March.

DEREGULATION COMMITTEE

Ordered,

That Mr. Stephen McCabe be discharged from the Deregulation Committee and Mr. John McDonnell be added to the Committee.—[*Mrs. McGuire.*]

TRAVEL BY MEMBERS TO NATIONAL PARLIAMENTS AND EUROPEAN UNION INSTITUTIONS

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That the Resolution of 6th December 1991 relating to travel by Members to European Community Institutions be rescinded.

That, in the opinion of this House, provision should be made as from 1st April 1999 for reimbursing Members in respect of the cost of travelling on parliamentary duties between the United Kingdom and any European Union institution in Brussels, Luxembourg or Strasbourg or the national parliament of another European Union member state and any additional expenses necessarily incurred in such travelling, subject to the limit that

(1) the amount payable to a Member in any year, beginning with 1st April, shall not exceed the aggregate of—

(a) the cost of a return business class airfare for the journey on the assumption that the journey begins and ends at a London airport and that the destination is any of the three cities mentioned above or the location of the national parliament of a European Union member state; and

(b) twice the corresponding civil service class A standard subsistence rate for the time being in operation; and

(2) expenditure in pursuance of this Resolution within financial year 1999–2000 shall not exceed the total currently planned for expenditure on travel by Members to European Union institutions within that year.—[*Mrs. McGuire.*]

Hon. Members: Object.

OFFICE COSTS ETC. ALLOWANCES

Resolved,

That, in the opinion of this House, the following provisions should have effect:

The limit on the office costs allowance in relation to Mrs. Betty Williams should be up to 1.25 times that determined in accordance with paragraph (a) of the Resolution of the House of 10th July 1996 for any quarter beginning with 1st April 1998.—[*Mrs. McGuire.*]

Tibet

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mrs. McGuire.]*

2.32 pm

Mr. Norman Baker (Lewes): I am grateful for the opportunity to make progress with my Adjournment debate, and that the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) will not be able to prevent me from doing so in the next half hour.

Wednesday 10 March was the 40th anniversary of the uprising in Lhasa, when the Chinese finally made clear their intention to rule Tibet with a rod of iron. I am grateful that today we have not just the Minister with us but, in the Public Gallery, representatives from the Tibetan community in this country, including Migyer Dorjee, a representative of his Holiness—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael J. Martin): Order. Perhaps I might teach the hon. Gentleman something. He may not refer to anyone outside the Chamber, and that includes the Public Gallery.

Mr. Baker: I was unaware of that ruling, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but I shall respect it.

Since 1959, thousands of innocent Tibetans have been killed, imprisoned and tortured for no other reason than that they are Tibetan. The Chinese flag was raised for the first time in Lhasa on 23 March 1959—almost 40 years ago to the day. Within three days of the uprising, 10,000 Tibetans had been killed. Treasures from Tibet, especially from the monasteries, were looted and removed to China—in the same way as the Nazi Government in Germany behaved towards countries that they had invaded. By 1961, the land under cultivation had increased by 22.5 per cent. as a consequence of Chinese involvement, but Tibet suffered famine of epidemic proportions because grain was shipped out of Tibet to China. Tibetans starved in their thousands: so bad was the situation that parents were forced to feed their dying children with their own blood in an effort to keep them alive.

If that were not bad enough, the situation worsened with the onset of the cultural revolution, which affected Tibet as well as China. I could list statistic after statistic from that period, but suffice it to say that, before the Chinese decided to interfere in Tibet, there were more than 6,000 monasteries whereas, by the end of the cultural revolution, only five years later, there were only 13—a catalogue of destruction unimaginable in this country. Hundreds of works of art were destroyed—it seemed that everything Tibetan was up for destruction. The Tibetans are a religious people, but their religious places were used for keeping pigs in a deliberate attempt to denigrate Tibet's religion—contrary to the theoretical meaning of the Chinese constitution. In 1968, movement beyond house and field was forbidden, and Chinese officials' permission was required to collect firewood. By 1973, in just 14 years, one seventh of the Tibetan population had been killed as a consequence of the Chinese invasion.

Over the past 40 years, a policy of what can be described only as apartheid has been operated in Tibet. Electricity has been provided for the capital, but only in the Chinese quarters. Free medical care has been supplied for settlers, but only barefoot doctors are available for Tibetans. Food rations have been available for the whole population, but, when rationing is in place, the Chinese have received twice as much as Tibetans. All business has to be conducted in Chinese. Few Tibetans are in positions of power in Tibet, and those who are could be described as accomplices of the Chinese regime.

With my interest in the environment, I find the environmental damage that Tibet has suffered in the past 40 years horrifying. The Tibetans, as Buddhists, respect life in all its forms, but hitherto protected wildlife has been slaughtered to such an extent that formerly abundant species are now threatened with extinction. The snow leopard, the Himalayan monkey, wild yaks and gazelles are all on the brink of extinction as a consequence of Chinese involvement in Tibet. In addition, Tibet has been used as a convenient location for the dumping of nuclear waste. Deforestation continues apace, as the once prevalent Tibetan forests are cut down and the wood exported to China. That has not only destroyed the forests but has led to numerous environmental problems within Tibet. A once proud country has been raped and pillaged.

From 1977 to 1980, there was a slight improvement, and Hu Yaobang visited the country and admitted that mistakes had been made. However, it has all been downhill since then. In their own country, Tibetans continue to be second-class citizens, subject to arbitrary arrest and to torture with weapons such as electric batons. Ordinary Tibetans, whether or not they are monks or nuns, are subject to gross human rights abuses that no one in this world could possible defend. Such is the repression that it is now an offence to own or display a Tibetan flag. I have here a Tibetan flag and, by showing it to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am committing a simple act which, if I were in Lhasa, would make me subject to arbitrary arrest, imprisonment and torture.

For monks and nuns to have pictures of the Dalai Lama in their monasteries is now an offence. The Dalai Lama is the religious leader of Tibet; how can the Chinese possible claim to respect human rights and religious freedom when they go to such lengths to prevent Tibetans from possessing even photographs? On numerous occasions since 1959, monks and nuns have been required to issue ritual denunciations of the Dalai Lama and to undertake all sorts of horrific acts to demonstrate those denunciations of their religious leader.

The Tibetans, who are a proud and brave people, continue their protests. The Chinese will never win the hearts and minds of Tibetans as long as they continue their current policies of repression. They cannot win in that way, so, instead, they are trying to win in a far more insidious way. China is operating a policy of mass migration of Han Chinese into Tibet, with the clear intention of making Tibetans a minority within their own country. That is nothing new for China: it did the same thing in places such as Mongolia.

By 1982, a third of Lhasa was occupied by Chinese. Today, Lhasa is a Chinese city. Much of the original city has been destroyed and replaced with grey, faceless 1950s buildings. The policy of deliberately making Tibetans a minority in their own country, treating them as second-class citizens and destroying their civilisation I can only describe—and it is not a word I use cavalierly—as genocide.

I turn briefly to the international perspective. I believe that Tibet is legally an independent country—that is not the position of the British Government, and the Minister

[Mr. Baker]

will elaborate on that point—and that China is an occupying power. I could cite at length the history of Tibet's independence and I have gathered information from previous centuries to back my case. I do not have time to set it out in full detail.

In 1876, the Chefoo convention gave the United Kingdom the right to establish a trade mission in Tibet. The United Kingdom had signed a similar convention in 1858 relating to China. Therefore, by reaching a separate agreement with Tibet, the United Kingdom recognised that that country was not part of China. In 1894, the then Foreign Secretary, the Marquis of Salisbury, said:

"If the Chinese ever had any authority in Tibet, they certainly have none now."

At the very least, the British Government recognised Tibet's de facto independence from China.

In 1904, the United Kingdom and Tibet signed the Lhasa convention. China objected, but the United Kingdom replied:

"Tibet is not one of the 18 provinces of the Chinese Empire."

Treaties have been signed by the United Kingdom and Tibet. China had no tax-raising powers in Tibet and had to pay taxes on its goods entering Tibet. How else do we define independence and sovereignty? Tibet conducted its own foreign policy. Those are the hallmarks of an independent country.

China invaded Tibet in 1905. However, after the Chinese emperor was deposed in 1910, the Dalai Lama declared all ties broken and the last Chinese troops left Tibet in 1913. Between 1913 and 1959, there is no question but that Tibet operated as an independent country, with its own currency and stamps. When China declared that Tibet was part of China, British authorities in this country issued a formal protest about that declaration.

Britain plays an important role in relation to Tibet. When the 1959 uprising occurred, Britain was the only independent witness to that event. We have enjoyed long relations with Tibet and, in this century and the last, Britain has been closer than any other country to Tibet. Therefore, we have an historical duty to represent the views of the Tibetan people.

There are further indications that Britain recognised Tibet's independence. In 1914, the British signed an agreement with Tibet—the Simla convention. The British said:

"the Chinese Government will of course lose all the privileges and advantages which the tripartite convention"—

the alternative agreement—

"secures to them, including recognition of Chinese suzerainty over Tibet; while the return of the Chinese Resident at Lhasa"—

the Amban—

"will be postponed indefinitely and His Majesty's Government will render the Tibetans all possible assistance in resisting Chinese aggression."

In 1921, Curzon, the then Foreign Minister, told the Chinese:

"We shall regard ourselves at liberty to deal with Tibet, if necessary, without again referring to China; to enter into closer relations with the Tibetans; to send an officer to Lhasa from time to time to consult the Tibetan Government . . . and to give Tibetans any reasonable assistance they might require in the development and protection of their country."

It is clear that the British, in the inter-war years, recognised Tibet as an independent country.

When Tibet asserted her neutrality in the second world war, the British Foreign Office said:

"The Tibetans have every moral right to their independence for which they have fought successfully in the past, and we are committed to support them in maintaining it".

That is what the British Government said in 1942. They continued:

"For over 30 years (Tibetans) have enjoyed de facto independence and do not wish to be subjugated".

I believe it is quite clear that Tibet is an independent country and that China is an occupying force. Because of our historical connections with Tibet, Britain can play an important role in clarifying that position and pushing for human rights improvements and the recognition of Tibet. The Government must take up that role.

Unfortunately, for reasons of realpolitik, Tibet has been abandoned by the west since 1959. Tibet is not geographically important. It has no natural resources that the British, American and other western Governments need. It does not have the strategic importance of Kuwait. China is powerful, and there are other interests to consider, such as Hong Kong and trade relations.

The Government will never condone the human rights abuses in China. I acknowledge that they regularly make protests about those to the Chinese. They have genuinely tried to engage the Chinese in constructive dialogue and persuade them to change direction. As I said in an oral question to the Minister on Tuesday, I do not criticise that process in any way, but, unfortunately, the Chinese regard it as weakness. They have signed plenty of bits of paper in the past year to say that they will improve their human rights, but human rights have got worse in Tibet and China in that time. There has been no end to the invasion of Tibet by migrating Han Chinese. There has been no meeting with the Dalai Lama. In short, there has been no progress.

I should like the Minister to answer four questions in his reply. First, will the Government recognise that Tibet was independent before 1959 and that China is therefore an occupying power? Will the Minister admit that Tibet is not part of China? That is an important question.

Secondly, will the Government support a motion at the meeting of the UN Commission on Human Rights, due to take place on 22 March, condemning China, specifically mentioning Tibet, and pressing China to negotiate with the Dalai Lama?

Thirdly, will the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary meet the Dalai Lama when he visits the United Kingdom in May?

Finally, will the UK demand, with our European Union partners, the immediate release of the Panchen Lama, who has been imprisoned, without justification, in mainland China? Will the Government further demand that independent witnesses from the EU or the Government be sent to verify that the Panchen Lama is still alive and healthy?

Tibet is a wonderful country, which has been dealt a bad hand in the past 40 years. This country has an historical relationship with Tibet that gives us a moral duty to do what we can to help those people.

2.47 pm

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Derek Fatchett): I congratulate the hon. Member for Lewes (Mr. Baker) on raising this issue and the way in which he put his arguments. I thank him for bringing to the House his concerns and those of others.

The hon. Gentleman has expressed his understandable worries about the situation in Tibet. He knows that Tibet is, rightly, of concern to the wider public and Members of the House. As he said, the issue has been brought sharply into focus this week with the 40th anniversary of the exile from Tibet of the Dalai Lama. The hon. Gentleman's timing is extremely good.

The Government share the deep concerns expressed by many hon. Members and we are actively addressing them with the Chinese through our human rights dialogues and other contacts. Tibet features prominently in those discussions and in the points that we make about human rights. The hon. Gentleman said that, for reasons of realpolitik, western Governments have abandoned Tibet. That is not the case; we have not abandoned the people of Tibet, and we shall continue to express our concerns and raise many of the issues to which the hon. Gentleman referred.

The hon. Gentleman asked me four questions, the first of which related to the status of Tibet. He knew the answer to the question even as he asked it, but it may be worth while putting on record again the position taken by successive UK Governments. They have regarded Tibet as autonomous, while recognising the special position of China there. That continues to be the policy of this Government. As the hon. Gentleman knows—he expressed his regrets on this point—Tibet has never been internationally recognised as independent. This Government and our predecessors have not recognised the Dalai Lama's government in exile. However, we believe strongly that the Tibetans should have a greater say in running their own affairs, and we have urged the Chinese authorities to respect the distinct cultural, religious and ethnic identities of the Tibetan people. The hon. Gentleman rightly made several powerful points about the way in which those distinct identities have been undermined in the past four decades.

We do not recognise the Dalai Lama as the head of the Tibetan Government-in-exile, but we do acknowledge him as a highly respected spiritual leader, the winner of the Nobel peace prize and an important and influential force. He has visited the United Kingdom several times, and we look forward to his visit in May when he will be met at an appropriate level by members of the Government.

The best way to achieve a lasting solution to the situation in Tibet is through dialogue between the Chinese Government and the Tibetans, including the Dalai Lama, without any preconditions. We continue to urge China to enter into such a dialogue. The hon. Gentleman may wish to know that, when my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister visited China in October last year, he raised the question of Tibet and our concerns about human rights and put forward the points that I have just made about the need for a dialogue between the Chinese Government and the Tibetans, involving the Dalai Lama.

We have also expressed many deep concerns to the Chinese about the situation in Tibet. The hon. Gentleman referred to some of them. They include the "re-education" of monks and nuns in Tibet, under which some, as he said, are reported to be required to renounce their loyalty to the Dalai Lama. We have also expressed our concern about the reported restrictions on the display of the Dalai Lama's picture and the use of the Tibetan flag, which the hon. Gentleman also highlighted. We have raised all those issues in our dialogue with the Chinese.

China's recent atheist propaganda campaign has also given us cause for concern. We most certainly believe that the Chinese should see religion as fulfilling a basic human need and right. Religion should never be seen as a threat. Again, I give the hon. Gentleman a clear commitment that we shall continue to raise such matters.

We are also concerned about the future of the special ethnic, cultural and religious characteristics of Tibet in light of the conditions there. The hon. Gentleman mentioned reports of the migration of a significant number of Han Chinese to the Tibet Autonomous Region. Again, we wish the essential characteristics of Tibetan culture to be maintained, not subverted and undermined.

The hon. Gentleman asked about the Panchen Lama. The detention in 1995 of Gedhun Choekyi Nyima raises particular concerns. The boy, who will be only 10 years old in April, was detained following his recognition in 1995 by the Dalai Lama as the Panchen Lama, the second highest religious figure in Tibet. The UK Government are not in a position to hold a view on the child's candidacy as the Panchen Lama—that is clearly a matter for the Tibetans alone to decide—but he is just a child, and we are concerned about his welfare. We have repeatedly asked the Chinese to be allowed to visit him to check on his well-being. Regrettably, this request has not been granted by China. We shall continue to raise his case and that of other Tibetans with the Chinese at each and every opportunity.

The hon. Gentleman referred to the positions adopted by this Government. It might be worth while to remind him, although I do not think that he has forgotten, of the special initiative that we took during our presidency of the EU. For the first time, a delegation of EU Troika ambassadors in Beijing made a week-long visit to Tibet in May last year to make an assessment of the situation there. We were pleased that that took place during the British presidency. The delegation was led by the British ambassador and was supported by a British Tibetan speaker, which was in itself an important innovation and precedent. As a result of that visit, the European Union as a whole agreed some common guidelines for addressing the issue of Tibet. It may be useful if I list them.

The first guideline was to urge China to respect human rights in Tibet. The second was to encourage China to begin talks with the Dalai Lama. The third was to target development assistance for ethnic Tibetans to help them to compete and survive in the economy. The fourth was to seek to preserve the Tibetan language and culture.

I hope that the hon. Member for Lewes will recognise that Europe and the United Kingdom are supporting the human rights dialogue with practical co-operation. While in Tibet, the EU Troika ambassadors visited Pa Nam, the site of a £5.1 million EU rural development project. That project will directly benefit indigenous Tibetan people by providing employment, training and access to land. Britain alone will contribute about 15 per cent. of the costs of that project. The Government are also providing development assistance to Tibet through the Save the Children projects in education and health, so we are

[Mr. Derek Fatchett]

pleased that the Troika ambassadors' visit took place. It was a welcome visit, and it was a welcome initiative on our part.

The hon. Gentleman asked about our overall approach to the issue of human rights and the forthcoming meetings in Geneva. Perhaps I may take a few minutes to put those in context. Since the successful handover of sovereignty in Hong Kong in July 1997, the Government have succeeded in placing our relations with China on a new, more constructive basis. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's visit to China last year strengthened that relationship. We shall continue to build on it and we look forward to welcoming President Jiang Zemin to the United Kingdom in the autumn.

As part of that relationship, we are addressing our human rights concerns in a variety of ways. We have raised them directly with the Chinese Government. The Foreign Secretary and the Prime Minister did so when they met Chinese leaders during their visits to China last year. I will do so when I visit China next month. We do so regularly with the Chinese ambassador in London. We shall continue to press the Chinese Government to live up to the standards of the international covenants that they have signed—a process that the hon. Gentleman mentioned.

The two processes—dialogue and the raising of specific cases—are often regarded as mutually exclusive. They are not. We have been able to express our concerns about individual cases—about what we would see as the violation of human rights—and to place those in the overall dialogue. We feel that that may well be the most constructive way to proceed. However, I emphasise that dialogue is not an end in itself. It must be a means to achieve an improvement in human rights in China—otherwise, the dialogue has no purpose. It is a vehicle for achieving change.

As a result of the dialogue, there have been some improvements in China, but there have been some very disappointing recent developments there about which we have expressed, and shall continue to express, our deep concerns.

Twelve positive steps have emerged from the dialogue, and it is worth remembering them and considering how much progress we could have made without the dialogue. In October 1997, China signed the international covenant on economic, social and cultural rights. In October 1998, China signed the international covenant on civil and political rights. In September 1998, there was the visit to China and to Tibet by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mary Robinson. There was the visit to China and to Tibet by the UN working group on arbitrary detention. An invitation was extended to the UN special rapporteur on torture, who also visited China.

Chinese agreement was given to report separately on Hong Kong under the two international covenants. The EU Troika ambassadors visited Tibet. Discussions took place with the Chinese on issues of serious human rights concerns, including individual cases, the death penalty, conditions of detention and Tibet. There was collaboration on the EU-China human rights co-operation programme, which includes projects in the areas of civil and political rights as well as economic and social rights, and those activities have been funded by the European Commission. There have been two EU-China legal affairs seminars, and a seminar on the rights of women. The Chinese accepted participation in the dialogue of critical western non-governmental organisations, such as Amnesty International. Finally, Chinese prosecutors have shown suspects a card describing human and basic rights in court proceedings.

Those are signs of the progress that we have made. We must decide in Geneva—we want European Union member states to take the decision together—whether we can achieve more by other means. It is a tactical not a principled question. I think that the hon. Gentleman and I share very much the same agenda.

Mr. Baker: I am grateful to the Minister for approaching this productively. When China signed the international covenant on civil and political rights in October 1998, *China Daily* said:

> "It is not that China's stance or policies on the issue of human rights have changed . . . rather that the belated favourable turn in the international atmosphere has created an opportunity for China to elaborate its perspectives".

I am very concerned that China is signing bits of paper but changing nothing.

Mr. Fatchett: I understand that concern; we seek change. As I said, we are wedded not to the process but to the outcomes. That is why the question becomes tactical. China's signing into the international human rights regime is important in itself. It is a statement in itself, on which we must build. From the process to which I have referred, we never expected overnight, dramatic changes. The process is a long one, and we are committed to it.

I hope that I have been able to persuade the hon. Gentleman and those who have a real interest in the future of Tibet and its people that this Government share many of their concerns. We are active on those concerns, and will continue to raise them on behalf not just of individual Lobby groups or Members of Parliament but of the United Kingdom Government. That forms a central part of our dialogue on human rights and, because of it, to return to a phrase used by the hon. Gentleman, we will not forget Tibet. Tibet forms an essential and central part of what we are trying to do on human rights.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at two minutes past Three o'clock.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 8 March 1999

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Economic and Monetary Union

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list those hon. Members who are planned to go, or have been, to Sweden to lecture on the single currency and EMU for the British Council. [75130]

Mr. Fatchett: I understand from the British Council that no hon. Members have travelled to Sweden to lecture on the Council's behalf on the single currency and EMU. The Council is organising a conference in Sweden later this month with the title "Outside EMU—North European Perspectives" at which the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke) will speak.

Ministerial Visits

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the ministerial visits made to *(a)* Argentina and *(b)* Taiwan in 1998. [75020]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: *(a)* There were six ministerial visits to Argentina in 1998. These were as follows:

The Minister for Sport visited Argentina from 26 to 28 March in connection with the World Cup 2006 campaign.

The Minister for Education and Employment visited from 18 to 21 April in connection with educational co-operation.

The Minister for Transport in London visited from 12 to 14 July in connection with transport co-operation.

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the hon. Member for Manchester, Central (Mr. Lloyd), visited from 2 to 4 August to discuss bilateral relations.

The Deputy Prime Minister and Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions and the Minister for the Environment visited from 10 to 13 November for the Climate Control Conference.

(b) The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office visited Taiwan privately from 14 to 20 February 1998, at the invitation of the British Chamber of Commerce in Taipei, in connection with inward investment opportunities.

Ambassadors and High Commissioners

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many ambassadors and high commissioners there are; how many of them *(a)* are women, *(b)* are members of ethnic minorities, *(c)* have Oxbridge degrees and *(d)* were educated at public schools; and if he will make a statement. [74880]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: As of 1 March 1999 there were 148 Ambassadors and High Commissioners and High Commissioners/Ambassadors designate. Seven are women. None are members of ethnic minorities. Eighty-four have degrees from Oxford or Cambridge universities. Information on the schools they attended is incomplete but at least sixty were educated at private schools and at least fifty-eight were educated at state schools.

Western Sahara

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he expects the UN to be able to conduct a referendum on the future of the Western Sahara. [74872]

Mr. Fatchett: In his report of 11 December 1998 the UN Secretary-General stated that it is the United Nations' intention to hold the referendum in the Western Sahara in December 1999, provided that it receives full co-operation from the parties involved. We fully support the UN in its efforts to achieve this goal and hope that this deadline will be met.

Sierra Leone

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the EU member states that are assessing the need to provide extra funds to Sierra Leone; when he requested them to do so; and what form the invitation took. [75482]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: The new £10 million package of British assistance to Sierra Leone was announced by the Foreign Secretary on 2 March 1999, *Official Report*, columns 895–96. On the same day, we instructed our Embassies and High Commissions to invite not just our partners in the European Union, but around the world, to play their part. Support from other donors could include direct support for ECOMOG, for the Government of Sierra Leone, or for humanitarian or other assistance

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he took the decision to commit up to an additional £10 million from the reserve for Sierra Leone; and over what period of time the sum will be spent. [75481]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: The request from the Foreign Secretary for a contribution from the reserve for Sierra Leone was approved by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on 18 February. We are inviting others in the international community to follow our lead in providing support to Sierra Leone; the £10 million will be spent as we receive matching new pledges from them.

Rambouillet Talks

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to the answer of 1 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *605*, for what reasons President Milosevic was not invited to join the Rambouillet talks. [75485]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: The invitation allowed both sides to nominate their representatives at Rambouillet. It is a matter for the Federal Yugoslav and Serbian Governments as to why President Milosevic was not a member of their delegation.

Africa

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the representatives of the Governments of *(a)* Angola, *(b)* Zimbabwe, *(c)* Namibia, *(d)* Uganda, *(e)* the Democratic Republic of Congo and *(f)* South Africa whom the Minister of State met on his recent visits to the region, indicating the dates of the meetings. [75479]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: As the Prime Minister's Special Envoy I visited the Democratic Republic of the Congo and other African countries directly or indirectly involved in the conflict from 22–26 February to assess progress in African mediation efforts and to explore what more Britain and the international community may be able to do to support these. I met *(a)* Deputy Foreign Minister Miranda (24 February), *(b)* President Mugabe (25 February), *(c)* Prime Minister Geingob (24 February), *(d)* President Museveni (26 February), *(e)* President Kabila (23 February) and *(f)* Deputy Foreign Minister Pahad (22 February). I also met President Bizimungu and Vice President Kagame of Rwanda (25 February) and the Secretary General of the OAU (26 February).

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list those *(a)* British citizens and *(b)* British citizens with dual nationality who have been kidnapped in Africa from 1 January 1998 to date, together with (i) the date of the kidnap, (ii) the identity, or suspected identity, of the kidnappers and (iii) the outcome of the kidnaps. [75484]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: Not all kidnappings of British nationals are reported. However, to our knowledge, the following kidnappings have taken place in Africa since 1 January 1998:

On 10 March 1998, Lenard Holland and Barry Glover (both British nationals) were abducted by villagers in Warri, Nigeria, along with a US national. They were released unharmed on 12 March.

On 14 April 1998, Gordon Hutchinson, Andrew Odell, Mark Edward and Grevill Moteran (British nationals) were held hostage by fellow oil workers in Nigeria. They were released after four days.

On 11 August 1998, Douglas Kear (joint New Zealand/British national) was abducted, probably by Rwandan Interahamwe rebels, in the eastern Democractic Republic of Congo, along with two Swedes and a Canadian. The Canadian was released on 18 August. The fate of the other three remains unknown.

On 6 October 1998, Pierre de School-Meester (British national) was abducted by pirates from a ship off the Delta State Coast, Nigeria. He was released unharmed on 12 October 1998.

On 8 November 1998, following a UNITA attack on a diamond mine in north-east Angola in which two British nationals were killed, Jason Pope (British national) was abducted along with a South African, two Filipinos and several Angolans. Their fate remains unknown.

On 10 November 1998, Peter John Holgate (British national) was taken hostage with seven other oil rig workers by Ijaw youths in Bayelsa State, Nigeria. All eight were released unharmed on 17 November 1998.

On 9 February 1999, Jim Simpson (British national) was abducted by local youths in Warri, Nigeria, along with an Italian and a Nigerian. He was released unharmed on 17 February.

On 15 February 1999, Martin Westbury and his young son Benjamin (both British nationals) were abducted by armed youths in Warri, Nigeria. They were released unharmed on the same day.

On 1 March 1999, Joanne Cotton, Steve Roberts, Mark Lindgren, Martin Friend, Gary Tappenden (all British nationals and Mark Avis (joint New Zealand/British national) were abducted by Rwandan Interahamwe rebels in Bwindi National Park, western Uganda, along with a number of other Western tourists. Gary Tappenden and Mark Avis found their way to safety; the other four were murdered by their abductors, along with four US and New Zealand tourists.

On 3 March 1999, Ian Lane (British national) was abducted by armed men in Warri, Nigeria. The case has not yet been resolved.

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations were made to the Minister of State during his recent visit to Africa concerning the targeting by the Interahamwe of *(a)* British and *(b)* American citizens. [75480]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: None.

Uganda

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations his Department received from the Government of Uganda concerning travel advice between 1 January 1998 and 1 March 1999. [75487]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: None.

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to assist the Ugandan authorities in their investigation into the murders and kidnappings at Bwindi National Park. [75483]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: The Ugandan President has promised us a full report on this tragic incident. A British police team arrived in Uganda on 5 March to assist the Ugandan authorities with their investigation.

Nigeria

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the President-elect of Nigeria following his announcement of the intention to withdraw Nigeria's peace keeping troops from Sierra Leone. [75477]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary will visit Nigeria on 8 and 9 March. In his discussions with President-elect Obasanjo, the Foreign Secretary will pay tribute to the efforts which Nigeria is making to help provide security in Sierra Leone; and will stress the support which Britain is giving to ECOMOG to help it consolidate the security situation.

Rotherham Euro Experiment

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 22 February 1999, *Official Report*, column *192*, on the Rotherham Euro Experiment, what role *(a)* ministers and *(b)* officials in his Department played in locating sponsors for the Rotherham Euro Experiment. [74491]

Ms Quin: *(a)* None. *(b)* None.

ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND THE REGIONS

Environment Council

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the issues for discussion before the Environment Council of 11 and 12 March, indicating the position he proposes to take on each issue. [72738]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 24 February 1999]:* The following issues will be debated in Brussels on 11–12 March:

Community strategy on climate change: Council conclusions.

Amended proposal for a Council Directive establishing a framework for Community action in the field of water policy: Common position.

Proposal for a Council Directive on end-of-life vehicles: Common position.

Community strategy to reduce CO_2 emissions from private cars—Commission negotiations with car manufacturers which are not members of ACEA: Council conclusions.

Proposal for a Council regulation allowing voluntary participation by organisations in a community eco-management and audit system: Policy debate.

Proposal for a Council Directive amending Directive 88/609/EEC, on the limitation of emissions of certain pollutants into the air from large combustion plants: Policy debate.

Proposal for a Council Directive on the incineration of waste: Progress report.

It has not been the practice of successive Administrations to indicate the position Ministers propose to take in advance of Council.

North Circular Road

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what were the *(a)* budgeted cost and *(b)* total final cost for the three contracts to extend the North Circular Road (A406) at the junction of Fore Street, N18 (A1010) extending eastwards to the boundary of the London Borough of Enfield; on what date each contract was to be completed and when they were actually completed; and if he will make a statement. [74202]

Ms Glenda Jackson: I have asked the Chief Executive of the Highway Agency, Mr. Lawrie Haynes, to write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Peter Nutt to Mr. Andrew Love, dated 8 March 1999:

The Minister for Transport in London, has asked Lawrie Haynes, the Chief Executive of the Highways Agency, to reply to your recent parliamentary Question about the improvements to the A406 between Fore Street and Hall Lane. I am replying in Lawrie's absence from the office.

The information you asked for is in the attached table except for the information on the final cost of each of the three contracts. I am afraid it is not possible to provide this until the final accounts have been settled. I have therefore provided figures of the spend to date.

The delays in completing what were highly complex improvements to the A406, particularly at Fore Street, are regretted, but as you know, they were largely due to the contractors encountering unforeseen ground conditions. There were also difficulties installing the specialist mechanical and electrical equipment necessary for safety in the tunnel.

However, the improved road between Fore Street and Hall Lane now means that traffic on the A406 is able to run much more freely. It no longer has to compete with local traffic at the Fore Street, Angel Road and Lea Valley junctions, thus reducing congestion and delays to all road users. This coupled with the extensive landscaping we have carried out means that local people who live and work in the area can now enjoy a much safer, healthier and more attractive environment.

	Completion date			
Highway scheme	*Planned completion*	*Actual completion*	*Original works budget £ million (1992)*	*Spend to date (million)*
Contract A: Fore Street Underpass	31 December 1997	4 December 1998 (Tunnel—16 July 1998)	56.6	62.0
Contract B: Angel Road Viaduct	16 January 1996	28 November 1996	31.4	39.6
Contract C: Lea Valley Viaduct	14 November 1995	22 August 1996	32.7	39.4
Total			120.7	141.0

Notes:
1. All figures are exclusive of VAT
2. Figures include the cost of works, statutory undertakers, variations of price and contingencies. They exclude Traffic Control Systems Unit (TCSU), Preparation and Supervision (P & S) and Land costs.

Departmental Websites

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions for what reason the current running cost estimate of the Environmental Protection Agency website is projected to rise to £1,000,000 in the year 2000–01. [74007]

Mr. Meacher: I am advised by the Environment Protection Agency that the estimated cost of running its website is projected to increase from £25,000 in 1998–99 to £100,000 in 2000–01. This estimate is based on current growth rates, comparisons with the US Environmental Protection Agency and costs of other internet services. The figure of £1,000,000+ is a rough and untested estimate of the cost in 2000–01 were the Agency to develop its information systems and businesses processes to provide a range of electronic services including electronic handling of 25% of licence applications and access to public registers. It is being considered alongside competing priorities but has not yet been subject to critical business assessment and does not feature in the Agency's current financial plans.

European Commission on the Regions

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will deposit

in the Library a copy of the report of the April 1998 Conference organised at Brighton by the European Commission on the Regions. [74443]

Mr. Caborn: I regret that the Department was unable to determine from the Question which conference the right hon. Member has in mind. If he would like to write with further details, I would be happy to consider his request further.

Supermarket Sites

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many supermarkets have been granted planning permission as a result of a planning inquiry or appeal since May 1997 on (i) out of town, (ii) green-field, (iii) town centre and (iv) brown-field sites. [74556]

Mr. Raynsford: Since May 1997 planning permission has been granted, as a result of a planning inquiry or appeal, in respect of ten supermarkets. Of these, none were out-of-town or on green-field sites, six were in town or district centres and the remaining four were out-of-centre, but within the urban area on brown-field sites.

Trunk Road Network

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he will announce his decision on the extent of the core trunk road network following consultation on his paper, "Roads Review: Implementation of Detrunking Proposals". [74720]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Responses from regional planning bodies, local authorities and others are being considered. We will announce a final decision on the extent of the core network as soon as possible.

Rail Links

Mr. Linton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he plans to consider *(a)* the order application for the link from London Underground's East London Line to Railtrack's South London Line and *(b)* the funding application for the southern link and the northern extension to the North London Line; and if he will assess the benefits of creating an orbital rail network for London. [74624]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The Deputy Prime Minister gave permission for London Underground last August to do preparatory work for securing the legal powers necessary to build the southern extension to the East London Line. This work would need to be completed before an order application could be lodged.

London Transport and the Department are considering a number of ways in which both the Northern and Southern Extensions might be funded. Any appraisal of the extensions will take into account the benefit of establishing orbital railway links.

Planning Applications

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many applications for consideration of planning applications by public inquiry have been received by him since May 1997. [74536]

Mr. Raynsford: Comprehensive records are not kept centrally of requests to my right hon. Friend to call in planning applications. However, of those called in in the period 1 May 1997 to 31 December 1998, 239 applications have been or are due to be considered at a public inquiry.

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many planning applications have been called in by him since May 1997. [74535]

Mr. Raynsford: For the 20 months from 1 May 1997 to 31 December 1998, my right hon. Friend called in some 246 planning applications.

Self-financing Trading Operations

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will *(a)* list and *(b)* estimate for each of the past three years applications by local authorities in England and Wales for trading credit approvals or other borrowing requirements for the development and maintenance of self-financing trading operations other than airports. [74702]

Ms Armstrong: In the last three years my Department has received a large number of applications for extra credit approvals for a wide range of purposes, including for Trading Credit Approvals (TCAs) for self-financing schemes. Owing to the constraints on my Department's resources, such requests could only be approved in the most exceptional circumstances. Local government in Wales is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will estimate the effect on the Public Sector borrowing requirement for 1999–2000 of approving all applications by local authorities in England and Wales for trading credit approvals or other borrowing requirements for the development and maintenance of self-financing trading operations other than airports for that period. [74703]

Ms Armstrong: Local authority applications for Trading Credit Approvals (TCAs) can be made at any time of the year and therefore it would not be possible to estimate the amount of requests for TCAs my Department might receive in 1999–2000 or future years. Were an application to be successful the PSBR for 1999–2000 would be expected to increase by the amount of the credit approval issued. Local government in Wales is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Advance Corporation Tax

Jackie Ballard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) if he will estimate the financial impact of the changes made to advance corporation tax since May 1997 on local authority budgets for 1999–2000; [74948]

(2) if he will estimate the cost per council tax payer for 1999–2000 by local authority of the changes to advance corporation tax introduced since 1 May 1997. [74947]

Ms Armstrong: Actuarial assessments of the impact on local authority pension funds as a result of changes to advance corporation tax are not yet available for all funds. The Local Government Association, following a national survey last year, estimated the impact at £130 million. This was taken into account in the Revenue Support Grant Settlement for 1999–2000. It is not possible to say how these changes will impact on council tax. Local authorities will need to take into account all the relevant local circumstances in deciding on budgets and hence council taxes.

Sorting Office, Feltham

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he proposes to report on the planning application for a Royal Mail sorting office on the Feltham Marshalling yards site. [74886]

Mr. Caborn: We have decided not to intervene on this planning application and have written to the local planning authority today to tell them that they can determine the application as they see fit.

Merchant Ships

Mr. Prosser: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many merchant ships joined the United Kingdom register during the last year for which figures are available; and if he will indicate their *(a)* names and *(b)* previous flags. [74965]

Ms Glenda Jackson: In 1998, 30 trading vessels of 100 gross tons and over joined the UK register. Their latest recorded names and previous flags are as follows:

Name	*Previous flag*
Alexander	not known
Amandine	Antigua & Barbuda
Berge Hugin	Norway
Cape Sable	Liberia
Carole T.	Barbados
Clansman	newbuilding
Crear	newbuilding
Global Mariner	Hong Kong
Humber Fisher	newbuilding
Janet C.	Barbados
Johanna C.	Barbados
Loch Rannoch	newbuilding
Maersk Cotonou	Isle of Man
Mersey Fisher	newbuilding
Milford Fisher	newbuilding
Olaf	Norway
P&O Nedlloyd Genoa	Liberia
P&O Nedlloyd Kobe	newbuilding
P&O Nedlloyd Marseille	Liberia
P&O Nedlloyd Southampton	newbuilding
P&O Stena Elite	Bahamas
Red Jet 3	newbuilding
Sea Centurion	Sweden
Seacat Scotland	Uruguay
Solent Fisher	newbuilding
Stena Fantasia	Bahamas
Stena Lynx	Bahamas
Tor Gothia	Sweden
Tor Hollandia	Sweden
Wightstone	Honduras

Source:
Lloyd's Maritime Information Services Ltd.

Development Projects

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the development projects involving sites larger than one hectare in the South East which he has called in the past year. [75499]

Mr. Raynsford: In the period from 1 March 1998 to 28 February 1999 the Secretary of State has called-in 20 planning applications involving sites larger than one hectare in the South East. These are as follows:

Extension of a quarry and new cement works at Holborough Quarry, Snodland, Kent;

Leisure development at Stone Lodge, Dartford, Kent;

Conversion of a house and outbuildings to residential units, North Frith, Tonbridge, Kent;

Development of land for bagging and storing topsoil at Honeypot Farm, Edenbridge, Kent;

Leisure development at site of High School for Girls, Chichester, West Sussex;

Housing development at Newdigate, Surrey;

Retail, leisure and restaurant development at land to the west of Park Street, Camberley, Surrey;

Mixed-use development including retail, leisure, restaurant and cinema at land to the north of Obelisk Way, Camberley, Surrey;

Extension to Nutfield Priory Hotel, Nutfield, Surrey;

Multiplex cinema, Port Solent, Paulsgrove, Portsmouth, Hampshire;

Foodstore, Bordon Motors site, Bordon, Hampshire;

Foodstore, Southampton Road, Paulsgrove, Portsmouth, Hampshire;

Storm Water Screen House, Fort Cumberland, Portsmouth, Hampshire;

Retail warehouse and restaurant, Churchill Way West, Basingstoke, Hampshire;

Two proposals for the redevelopment of Bracknell town centre, Berkshire;

Housing development, Grazeley, Wokingham, Berkshire;

Housing development, Spencers Wood, Wokingham, Berkshire;

Park and ride, Grain Silo, Cherwell, Oxon;

Multiplex cinema, Abingdon, Oxon.

Green Ministers

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when the team of Green Ministers last met; what was discussed; and which departments were represented by officials. [75089]

Mr. Meacher: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 8 December 1998, *Official Report*, column *131*, and also to the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. Clapham) on 25 November 1998, *Official Report*, column *5*. Those replies related to the last meeting of Green Ministers on 18 November 1998. The next meeting is scheduled for 22 March 1999.

Cycle Paths

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what is the Government's policy in respect of the use of cycle paths by invalid scooters. [75104]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Cycle tracks and mandatory cycle lanes are not generally available to invalid carriages, although advisory cycle lanes can by used. Local authorities can permit the use of Class 3 invalid carriages (those capable of a maximum speed of 4 mph on the footway and 8 mph on the carriageway) on mandatory cycle lanes.

Genetically Modified Crops

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how crops grown in genetically modified crop trials are disposed of where the subsequent foods or food ingredients do not meet the requirements that would allow them to enter the food chain. [75112]

Mr. Meacher: The method of disposal is specified in each consent to release genetically modified crops. Methods for disposal include landfill, incineration, or autoclave. In addition to these methods, non-regenerative material may be disposed of by maceration or chemical treatment at the trial site and subsequent incorporation into the soil at the trial site.

Business Rates

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what powers are available to local authorities to encourage businesses to move to their areas through the waiving or reduction of business rates; and if he will make a statement. [75008]

Ms Armstrong: Local authorities do not have the power to waive or reduce business rates to attract businesses to their areas. However, we have proposed in the White Paper "Modern Local Government: In Touch with the People" (July 1998) a measure of local discretion over the business rate, which would allow an authority to grant a rebate to all of its ratepayers, though the cost of that rebate would have to be met by the authority. We shall shortly be issuing a public consultation paper on the details of implementing the White Paper proposals on rates.

Local Government Reform

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he expects to make changes to the function and composition of local councils. [75075]

Mr. Raynsford: Our plans for the modernisation of local government are set out in the White Paper "Modern Local Government: In Touch with the People" published in July 1998. This is a programme for change stretching for ten years or more. The Local Government Bill (which provides for the replacement of Compulsory Competitive Tendering with the new duty to achieve best value in providing local services, and also abolishes crude and universal capping) completed its Committee stage in the House of Commons on 25 February. Our proposals to transform the political management and ethical framework of councils will be published soon in a draft Bill, and other measures will follow.

Local Authority Housing

Dr. Starkey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will announce the results of the consultation exercise on the proposed incentive for local authorities to buy back ex-council flats and houses. [75707]

Ms Armstrong: Around 200,000 people in England have bought a council flat, mainly under the Right to Buy. Research shows that the great majority consider it good value for money. But some, especially in system-built flats, cannot afford the costs of maintenance. Some cannot re-sell their home—either because they cannot find a buyer, or because mortgage lenders refuse to give a loan.

The Government already provide financial help to councils to reduce high repair bills in flats. But some people—including some older people on low incomes—can no longer cope with the cost and strain of home ownership. Local authorities have powers to buy back housing, but their resources are limited, and they have other pressures. Last July we published a consultation paper offering to cover 25 per cent. of councils' costs.

Many respondents were concerned that the incentive offered was too small. We have therefore increased it to 35 per cent. of all costs incurred by a council above a threshold of £50,000 per council per year. This will target help on those areas with the greatest problems. We have also extended it in other ways—for example, to cover homes already bought back during 1998–99, and to include former New Town housing.

In addition to this incentive, when a council buys back a property it regains a capital asset which, sooner or later, it can re-let. It also reduces the costs of managing its leasehold property including, for example, trying to recover arrears of service charges. And in some cases, such as buying from an elderly or vulnerable person in arrears, the council will be helping someone whom it might otherwise have to re-house.

Local authorities are best placed to decide who needs their help. They will be free to decide whom to assist and on what terms. there are just two restrictions: the incentive only applies where they are buying from an individual, and where they are not using compulsory purchase powers. This limits the incentive to cases there occupants wish to sell their home.

We have today laid an Order before Parliament amending regulation 104 of the Local Authorities (Capital Finance) Regulations 1997. Subject to Parliamentary approval, this will come into force on 1 April and councils will then be able to use the financial incentive. A copy of the consultation paper, and a list of the responses, is in the Library of the House, and copies of the responses are available in the Library of the Department.

PRIME MINISTER

Minister for Science

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Prime Minister what instructions he has issued relating to the Minister for Science's attendance at, or participation in, meetings where genetically modified foods and crops are discussed. [73026]

The Prime Minister: It has not been necessary to issue any such instructions.

At all times the Minister for Science has acted in accordance with the rules set out in the Ministerial Code and the statement he made at the time he became a Minister.

Train Operating Companies

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his oral answer of 24 February 1999, *Official Report*, column 383, what criteria he uses to evaluate the *(a)* quality of service and *(b)* customer satisfaction provided by train operating companies. [74153]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 2 March 1999]:* Quality and customer satisfaction are currently measured against benchmarks in passengers' Charters and franchise agreements. As I made clear at the Rail Summit on 25 February, this Government are committed to improving the quality of rail services, and believes that transport generally is as important as schools and hospitals.

The Summit demonstrated our determination to improve rail services. Sir Alastair Morton, as the new Chairman of the British Railways Board and prospective Chairman of the Strategic Rail Authority, will have a key role in raising standards and boosting investment. We also made clear that we need better measurements of quality and customer satisfaction.

Single Currency

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on procedures for *(a)* democratic accountability and *(b)* official representations on economic management permitted from (i) national Governments and (ii) parliamentarians from countries within the euro zone, concerning management of the single currency; and what analysis he has made of such in determining whether the United Kingdom should join EMU. [74446]

The Prime Minister: Article 109b(3) of the Maastricht Treaty contains several provisions designed to balance the necessary independence of the European Central Bank with the need for democratic accountability. The Government believe that accountability and transparency in their policy-making will be key to ensuring that the European Central Bank gains the trust of the European public and financial markets. Ultimately, it will help to provide the credibility needed to deliver a more effective monetary policy.

Euro

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Prime Minister what estimate he has made of total costs to *(a)* public services and *(b)* government departments of preparations for transition to the euro; and if he will make a statement. [74499]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Bognor Regis and Littlehampton (Mr. Gibb) on 1 March 1999, *Official Report*, column 529.

Racism

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Prime Minister what arrangements are being proposed to guard against institutional racism in the public sector as a whole, with particular reference to new tests, guidelines and monitoring arrangements; and if he will make a statement. [75136]

The Prime Minister: The Government have accepted the definition of institutional racism set out in the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry Report and have welcomed the Report's recommendations. A detailed response and action plan will be laid before the House in time for the debate on the Report.

As my right hon. Friend made clear in his statement to the House on 24 February 1999, *Official Report*, columns 389–403, the Report is a challenge to all public services and the Government are committed to a comprehensive agenda to improve race relations which will set out over the coming months. This will include extending the Race Relations Act 1976 to cover public services.

Newspaper Articles

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Prime Minister if he will arrange for copies of articles which he writes for publication in overseas journals and newspapers to be deposited in the Library, together with a translation. [75051]

The Prime Minister: No central store is routinely kept of such articles and it would not be practical to make systematic arrangements to do so.

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Prime Minister (1) what representations he has received from (i) foreign Governments, (ii) foreign agencies, (iii) foreign media and (iv) British lobbyists concerning potential writing of articles for placement in foreign newspapers and journals; [75050]

(2) what representations he has received from overseas on articles which he has written in foreign newspapers and journals. [75049]

The Prime Minister: As far as I am aware, none.

Geneva Trade and Environment Symposium

Mr. Baker: To ask the Prime Minister who will represent the British Government at the High Level Symposium on Trade and Environment in Geneva on 15 and 16 March 1999; what policy position the Government will be promoting; and if he will make a statement. [74869]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 5 March 1999]:* We will be represented at the World Trade Organisation Symposium on Trade and Environment by senior officials from the Department of Trade and Industry, the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, the Department for International Development, and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. We expect the event to be an opportunity to work with other WTO members and representatives of non-governmental bodies, including business, to identify constructive ways ahead on the trade and environment interface.

The Symposium is not intended to be a forum for negotiation or decision-making, but we hope that the event will progress the trade and environment debate by helping to:

Clarify the relationship between trade rules and international Environmental law;

Identify mutually-beneficial solutions for achieving trade, environment and development objectives;

Encourage further dialogue between all interested communities, in particular highlighting the importance of transparency at both the national and international level.

The United Kingdom will engage constructively in the debate at the Symposium.

Genetic Modification

Mr. Baker: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 1 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *527*, on genetic modification, on what basis he stated that genetic modification has the potential for the production of food that is more nutritious and better tasting. [75061]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 5 March 1999]:* This is the view of eminent scientific opinion. In its report on 'Genetically Modified Plants for Food Use' published in September 1998, the Royal Society say that

'the use of genetically modified organisms has the potential to offer real benefits in agricultural practice, food quality, nutrition and health'.

Biotechnology

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Prime Minister when he last met environmental groups with an interest in biotechnology; and who was present at the meeting. [75063]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 5 March 1999]:* As under previous Administrations, it is not the normal practice to provide details of private meetings with specific individuals or organisations.

UNSCOM

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister on what date he was informed that the American Government were running a signals intelligence operation under the cover of UNSCOM. [75408]

The Prime Minister: I am aware of the latest press allegations of the United States spying under cover of UNSCOM operations.

The US Government have publicly stated that all activities by US nationals assigned to UNSCOM, and all information exchanges between the US and UNSCOM have been strictly in pursuit of UNSCOM's mandate to dismantle Iraq's Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) capability.

Lockerbie

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to the answer by the Minister for Home Affairs and Devolution of 23 February 1999, *Official Report*, column *212*, on Lockerbie, if he will define which aspects of the Lockerbie issue will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament, and which for the UK Parliament. [75280]

The Prime Minister: Scottish criminal procedure and the Scottish criminal justice system will be within the legislative competence of the Scottish Parliament. International relations will remain the responsibility of the United Kingdom Government.

Lord Chancellor (Garrick Club)

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Prime Minister what action he has taken in respect of the Lord Chancellor's use of his private office to promote a candidate for membership of the Garrick Club. [75153]

The Prime Minister: None. The Lord Chancellor did not use his Private Office to promote a candidate for membership of the Garrick Club. His Private Office was involved in preparing and despatching some letters on the Lord Chancellor's behalf. This was an oversight and the costs have been reimbursed.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Paramilitary Violence

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will list for the week ended Saturday 6 February the number of *(a)* violent incidents involving paramilitary groups, *(b)* punishment beatings and *(c)* punishment shootings which took place in Northern Ireland, indicating how many involved (i) Loyalist and (ii) Republican groups. [70902]

Mr. Ingram: Between 31 January and 6 February 1999, there were 4 shooting incidents and 1 bombing incident. The number of casualties as a result of paramilitary-style attacks were as follows:

	By Loyalists	*By Republicans*
Assaults	2	1
Shootings	1	1
Total	3	2

Note:
Figures may be subject to minor amendment in the light of further information becoming available

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will list for the week ended Saturday 30 January the number of *(a)* violent incidents involving paramilitary groups, *(b)* punishment beatings and *(c)* punishment shootings which took place in Northern Ireland, indicating how many involved (i) Loyalist and (ii) Republican groups. [70901]

Mr. Ingram: Between 24 and 30 January 1999, there were 4 shooting and 2 bombing incidents. The number of casualties as a result of paramilitary-style attacks were as follows:

	By Loyalists	*By Republicans*
Assaults	7	4
Shootings	1	2
Total	8	6

Note:
Figures may be subject to minor amendment in the light of further information becoming available

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will list those incidents of violence attributed to Loyalist paramilitary groups which have occurred in 1999 to date. [71379]

Mr. Ingram: The number of security incidents during 1999 to 24 February attributable to Loyalists are as follows:

	1999 To 24 February
Deaths	0
Shootings	13
Bombings	11

Note:
These figures are subject to amendment

Casualties as a result of paramilitary style shootings/assaults

	Loyalist	*Republican*
Shootings		
January	6	5
February (24)	6	1
Total	12	6
Assaults		
January	17	12
February (24)	12	4
Total	29	16

Note:
Figures are subject to minor amendment

Good Friday Agreement

Mr. Moss: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the timetable for normalising security in Northern Ireland under the Good Friday Agreement. [71399]

Mr. Ingram: The Government will make progress towards the objective of as early a return as possible to normal security arrangements in Northern Ireland, consistent with the level of threat. The situation is kept under constant review.

Graffiti

Mr. Moss: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the cost was to the public purse in each of the past five years to clean up graffiti on public buildings in Northern Ireland. [72912]

Mr. Paul Murphy: This information is not recorded in the form requested and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Pilot Projects

Yvette Cooper: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will list the pilot projects instigated by his Department since 1 May 1997, indicating the area in which each pilot took, or is taking, place. [72636]

Mr. Alan Howarth: The Department is funding five pilot schemes to promote the voluntary recording of archaeological finds in Kent, Norfolk, North Lincolnshire, the North-West and Yorkshire for two and a half years from September 1997 to April 2000.

Departmental Policies

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what systems he has in place to ensure that policies being developed by his Department are subject to a crime impact *(a)* assessment and *(b)* audit and are not likely to lead to enhanced criminal opportunities. [72694]

Mr. Alan Howarth *[holding answer 24 February 1999]:* Departments co-operate on policy development and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State works closely with other Ministers in assessing any likely implications for crime of new developments, in support of the Home Office's aim to reduce crime and the fear of it.

The procedures for crime assessment and audit vary across the Department's responsibilities. Where a policy is assessed as carrying some risk, for example where grants are made to third parties, specific systems are in place. Relevant sponsored bodies such as the national museums and galleries, Historic Royal Palaces, and English Heritage have security systems to guard against theft and criminal damage and we expect our sponsored bodies to keep these systems under review, to ensure they are appropriately effective in developing circumstances. The Department and its sponsored bodies have fraud policies in place and the Department has developed a checklist of key controls to prevent, detect and investigate fraud and deal with its consequences. The Department is committed to producing an annual fraud return to the Treasury's timetable each year.

From this year onwards, Departmental and NDPB Accounting Officers will be required to prepare statements on the system of internal financial control which operates in their organisations, including risk management. In preparation for this, my Department is about to pilot Control and Risk Self Assessment (CRSA) techniques in a number of policy areas.

The National Lottery regulator also has systems to ensure that those associated with the running of the National Lottery are fit and proper for their role and to monitor the effectiveness of the operator's systems to guard against crime including fraud.

British Airways

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when he last met representatives of British Airways; what was discussed; what help his Department is receiving from British Airways and if British Airways is financially sponsoring initiatives run by his Department or its agencies. [72810]

Mr. Chris Smith *[holding answer 24 February 1999]:* I have no formal meetings with representatives of British Airways in that capacity. From time to time, however, both as Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport and as Chairman of the Millennium Commission, I have

met Bob Ayling, the Chief Executive of British Airways, in his capacity as Chairman of the New Millennium Experience Company.

Neither my Department nor The Royal Parks Agency is receiving any help or financial sponsorship from British Airways. However, British Airways has for some years been providing financial sponsorship for the Art for Architecture scheme, for which my Department is the core-funder.

UK Sports Institute

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport on what dates he has visited the headquarters site of the UK Sports Institute since December 1997. [73563]

Mr. Banks *[holding answer 26 February 1999]:* My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I visited the Sheffield headquarters site of the UKSI on 26 January 1998 and I returned for a second visit on 18 June. We have had several meetings with the UKSC, ESC, Sheffield City Council and the Phoenix consortium throughout this development period to track progress; the most recent one took place on 26 January this year. I will be visiting the site again in April.

Libraries

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what advice is given by his Department on the provision of locally available, accessible libraries. [73161]

Mr. Alan Howarth *[holding answer 1 March 1999]:* Local library authorities have a statutory duty to provide comprehensive and efficient services and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has recently reminded them of his own statutory obligation to ensure that they do so. The Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 does not specify the number, location, distribution or opening hours of local libraries. These detailed decisions are for local library authorities to make, based on the precise nature of their areas and their local resources and priorities. However, through their Annual Library Plans, library authorities are required by my right hon. Friend to report on the availability and accessibility of local libraries, which is a key element in ensuring that a comprehensive and efficient service is being provided, and he subsequently provides both individual and general feedback to each authority.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what representations he has received concerning the future of Kilburn, Chalk Farm and Belsize public libraries in Camden; and if he will make a statement. [75186]

Mr. Alan Howarth *[holding answer 5 March 1999]:* To date, I have received 23 representations about these public libraries. I am looking at Camden's proposals for its library services in detail to ensure that they meet with statutory requirements and do not result in a reduction in service quality across the authority.

Sports Cabinet

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will list the members of the Sports Cabinet; and when it has met. [74558]

Mr. Banks *[holding answer 4 March 1999]:* The Sports Cabinet is chaired by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, and brings together the Ministers with responsibility for Sport in the four parts of the United Kingdom and, when appropriate, others who are closely involved in the development of sport.

The Sports Cabinet last met on 26 November 1998 and is scheduled to meet next on 10 March. Officials of my Department have met their counterparts from the Home Country Departments on a number of occasions during this period and are in regular contact on a range of issues that relate to elite performance and of strategic priority for UK sport.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Biological Resources (Poorer Countries)

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development in respect of their impact on poorer countries, what assessment her Department has made of the compatibility of Article 27 of TRIPS and Articles 8, 15 and 16 of the UN Convention on Biological Resources. [74844]

Clare Short: The World Trade Organisation Trade Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) Agreement and the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) are complementary. They both seek to establish common international frameworks and obligations within which individual countries may develop legislative regimes appropriate to their circumstances.

There are concerns about the way in which the two instruments can be implemented in a mutually supportive way. Given the interests of developing countries, many of which have indigenous and local communities which depend on local biodiversity for their livelihoods and welfare, we have funded an independent assessment of the implementation issues. This has been published and is being placed in the Library of the House.

Articles 8, 15 and 16 of the CBD refer to the rights of indigenous people, access to genetic material and transfer of technology respectively. Article 27 of the TRIPS agreement deals with the application of intellectual property rights to plant and animal material. Regarding compatibility with Article 8 of the CBD on the rights of indigenous people, patents can protect only new technical contributions. Rights cannot be obtained which cover existing knowledge. Regarding Article 15 of the CBD on access to genetic material, it is for individual contracting States to the CBD to set the conditions for access and it is not a matter for TRIPS or intellectual property regimes. Regarding Article 16 of the CBD, both the CBD and the TRIPs agreement encourage the transfer of technology.

Genetically Modified Organisms

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what representations she has received from developing countries on their attitude towards genetic modification issues; what assessment she has made of them; and if she will make a statement. [75105]

Clare Short: I have received no direct representations on these issues. We will publish a paper later this month outlining our work on genetically modified organisms and how we propose to assist developing countries to strengthen their capacity to handle these important issues.

Iran (Aid)

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the provision of aid to Iran. [75350]

Clare Short: We do not have a programme of assistance for Iran. We do provide support to Iraqi and Afghan refugees in Iran, both bilaterally and through contributions to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Since April 1996, we have spent nearly £1.2 million bilaterally. We also provide emergency aid in response to natural disasters in the region.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Civil Aerospace Research

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what forms of Government support are available for civil aerospace research in *(a)* the United Kingdom, *(b)* France and *(c)* Germany; and what level of funding was provided by each in 1997–98. [74533]

Mr. Battle: In the UK, the Civil Aircraft Research and Technology Demonstration (CARAD) Programme supports long-term research in key aeronautics technologies by providing grants for industry and for funding work undertaken at the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency (DERA) or placed by DERA in industry and universities. In 1997–8, funding totalled £24.6 million. Additionally, in the three years ending 1997–98, £12 million was targeted through the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council's (EPSRC) industrially led Innovative Manufacture Initiative (IMI) Aerospace Programme. For further information about the EPSRC programme, I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Hancock) on 7 December 1998, *Official Report*, columns *67–68*.

For France, our best estimate of expenditure in 1997 (calendar year) on CARAD—equivalent support is about £50 million. For Germany, our best estimate for 1998 (calendar year) is about £90 million.

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many companies and academic establishments have received funds through the CARAD programme in *(a)* 1997–98 and *(b)* 1998–99; what areas of research have been sponsored by the programme; and what assessment he has made of the benefits of the programme. [74532]

Mr. Battle: In 1997–98, 47 companies and 22 universities received CARAD funds; similar numbers are expected to receive funds for the financial year 1998–99. Areas of research sponsored include aerodynamics, propulsion systems, materials and structures, aircraft systems and rotorcraft (which was subject to a moratorium on new support from February 1998). Copies of the CARAD Annual Report for 1997–98 have been placed in the Library of the House.

The research programmes supported by CARAD over the years have made a significant contribution to the technological competitiveness of our industry, including wider benefits outside aeronautics.

Fire-retardant Chemicals

Mr. Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry which fire retardant chemicals are authorised for use in consumer goods in the United Kingdom. [74956]

Dr. Howells: There is not an authorised list of flame-retardant chemicals used in consumer goods. The use of chemicals is governed by "The Chemical (Hazard Information and Packaging for Supply) Regulations 1994", as amended, and "The Dangerous Substances and Preparations (Safety) (Consolidation) Regulations 1994", as amended.

A recent report by the University of Surrey for the Department of Trade and Industry on "Risks and Benefits in the Use of Flame Retardants in Consumer Products" gives an indication of the types and quantity of flame-retardant chemicals used in consumer products. A copy of this report is available in the Library.

Researchers

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to his answer of 21 January 1999, *Official Report*, column *547*, on researchers, if he will make a statement on the outcome of the meeting of the new RCI steering group. [72896]

Mr. Battle: The new group has its first meeting on Thursday 18 March. I understand that the Minister for Science would be pleased to consider making a response to the meeting's outcome.

Fireworks

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to his answer of 22 February 1999, *Official Report*, column *89*, when he expects to place the final firework safety figure for 1998 in the Library. [75183]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 5 March 1999]:* A summary report of the 1998 injuries is being sent to the printer and copies will be placed in the Library of the House as soon as they are available. I will inform the House when this has been done. The full report, complete with analytical tables, should be available in mid-April and copies will be placed in the Library.

Internal Market Council

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what was the outcome of the Internal Market Council held in Brussels on 25 February; and if he will make a statement. [74198]

Mr. Wilson: My noble Friend the Minister for Trade and Competitiveness in Europe represented the UK at the Internal Market Council in Brussels on 25 February.

The Commission introduced an open debate on the follow-up to the Single Market Action Plan since this expired at the end of 1998. There was general support for a follow-up which maintains political commitment by setting targets and deadlines for improving the operation of the Single Market, taking into account the needs of business and consumers. In an open debate on simplification, there was agreement that SLIM (Simpler Legislation in the Internal Market) was an important initiative, but more effort was required to deliver concrete results. The Council welcomed the Business Test Panel initiative, which is intended to improve consultation with business on the likely impact of selected legislative proposals.

The Council agreed Conclusions on the economic reform process agreed at the Cardiff Council under the UK Presidency. These identify priority areas for further development of the Single Market and are also designed to assist ECOFIN in their consideration of Broad Economic Policy Guidelines. The Commission presented a study carried out by the National Economic Research Associates on parallel imports; a debate on this will take place at the June IMC.

The Commission presented reports on: Community patents; a Green Paper on counterfeiting and piracy; and two directives on Third Country Nationals; and gave a progress report on Community design.

Over lunch, Ministers discussed the environment and the Single Market, and the Artists' Resale Right Directive. The Presidency concluded that in view of the remaining difficulties some member states had with the proposed Directive on Artists' Resale Rights, COREPER should examine this further with the aim of reaching early agreement.

Ente Poste Italiane

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations he has made, pursuant to European Communities State Aid Examination 1999/C 28/05, on Ente Poste Italiane; and if he will make a statement. [75083]

Mr. Wilson: My right hon. Friend has made no representations on this case. The Government intervene in cases only where substantive legal or policy issues are raised. The Commission has exclusive competence to take decisions on state aid.

University Lecturers

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations he has received on the ability of British university lecturers to find employment at French universities; and if he will make a statement. [74403]

Mr. Wilson: My Department has received no representations on this subject.

Teachers

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations he has received on the ability of British teachers to find teaching positions in German schools; and if he will make a statement. [74398]

Mr. Wilson: Since 1 May 1997, my Department has received written representations from 10 teachers concerning difficulties involved in obtaining recognition in Germany of their UK Qualified Teacher Status.

My officials have, where appropriate, taken up individual complaints with the German authorities and the European Commission, with a view to ensuring that Germany complies fully with its Single Market obligations in this respect. My officials also provide more general continuing advice, assistance and support to British-trained teachers in their dealings with the German authorities.

Secondhand Goods (Sales)

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what *(a)* United Kingdom and *(b)* European legislation regulates the sale of secondhand goods; and if he will make a statement. [75010]

Dr. Howells: Consumers have the same rights in UK law when they buy secondhand goods as when they buy new ones. The Sale of Goods Act 1979 requires goods sold by traders to be of satisfactory quality. The test of quality is what a reasonable person would find satisfactory, taking into account the price, how the goods are described and other relevant factors such as age. If, taking account of these considerations, a buyer finds the goods are not of satisfactory quality when he initially examines or tries them out, he can reject them and seek a refund. If a fault, of which the buyer could not reasonably be unaware when he bought the goods, manifests itself after he has accepted the goods he is entitled to claim compensation (such as the cost of repair or money back). The buyer can claim compensation for up to six years after purchase in England, Wales and Northern Ireland and up to five years after the goods have caused loss in Scotland.

Traders selling new or second hand goods must also comply with general consumer protection legislation, such as the Trade Descriptions Act 1968.

The proposed EC Directive on the Sale of Consumer Goods, expected to be adopted later this year for implementation by 1 January 2002, applies to both second hand and new goods. If goods sold are not in conformity with the contract, the Directive will give consumers the remedies of repair or replacement whichever is more economical, in relation to defects, present when the goods were bought, for up to two years afterwards. The Directive gives additional remedies of price reduction or rescission of the contract when repair or replacement of faulty goods is not possible.

In addition to Sale of Goods legislation, there is a considerable body of Community and domestic legislation setting out safety requirements for specific kinds of goods, including second hand goods.

Unsolicited Faxes

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he plans to introduce legislation to prohibit the sending of unsolicited faxes. [75074]

Mr. Wills: I refer the hon. Member to my answer to the hon. Member for Colchester (Mr. Russell) of 27 January 1999, *Official Report*, column *284*.

Plutonium Shipments (Japan)

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to his answer of 22 February 1999, *Official Report*, column 97, on plutonium shipments to Japan, when he expects the contracts for MOX shipments by BNFL to be signed; and what role his Department will play in the negotiations. [74972]

Mr. Battle: The timing and terms of contracts for the shipment of nuclear materials are linked to the operational and commercial requirements of customers and are matters for the companies concerned to agree. These are not matters in which the Government is directly involved.

Ethical Trading Initiative

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) if he will make a statement on the actions his Department is taking to promote the Ethical Trading Initiative among UK companies; [75236]

(2) what action his Department is taking to promote the establishment of internal systems in UK companies for the implementation and external verification of ethical practices. [75235]

Mr. Wilson: My Department has made it clear that, along with other interested departments, we fully support the aims of the Ethical Trading Initiative—as one of the important initiatives being taken currently by the voluntary sector—to promote a culture of social responsibility among British companies. We have enjoyed regular contacts, at both official and ministerial level, with the ETI and applaud their efforts to develop and promote corporate codes of conduct relating to companies' dealings with their overseas suppliers, and have given them all the support they have called for.

Oil Exploration (St. Kilda)

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions his Department has had with the Scottish Office regarding the impact of oil exploration near St Kilda. [73929]

Mr. Battle: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him on 2 March 1999, *Official Report*, columns *693–95*.

Genetic Resources Patenting

Joan Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what consultations he had with MAFF, the Department of Health and the Department for International Development on the formulation of Government policy on patenting genetic resources for food and agriculture. [74473]

Mr. Battle: The patenting of genetic resources for food and agriculture, as with all areas of technology, is governed by the Patents Act 1977. In July 1998, an EC Directive on the Legal Protection of Biotechnological Inventions was adopted with the aim of clarifying and harmonising the patent legislation of all Member States for such inventions. During the negotiations on this Directive my Department consulted closely with other Departments including MAFF, the Department of Health and the Department for International Development. These links have been maintained since the adoption of the Directive.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Zimbabwe

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what official visits he, his ministers or officials have paid to Zimbabwe since May 1997; whom they met; and what was discussed. [73556]

Mr. Straw: No Ministerial visits have been paid to Zimbabwe over this period.

One official visited Zimbabwe in August 1998 to assess a penal report project which the Department for International Development (DFID) had funded. He met senior Government legal officers and staff from non-governmental organisations.

One official visited Harare in September 1997 and September and November 1998 to undertake carriers' liability training and made liaison visits to British Airways and Air Zimbabwe. Two Immigration Service officials paid similar visits to Air Zimbabwe in February 1999.

One official provided consultancy services to the Zimbabwe police in October 1998 in relation to record keeping.

One official is currently on a DFID-funded secondment to the Zimbabwe Police Department to review and advise on the collection of crime statistics in Zimbabwe.

In addition, two police officers, from Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary, were attached to the Zimbabwe fraud and anti-corruption unit from 18 April 1997 for 18 days.

Asylum and Immigration White Paper

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish a summary and analysis of the responses to the 1997 White Paper on asylum and immigration. [73890]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The White Paper published in July 1998 set out the Government's policy proposals and did not seek views on specific issues. In those circumstances, we took the view that the best approach was to publish a list of respondents and their full comments rather than attempt an extensive summary and analysis of the responses. A list of respondents, together with copies of their comments, was placed in the Libraries on 17 December.

Elections (Sundays)

Mr. Linton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will introduce measures to allow *(a)* elections to be held on Sundays and *(b)* the European election to be held on Sunday 13 June. [74685]

Mr. George Howarth: We have no plans at present to introduce polling at the weekend for Parliamentary or European Parliamentary elections. We are, however, considering the possibility of pilot studies of this and other alternative electoral procedures at local elections.

Fire Engines (Accidents)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people have been *(a)* injured or *(b)* killed in each year since 1990 as a result of an accident involving a fire engine answering a 999 call. [74631]

Mr. George Howarth: This information is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Au Pairs

Mr. St. Aubyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many au pairs were registered with the police under the terms of the au pair scheme in *(a)* May 1997, *(b)* July 1998 and *(c)* the latest month for which figures are available. [74488]

Mr. Mike O'Brien *[holding answer 5 March 1999]:* Statistical information about the number of "au pairs" who registered with the police because of the imposition of such a requirement by an immigration officer on entry is not available. However, the table showing the number of "au pairs" given leave to enter the United Kingdom in the specified months gives a strong indication of the number who might have been expected to have a registration requirement imposed.

As a result of the changes to the scope of the Police Registration Scheme which came into effect on 11 May 1998, only those foreign nationals from the countries or territories listed in Appendix 2 of the Statement of Changes in Immigration Rules will normally be required to register with the police from that date. This means that it is only "au pairs" from Turkey who will normally have been required to register with the police since then.

Passengers given leave to enter the United Kingdom as au pairs, during given months and by given nationality, 1997 and 1998 [6]

Nationality	*May 1997*	*July 1998*	*November 1998*
Cyprus	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—
Czechoslovak passport holders[1]	10	[3]—	[3]—
Czech Republic[2]	230	610	360
Slovakia	190	680	190
Hungary	90	190	110
Malta	[5]—	[5]—	[5]—
Switzerland	10	20	10
Turkey	80	100	120
Bosnia	[3]—	[4]—	[5]—
Croatia	10	20	40
Macedonia	10	30	20
Slovenia	10	10	10
Faroe Islands	[5]—	[4]—	[5]—
Total	650	1,680	870

[1] Persons still travelling on a passport issued by the former government

[2] 1998 data include holders of Czechoslovakian passports

[3] Not available

[4] Negligible (i.e. five or fewer)

[5] Nil

[6] 1998 data are provisional

Note:

The figures in this table have been rounded to three significant digits, or to the nearest 10 if fewer than 1000; because of this the sum of the constituent items may not agree with the total as shown.

Mr. St. Aubyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will estimate the costs saved since August 1998, following the relaxation of the rules requiring au pairs to register with the police after being in the United Kingdom for six months. [74489]

Mr. Mike O'Brien *[holding answer 5 March 1999]:* The Police Registration Scheme is administered by the police on a cost recovery basis, with the current fee standing at £34. Until the scope of the Police Registration Scheme was amended on 11 May 1998 "au pairs" given leave to enter the United Kingdom for a period of over six months were required, as a condition of that leave, to register with the police within seven days of arrival. Since that date only foreign nationals from the countries or territories listed in Appendix 2 to the Statement of Changes in Immigration Rules should normally be required to register. The changes to the scope of the registration scheme in respect of "au pairs" have not resulted in any cost saving to the police or central Home Office.

Juvenile Secure Accommodation

Mr. Leslie: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how the Government plan to take forward their programme of reform of juvenile secure accommodation; and if he will make a statement. [75814]

Mr. Straw: The Government set out their programme of reform of the current arrangements for the provision of juvenile secure accommodation on 29 July 1998, *Official Report*, columns *255–56*. The Crime and Disorder Act 1998 provided the courts with more appropriate remand and sentencing powers to deal with the most serious and persistent young offenders, as well as giving the police and the courts new powers to deal with other young offenders more effectively in the community. To complement these provisions, the Government are seeking to establish a range of secure accommodation appropriate to the age and maturity of young people and with regimes which address offending behaviour, and to develop intervention programmes which will support the new multi-agency youth offending teams under the 1998 Act in working with young offenders in the community.

Since July 1998, the Government have set up an 18-month pilot project in ten areas to pave the way for introducing youth offending teams across England and Wales in April 2000 and the final warning scheme and new court orders in 2000–2001. The Youth Justice Board for England and Wales was established in September and is responsible for administering a development fund of £85 million over three years from April 1999, which is being used to develop bail support initiatives and other community-based intervention programmes to support the final warning scheme and new court orders.

The Government have also taken forward the necessary arrangements for implementing on 1 June 1999 the provisions in the 1998 Act for court-ordered remands to local authority secure accommodation of 12, 13 and 14-year-old boys and girls, 15 and 16-year-old girls and, where a place has been identified in advance, vulnerable 15 and 16-year-old boys. This will ensure that the courts have the powers they need in dealing with those young people the seriousness of whose alleged offending means that they cannot be dealt with safely in the community.

The Prison Service is finalising its plans for a distinct estate within its accommodation for 15 to 17-year-old boys remanded or sentenced to custody, with improved levels of care and regimes delivered within it. The Prison Service has also reviewed its arrangements for accommodating 15 to 17-year-old girls.

The Youth Justice Board has provided initial advice on a range of youth custody issues and a copy of this has been placed in the Library. It will help to inform the Government's longer-term thinking about the provision of juvenile secure accommodation. The Board is now preparing more detailed advice on regime standards which, together with work being undertaken by the Prison Service, will help in preparing for the detention and training order under the 1998 Act.

A key element in improved regimes and in the operation of the detention and training order will be better links between custodial facilities, where the first half of the sentence will be served, and the community, where the second half will be served. The new youth offending teams will have a vital role in managing these links—a member of the team will be expected to be involved in sentence planning and throughcare whilst the young offender is in custody and then supervise them when they return to the community. Given this connection, the Government have decided to accept the recommendation in the Youth Justice Board's advice that the detention and training order should be implemented at the same time as the local structure of youth offending teams, that is April 2000. Ahead of this, the Prison Service will put in place arrangements for the distinct estate for boys in its accommodation and for improved regimes.

The Government have concluded that establishing distinct units for the very small number of 15 to 17-year-old girls held in Prison Service accommodation is not the best way forward, or in their best interests. The introduction of the detention and training order will allow for greater flexibility in the placement of sentenced young people. It is our intention to make use of this flexibility by placing sentenced 15 and 16-year-old girls in available non-Prison Service accommodation, when the detention and training order is in force. The first priority will be to place the youngest and most vulnerable young women outside the Prison Service. In the short term, arrangements within the Prison Service for holding 17-year-old women, and other young women for whom other accommodation is not available, will be improved by establishing discrete units for young women under the age of 21, with enhanced regimes within these.

The Government are also taking forward detailed work on the proposed extension of the role of the Youth Justice Board to act as the commissioning and purchasing body for all forms of secure accommodation for children and young people on remand and under sentence. This should help to achieve the appropriate volume, type and spread of accommodation in the longer term, so that individual needs can be met more effectively.

Life Prisoners

Mr. Allan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many offenders sentenced to life imprisonment have been granted an oral hearing before the parole board in the last five years. [75351]

Mr. George Howarth: The readily available information, which relates to the number of oral hearings held by the Parole Board, is published in the Board's annual reports. The most recent report, for 1997–98, records the number of such hearings as:

Year	*Number*
1993	265
1994	121
1995–96	216
1996–97	126
1997–98	278

These figures include some second and subsequent hearings for life sentenced prisoners who were not released following their first hearing.

HMP Lewes

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* phone calls and *(b)* letters have been received at Her Majesty's Prison Lewes since 1 May 1997 from local residents complaining of noise nuisance. [75097]

Mr. George Howarth: Since 1 May 1997, Lewes prison has received 16 letters from local residents about noise disturbance. A telephone log only began on 23 October 1997. Since then, Lewes has received 18 calls from local residents about noise disturbance.

Various measures have been taken to eliminate this problem, including the fitting of corrective brackets to cell windows. This work was undertaken on the advice of the Environmental Health Department and was completed in October 1998. Since this time no further written complaints have been received. Only one telephone complaint was received by the prison in the last month.

Immigration

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the status of the Immigration Services Commissioner, indicating the regulatory powers which apply to him. [74752]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The status and regulatory powers of the Immigration Services Commissioner are set out in Part V of, and Schedules 5 and 6 to, the Immigration and Asylum Bill.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the fast-track immigration appeals system for weddings and funerals; and what plans he has to prevent abuse. [74754]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The Immigration and Asylum Bill contains provisions which will allow applicants who are refused entry clearance to visit a family member in the United Kingdom to appeal against the decision.

Applicants will have to pay a fee to appeal. The fee will depend on whether an applicant opts for a hearing on the papers or a full oral hearing. Applicants whose appeals are allowed will have their fee refunded.

In order to prevent abuse, the Bill also contains provisions to enable the Secretary of State to accept a security with a view to securing that an applicant will, if given permission to enter the United Kingdom for a limited period, leave at the end of the period.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department at what level the bond for those on family visits will be set. [74756]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: We have not yet decided at what level bonds will be set. This will be one of the issues addressed in a consultation on a pilot bond scheme, which we shall issue later this year.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the provision of legal representation for those appealing against immigration detention. [74758]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Detainees who are challenging the legality of their detention by way of a writ of habeas corpus (judicial review in Scotland) are entitled to legal aid.

Detainees may apply to the independent Immigration Appellate Authority for bail and can receive free representation from either the Immigration Advisory Service or Refugee Legal Centre under the grant in aid payments allowed for under section 23 of the Immigration Act 1971.

A detainee who prefers to be represented at a bail or appeal hearing by a solicitor or other representative must fund the application themselves.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what rights of appeal defendants will have against decisions by immigration office officials. [74753]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The Government's proposals for a new system of appeals in immigration and asylum cases are set out in Part IV of the Immigration and Asylum Bill.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has for judicial scrutiny of the Immigration Services Commissioner. [74757]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Any person aggrieved by a relevant decision of the Commissioner may appeal to the Immigration Services Tribunal against the decision. A determination of the Immigration Services Tribunal will be subject to judicial review.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans the Government have to pilot the payments in kind benefit system for asylum seekers; and what minimum standards will apply. [74755]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: No decisions have yet been taken on which aspects of the new support arrangements for asylum seekers it might be possible to pilot. However, we will be monitoring closely the non-statutory interim arrangements for dispersing asylum seekers which are being set up by the local government associations. There will be a statutory requirement that accommodation provided must be adequate for the needs of the asylum seeker and his dependants, if any, and that essential living needs should be met.

Visas (Supply Teachers)

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to the answer of 1 March 1999, *Official Report*, columns *598–99*, on visas for supply teachers, what are the terms and conditions of the concession; when it was introduced; and for what reasons. [75292]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Young Commonwealth citizens, between the ages of 17 and 27 inclusive, may be admitted to the United Kingdom for an extended holiday of up to two years. Although working holidaymakers would normally be precluded from continuing their careers in the United Kingdom those in the teaching profession may do so provided such work is incidental to their holiday and the remainder of the Immigration Rules are met. This means that they cannot take full-time work for more than half of their stay here. For the purposes of the working holidaymaker scheme full-time work is more than 25 hours a week.

I am making further inquiries about the other information requested and I will write to the hon. Member.

Stephen Lawrence Inquiry Report

Sir Norman Fowler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what checks his Department made prior to the publication of the now withdrawn appendices of the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry report to ensure that no member of the public was put in danger by the information provided; and if he will make a statement. [75283]

Mr. Straw: I refer the right hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill) on 3 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *760*.

Sir Norman Fowler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish the report into unauthorised publication of extracts from the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry report ordered by his Permanent Secretary; and if he will make a statement. [75284]

Mr. Straw: No. It is not the practice to publish leak inquiry reports. I have undertaken to inform the House of the outcome of the investigation when they are known.

Sir Brian Mawhinney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 1 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *567*, on the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry, for what reasons it would not be in the interests of the investigation into the leak of parts of the Macpherson report to provide the information requested by the right hon. Member for North-West Cambridgeshire. [75409]

Mr. Straw: The details sought by the right hon. Member need to be established, along with other matters, by the independent investigator. It would not be appropriate for me to pre-empt that work.

Remand Prisoners

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners are currently on remand; and what has been the *(a)* average, *(b)* median and *(c)* maximum period for which prisoners have been held on remand in each of the last three years. [75412]

Mr. George Howarth: Provisional information for 26 February shows that there were 12,627 persons held on remand in prisons in England and Wales. Information on the estimated average number of days in custody for untried and convicted unsentenced prisoners over the last three years is given in table 1. This information is also published in "Prison statistics England and Wales" (table 2.2 of the 1997 edition, Cm 4017), a copy of which is in the Library. Information on the estimated median time in custody is given in table 2. No information is collected centrally regarding the maximum time held on remand.

Table 1: Estimated average time spent in custody for untried and convicted unsentenced persons in prisons in England and Wales, 1996–1998

	Estimated average number of days in custody [1]	
Year	*Males*	*Females*
Untried [2]		
1996	53	41
1997	51	36
1998[4]	47	34
Convicted unsentenced [3]		
1996	34	31
1997	37	30
1998[4]	38	30

[1] Estimated from number of receptions and average population
[2] Time spent in Prison Service establishments before conviction
[3] Time spent in Prison Service establishments after conviction
[4] Provisional figures

Table 2: Estimated median for time spent on remand on 30 June 1996–1998

Type of custody/year	*Estimated median time*
All untried	
30 June 1996	1 month 28 days
30 June 1997	1 month 26 days
30 June 1998[1]	1 month 29 days
All convicted unsentenced	
30 June 1996	2 months 12 days
30 June 1997	2 months 7 days
30 June 1998[1]	2 months 3 days

[1] Provisional figures

European Elections

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what arrangements he is making to scrutinise the counting of votes at the forthcoming European elections; how he intends to ensure that the votes across the country are verified and correlated; who will be in national charge of the election; and if he will make a statement. [75012]

Mr. George Howarth: My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary hopes to be able to lay regulations to govern the conduct of European Parliamentary elections before the House very shortly.

Our intention is that votes should be verified on a Parliamentary constituency basis as soon as practicable after the polls close on Thursday 10 June.

Counting of the votes, however, may not begin until the polls have closed in the last European Union member state on the evening of Sunday 13 June.

Counting will be conducted at Parliamentary constituency level though where the same person is the acting returning officer for two or more Parliamentary constituencies he or she will be able to combine them for polling and counting purposes. Local results will be communicated to the regional returning officers who will perform the seat allocation calculations for each of the 11 electoral regions.

It is a long established tradition that local returning officers have responsibility for the conduct of the election in their areas and we do not propose to change that.

DEFENCE

HMS Cromer

Mr. Brazier: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what studies were carried out which led to the decision to dispose of HMS 'Cromer'. [71663]

Mr. Doug Henderson *[holding answer 22 February 1999]:* As we announced in the Strategic Defence Review, the modernisation of the mine countermeasures force will continue but the increase in the number of vessels should be limited to 22 rather than 25 as previously planned. This will be achieved by paying off three of the older or least capable ships. No decisions have yet been taken as to which vessels will be paid off, although HMS Cromer is a candidate.

Mr. Brazier: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list *(a)* the cost of construction of HMS 'Cromer', *(b)* the cost of the cancelled refit of HMS 'Cromer' and *(c)* the cost of the short refit planned for HMS 'Cromer' for February to July. [71676]

Mr. Doug Henderson *[holding answer 22 February 1999]:* The information requested is as follows:

(a) The total cost of construction of HMS Cromer was £23.8 million plus an estimated £12 to £13 million for Government Furnished Equipment.

(b) I cannot say what the cost of HMS Cromer's cancelled refit might have been, as this would have been dependent on the outcome of contract negotiations, the cost of materials and any additional work which might have emerged during the refit. However, the broad order costs for refits of vessels of the same class have been around £5 million.

(c) The planned cost of HMS Cromer's reduced refit is about £2.5 million, but this does not include the costs of any unforeseen work.

Aircraft (In-service Dates)

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his Department's definition of in-service date for *(a)* Eurofighter, *(b)* Merlin helicopters and *(c)* C130 aircraft. [72646]

Mr. Spellar: The information requested is as follows:

Eurofighter—delivery of first aircraft.

Merlin HM Mk 1—delivery of twelfth aircraft.

Merlin HC Mk 3—delivery of sixth aircraft.

Hercules C130J—delivery of twelfth aircraft.

Belize (Jungle Training)

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the benefits of the jungle training exercises in Belize carried out between 1 April 1997 and 31 March 1998. [72783]

Mr. Doug Henderson: This exercise, involving a Commando Group of Royal Marines, was intended to maintain and develop their capability to conduct operations in a jungle environment, and is assessed to have succeeded in its aim.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the jungle training exercises in Belize carried out between 1 April 1997 and 31 March 1998. [72784]

Mr. Doug Henderson: These exercises are assessed as having succeeded in their aim of developing the jungle warfare capability of the infantry units which participated in them.

Exercises (Canada)

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what assessment he has made of the benefits of the six armoured battlegroup exercises in Canada carried out between 1 April 1997 and 31 March 1998; [72779]

(2) how many personnel were deployed on the six armoured battlegroup exercises in Canada carried out between 1 April 1997 and 31 March 1998. [72780]

Mr. Doug Henderson: Due to the deployment to Bosnia of a unit scheduled to take part in the armoured battlegroup exercises in Canada, only five armoured battlegroup exercises, involving 6,005 personnel, were carried out between 1 April 1997 and 31 March 1998. These exercises were designed to train the participating units to a level where they can be deployed operationally through participating in high intensity operations using live firing and our assessment is that this objective was achieved.

Infantry Exercise (Botswana)

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) which countries had armed forces involved in the infantry exercise in Botswana carried out between 1 April 1997 and 31 March 1998; [72787]

(2) what assessment he has made of the infantry exercise in Botswana carried out between 1 April 1997 and 31 March 1998; [72785]

(3) what assessment he has made of the benefits of the infantry exercise in Botswana carried out between 1 April 1997 and 31 March 1998. [72786]

Mr. Doug Henderson: Exercise DIAMOND CUTTER, which took place in Botswana from 4 February to 20 March 1998, involved B Company 2 PARA and a Company of the Botswana Defence Force. This exercise was designed to enable these personnel to gain extensive and realistic training experience by practising their skills and conducting advanced arms training in a demanding environment, over extended lines of communication, and our assessment is that these objectives were achieved.

Airborne Exercise (Ukraine)

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many personnel were deployed on the airborne exercise in Ukraine carried out between 1 April 1997 and 31 March 1998. [72924]

Mr. Doug Henderson: The airborne exercise COSSACK STEPPE, involving troops from the UK, Poland and Ukraine, took place in Ukraine in September 1997. The UK contribution was a company (approximately 130 personnel) from the 2nd Battalion, the Parachute Regiment.

Exercises (USA)

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he had made of the principle benefits of the two infantry exercises in the USA carried out between 1 April 1997 and 31 March 1998. [72926]

Mr. Doug Henderson: These exercises were designed to enable the units involved to gain extensive and realistic training experience by practising their skills and conducting advanced arms training in a demanding environment, and our assessment is that these objectives were achieved.

Defence Analytical Services Agency

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many people are currently employed by the Defence Analytical Services Agency; and what was the figure at its inception. [72819]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 25 February 1999]:* This is a matter for the Chief Executive of the Defence Analytical Services Agency. I have asked the Chief Executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Paul Altobell to Mr. Mike Hancock, dated 8 March 1999:

I am replying to your question to the Secretary of State on the number of people employed by the Defence Analytical Services Agency. As Chief Executive this falls within my area of responsibility.

The Defence Analytical Services Agency employed 148 permanent staff, (142 full time equivalents), plus 4 students on 1 April 1992. The Agency was launched on 1 July 1992. Precise figures are not available for that date but were not materially different from the 1 April position. On 1 January 1999 the Agency employed 112 permanent staff, (109 full time equivalents), plus 13 students.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Female Pilots

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many female pilots are currently serving in the *(a)* RAF and *(b)* Royal Navy; and how many are in training. [73789]

Mr. Doug Henderson: As at 1 January 1999, there were 25 trained female pilots serving in the RAF, with 21 under training. In the Naval Service, at the same date, there was one trained female pilot, with two under training.

Mr. Tony Geraghty

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the charges against Mr. Tony Geraghty. [74313]

Mr. Doug Henderson: There are at present no charges outstanding against Mr. Tony Geraghty.

Missiles

Mr. Page: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much his Department has spent on missiles procured from the USA in the last 10 years, expressed in dollars. [74013]

Mr. Spellar: Expenditure at outturn prices on the procurement of missiles from the USA for the period 1 April 1988 to 31 March 1998 is as follows:

	$ million
Advanced Medium Range Air to Air Missile	98.0
Harpoon	70.7
Sidewinder	30.3
Tomahawk	24.8
Trident	866.1

CR Gas

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what guidelines his Department has drawn up for the use of CR gas. [74255]

Mr. Doug Henderson: The use of CR gas by the Armed Forces is governed by prescribed rules of engagement, and the service personnel concerned are fully trained in how to use it. Both the rules of engagement and the training are operationally sensitive and I am withholding details in accordance with Exemption 1 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Mark II Vehicles

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will make a statement on the *(a)* mechanical problems with and *(b)* alterations made to truck cargo heavy duty mark II vehicles since 9 March 1998; [74254]

(2) how many unscheduled stops there have been involving truck cargo heavy duty mark II vehicles since 9 March 1998; and if he will list the *(a)* dates, *(b)* location, *(c)* length of delay and *(d)* circumstances of each stop. [74253]

Mr. Spellar: Since 9 March 1998, there have been 8 minor mechanical defects with Truck Cargo Heavy Duty, TCHD, Mk 2 vehicles, details of these are as follows:

TCHD MK2—Unscheduled stops since 9 March 1998

	25 March 1998	*27 March 1998*
Location	A428 west of Cambridge	M25 Jn 15 adjacent to M4/M25 interchange
Length of delay	5 minutes	5 minutes
Circumstances	ABS shows fault—System reset	ABS shows fault—System reset

No alterations or modifications have been made to these vehicles during this period. There have been 2 occasions on which the vehicles were obliged to make unscheduled stops to deal with technical problems. The circumstances are as follows:

TCHD MK2 mechanical problems since 9 March 1998

Mechanical Problems

Spurious ABS electrical faults requiring system resets.

Drivers door catch broken. New door catch fitted.

Radiator coolant leak. Hose clip tightened.

Punctures to road wheels. Road wheel changed.

Headlamp inoperative. Wiring connection re-made.

Air conditioning inoperative. Drive belts replaced.

Water leak into cab. Seal to roof hatch replaced.

Fuel leak. Fuel pipe union tightened.

NATO Exercise (South Africa)

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the benefits of the NATO joint exercise in South Africa carried out between 1 April 1997 and 31 March 1998. [72850]

Mr. Doug Henderson *[holding answer 2 March 1999]:* There were no NATO joint exercises in South Africa between 1 April 1997 and 31 March 1998.

Jungle Training (Singapore)

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what assessment he has made of the benefits of the jungle training exercise in Singapore carried out between 1 April 1997 and 31 March 1998; [72843]

(2) what his assessment is of the value of the jungle training exercise in Singapore carried out between 1 April 1997 and 31 March 1998. [72981]

Mr. Doug Henderson *[holding answer 2 March 1999]:* This exercise, involving a company of Royal Marines, was intended to maintain and develop their capability to conduct operations in a jungle environment, and is assessed to have succeeded in its aim.

Land Command

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the order of battle for Land Command *(a)* prior to and *(b)* following the Strategic Defence Review. [74057]

Mr. Doug Henderson *[holding answer 2 March 1999]:* The Order of Battle for Land Command before implementation of decisions taken in the Strategic

Defence Review, is two deployable divisions and six regional divisions. The deployable divisions are:

1st (United Kingdom) Armoured division based in Germany, consisting of three armoured brigades (4, 7 and 20)

3rd (United Kingdom) Division based in the UK, consisting of two mechanised brigades (1 and 19) and an airborne brigade (5).

The regional divisions are:

2 Division, consisting of 15 (North East) and 49 (East) brigades

4 Division, consisting of 2 (South East) and 145 (Home Counties) brigades and the deployable 24 Mobile Brigade

5 Division consisting of 42 (North West), 143 (West Midlands) and 160 (Wales) Brigades

Scottish district consisting of 51 (Highland) and 52 (Lowland) Brigades

London District

United Kingdom Support Command (Germany).

In addition to its deployable role, 3rd (United Kingdom) Division also commands 43 (Wessex) Brigade, a regional brigade. 107 (Ulster) Brigade is a stand alone regional brigade in Northern Ireland. There is also 2 (National Communications) Signal Brigade and nine deployable brigade sized formations:

1 Reconnaissance Brigade

Combat Service Support Group (United Kingdom)

Combat Service Support Group (Germany)

1 Artillery Brigade

7 Air Defence Brigade

12 (Air Support) Engineer Brigade

29 (Corps Support) Engineer Brigade

1 Signal Brigade

11 Signal Brigade.

In addition, there will be six overseas detachments:

British Army Training Unit Suffield and British Army Training Support Unit Wainwright in Canada

British Army Training Support Unit Belize

British Army Training and Liaison Staff Kenya in Nairobi

British Gurkhas Nepal

Brunei Garrison.

Following the Strategic Defence Review, the Order of Battle for Land Command will be two deployable divisions and four regional divisions, including three larger regional divisions in the UK. The deployable divisions will be:

1st (United Kingdom) Armoured division based in Germany, consisting of three armoured brigades (4, 7 and 20)

3rd (United Kingdom) Mechanised Division based in the UK, to consist of three mechanised brigades (1, 12 and 19).

The regional divisions will be:

2 Division, consisting of 15 (North East), 42 (North West), 51 (Highland) and 52 (Lowland) Brigades

4 Division, consisting of London District and 2 (South East), 49 (East) and 145 (Home Counties) Brigades

5 Division consisting of 43 (Wessex), 145 (West Midlands) and 107 (Ulster) and 160 (Wales) Brigades

United Kingdom Support Command (Germany).

There will also be two (National Communications) Signal Brigade and nine deployable Brigade-sized formations. One Reconnaissance Brigade unit will be embedded with the brigades of 3rd (United Kingdom) Division. The nine deployable Brigade-size formations will therefore be:

16 Air Assault Brigade

Combat Service Support Group (United Kingdom)

Combat Service Support Group (Germany)

1 Artillery Brigade

7 Air Defence Brigade

12 (Air Support) Engineer Brigade

29 (Corps Support) Engineer Brigade

1 Signal Brigade

11 Signal Brigade.

In addition, there will be six overseas detachments:

British Army Training Unit Suffield and British Army Training Support Unit Wainwright in Canada

British Army Training Support Unit Belize

British Army Training and Liaison Staff Kenya in Nairobi

British Gurkhas Nepal

Brunei Garrison.

Submarines (Health)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the health effects of service on a submarine. [74950]

Mr. Spellar: The Royal Navy has a comprehensive strategy to monitor for the health effects of submarine service. It is based on a programme of selective and rigorous medical screening and regular occupational health surveillance of individual submariners including monitoring for radiation exposure. This is backed up by epidemiological studies performed by independent authorities and a comprehensive system of scientific evaluation conducted in collaboration with other nations operating submarines.

As my hon. Friend the Minister for the Armed Forces announced in his written answer on 24 February 1999, *Official Report*, columns *300–01*, medical studies have shown that some contaminants, which are present in the atmosphere of a submarine, exceed the levels which are considered safe for the foetus of a pregnant women. These contaminants pose no risk to adults.

The results of an independent mortality study undertaken for the Royal Navy by the Medical Research Council and published in the Occupational and Environmental Medicine Journal in 1997 concluded that submariners are an occupational health group with an overall lower rate of mortality among workers than in the general population.

Departmental Land

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the current acreage of his Department's land holding; and what plans he has to reduce it. [74817]

Mr. Spellar: The total acreage of land that is held by the Ministry of Defence (both freehold and leasehold) stands at almost 593,000 acres (240,000 hectares). My Department recognises its responsibility to use and manage its estate effectively and our policy is to ensure that no more land is used than is needed to meet operational requirements.

There are currently some 32,000 acres (13,000 hectares) of surplus property scheduled for disposal, while the Strategic Defence Review set an ambitious target of £700 million in disposal receipts over four years. The Review also concluded that there should be more effective central strategic management of the estate. The Defence Estate Organisation and others are striving to ensure that the necessary processes are put in place to achieve this and we fully anticipate that further estate rationalisation will occur as a result.

Veterans' Advice Unit

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the current budget of, and how many civil servants and military personnel are employed in, the Veterans' Advice Unit. [74659]

Mr. Doug Henderson *[holding answer 4 March 1999]:* The Ministry of Defence Veterans' Advice Unit is currently staffed by three serving Warrant Officers (1 Royal Navy, 1 Army and 1 Royal Air Force).

The budget for the Veterans' Advice Unit covers the employment costs of the Warrant Officers, telecommunications and publicity material. The cost of the unit in the current financial year is estimated to be £89,000.

Chief of Defence Procurement

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the planned budget and total staff of the Chief of Defence Procurement after 1 April 2000. [74653]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 4 March 1999]:* Detailed budgetary allocations to individual budget holders in the Ministry of Defence are made only one year in advance. In broad terms, however, our plans for the Chief of Defence Procurement's area of responsibility for the financial year 2000–01 envisage expenditure in the order of £5.5 billion on equipment and some £600 million in operating costs at 1998–99 constant prices. Staff numbers for that year are expected to be around 5,000.

Unified Defence Logistics Organisation

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the key milestones and timetable for the implementation of the unified Defence Logistics Organisation. [74649]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 4 March 1999]:* The Chief of Defence Logistics will assume full budgetary and management responsibility for the Defence Logistics Organisation from 1 April 1999 and will create a unified organisation from 1 April 2000.

DERA

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to announce the extent and nature of the public/private partnership for DERA. [74640]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 4 March 1999]:* Initial advice from a team studying the options on the future of DERA is expected at the end of this month. Following a period of discussion and consultation, we would hope to make a decision and an announcement about the future of DERA later this year.

Defence Company Mergers

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the implications for his Department's tendering policy of proposed United Kingdom defence company mergers. [74644]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 4 March 1999]:* The implications for MOD procurement policies and practice of any merger activity within the United Kingdom defence sector is assessed by the MOD on a case by case basis and in accordance with the regulatory process.

Nuclear Weapons Tests

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the basis of the methodologies used by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* consultants contracted by his Department to assess the effects of radiation exposure from atmospheric nuclear weapons tests upon servicemen and medical auxiliaries; what assessment he has made of their sensitivity to the available data; and what representation he has received in respect of them. [74960]

Mr. Spellar: Radiation exposure of servicemen who participated in the UK's atmospheric nuclear tests was subject to pre-set standards which were directly based upon the contemporary guidance issued by the International Commission for Radiation Protection. There were two basic regimes. First, those who were known to be at risk were issued with personal dosimeters (film badges) and, if necessary, protective clothing. Secondly, and for the majority, the protective arrangement was to ensure that all personnel were accounted for and located at safe distances from the detonations. Additionally, there were programmes of general environmental monitoring covering the range and domestic areas including the muster locations. Of the 22,000 veterans included in the studies, some 5,000 were issued with film badges. Only 1,716 of these had non-zero recorded radiation doses; of these only 483 received total doses of more than 5 mSv and only 80 received more than 50 mSv. These figures and the results of the environmental monitoring are strong evidence that the majority of test veterans had no radiation exposure as a result of their participation.

The health of the test veteran population has been the subject of two epidemiological studies carried out by the National Radiological Protection Board (NRPB). The reports were published in 1988 and 1993. These studies made statistically based comparisons of the mortality and cancer experiences of the test veterans, regardless of the cause of the illness, with levels seen in both a matched control group and in the general population. The studies concluded that participation in the tests programme had not had a detectable effect on the participants' expectation of life or on their total risk of developing cancer.

Further and more detailed information about the methodologies used is given in the study reports copies of which are in the Library of the House. As regards representation, the British Nuclear Test Veterans Association (BNTVA) and their supporters have made clear their views on many occasions in recent years. However, the reports of these studies were peer reviewed,

published in the scientific press and have not attracted any serious scientific criticism. The statistical sensitivity of the results is fully addressed in the reports.

Army Act 1955

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many cases involving soldiers sentenced by non-military courts to terms of imprisonment have been disposed of under the provisions of section 70 of the Army Act 1955 for each year between 1988 and 1998 indicating *(a)* the court which dealt with the offence, *(b)* the nature of the offence, *(c)* the sentence and *(d)* whether the convicted person was discharged from the Army. [74428]

Mr. Doug Henderson *[holding answer 5 March 1999]:* No Army personnel have been convicted by civil courts under Section 70 of the Army Act 1955, as this provides for soldiers to be dealt with by military court-martial or summary dealing only. A number of soldiers have, however, been convicted and sentenced to terms of imprisonment by the civil courts but detailed information relating to such cases is not held centrally and could only be provided at a disproportionate cost. Section 134(1) of the Army Act prohibits a soldier from being tried by a court-martial or dealt summarily by his Commanding Officer for an offence, or substantially the same offence, of which he has been convicted in a civil court.

Territorial Army

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the number of *(a)* recruits enlisted into and *(b)* military personnel leaving the Territorial Army in each year since 1995–96. [74858]

Mr. Doug Henderson *[holding answer 5 March 1999]:* The information is not held in the form requested; however the number of personnel, soldiers and officers, entering and leaving the Territorial Army, including to and from Regular Army, in each year since 1995–96 is as follows:

Inflow and outflow of TA Officers

	Intake	*Outflow*
1995–96	554	682
1996–97	613	719
1997–98	779	739

Inflow and outflow of TA soldiers

	Inflow	*Outflow*
1995–96	12,520	14,973
1996–97	13,380	14,291
1997–98	11,015	11,709

Notes:
1. Figures exclude Non Regular Permanent Staff.
2. Soldier Officer Inflows and Soldier Outflows include soldiers who have been promoted to TA officers.

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what arrangements he has made to ensure that voluntary groups that use Territorial Army centres will not be adversely affected as a consequence of his TA review. [74862]

Mr. Doug Henderson *[holding answer 5 March 1999]:* At present, it is generally the case that voluntary groups rent space in TA centres on a commercial basis. We will ensure that voluntary groups, who make use of TA centres that are affected by the reforms, are given adequate notice to enable them to make alternative arrangements where necessary.

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what arrangements he has made for TA personnel who are studying for qualifications at TA centres which are closing to continue their studies. [74859]

Mr. Doug Henderson *[holding answer 5 March 1999]:* Where a unit or TA Centre is to close, we are making arrangements to transfer those TA personnel who are willing and able to an alternative unit where they may be able to continue their studies if required by the role of their new unit.

US Visiting Forces

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the UK bases which have needed clean-up operations after US visiting forces have vacated them, indicating the nature of the pollution, the costs, and who paid for these costs in each case. [75117]

Mr. Spellar: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the existing arrangements, agreements and memoranda of understanding between UK and US Governments in respect of the US visiting forces at Menwith Hill. [75114]

Mr. Doug Henderson: The presence of the US Visiting Forces at RAF Menwith Hill is governed by the NATO Status of Forces Agreement 1951 and other arrangements appropriate to the relationship which exists between the governments of the United Kingdom and the United States for the purposes of our common defence.

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will place in the Library a copy of the Cost Sharing Agreement 1973 between the UK and US Governments in respect of the US visiting forces. [75115]

Mr. Doug Henderson: No. The 1973 Cost Sharing Arrangement is a confidential arrangement between the UK and US Governments and is being withheld under Exemption 1 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the cost-sharing arrangements agreed between the US and UK Governments in respect of the US visiting forces. [75113]

Mr. Doug Henderson: The 1973 Cost Sharing Arrangement is the principal covering general costs sharing matters in relation to the presence of the United

States Visiting Forces in the UK. A number of other arrangements exist which may contain cost sharing provisions but a record of these is not held centrally.

Challenger 2

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to place an order for Challenger Tank 2 training rounds; what is the anticipated value of the contract; and if he will make a statement. [74759]

Mr. Spellar: An Invitation to Tender was issued in August 1998 for a new training round to replace the Discarding Sabot/Tracer round. As the order is currently the subject of a competition, its value is commercially confidential between the bidders and the Ministry of Defence. It is hoped to award a contract later in the year and I will make a statement at that time.

Army Trucks

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the Land Rover TUL/TUM (HS), the Wolf, was brought into service with the Army; and how many are now in use. [75294]

Mr. Spellar: The current Trucks Utility Light, TUL, and Trucks Utility Medium (High Specification), TUM(HS), the Land Rover Wolf, were brought into service with the Army in April 1997. A total of 6,352 vehicles have been issued to units to date, including 152 ambulance variants. There are 1,323 vehicles awaiting issue, including 623 ambulance variants, making a total of 7,675 vehicles.

Ministry of Defence Guard Service

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if members of the Ministry of Defence Guard Service carry arms. [74796]

Mr. Doug Henderson: No.

Military Road Traffic Accidents

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many road traffic accidents were reported involving the Land Rover TUL/TUM (HS), the WOLF, between April 1997 and March 1998; what were the (i) fatalities, (ii) serious injuries and (iii) slight injuries; and what were the estimated repair costs. [75007]

Mr. Spellar: 311 road traffic accidents were reported involving the Land Rover TUL/TUM/(HS) the WOLF, between April 1997 and March 1998. These accidents resulted in one fatality and 52 injuries of all types. The estimated repair cost is £294k.

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many military road traffic accidents resulted in *(a)* fatalities, *(b)* serious injuries and *(c)* slight injuries between April 1997 and March 1998. [75005]

Mr. Spellar: Between April 1997 and March 1998 there were a total of 9,075 road traffic accidents involving military personnel and MOD civilians. These resulted in 64 fatalities (17 on duty and 47 off duty), 63 serious injuries and 862 slight injuries.

WALES

Autism

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many autism specific places are provided in Wales within *(a)* residential provision, *(b)* mainstream services, *(c)* specialist autism spectrum disorder services, *(d)* pre school services and *(e)* higher education. [73749]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: The information on services for the disabled, which is collected centrally, does not include information on the number of autism-specific places provided by local and health authorities for residential provision, mainstream services and specialist autism spectrum disorder services.

For pre-school services and higher education, information on autism-specific places is not collected centrally. However, the latest information available (at January 1998) shows that 475 pupils attending schools in Wales had statements of special educational needs specifying autism spectrum disorders. A breakdown by category of school is given.

Type of school	*No. of pupils in Wales with statements specifying autism spectrum disorders*
Maintained Nursery Schools	2
Maintained Primary Schools	168
Maintained Secondary Schools	41
Maintained Special Schools	252
Independent Schools (including independent special schools)	12
Total	475

Following the transfer of functions, these issues will be a matter for the National Assembly.

Schools (Repair and Maintenance)

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his estimate of the amount of repair and maintenance work waiting to be done in Welsh schools; and if he will make a statement. [74902]

Mr. Hain *[holding answer 5 March 1999]:* The information requested is not held centrally.

I am fully aware of concerns expressed about the poor condition of many school buildings in Wales caused by under funding in previous years. We have moved quickly to assist local authorities by providing an additional £65 million over the lifetime of this Parliament for capital investment in schools; and we are maintaining, in cash terms, the normal capital allocations to local authorities for education for 1999–2000 at £43.939 million. Our plans provide nearly £200 million for capital expenditure in schools in Wales over the next three years.

Following the transfer of functions, this will become a matter for the National Assembly.

Social Services

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he intends to publish a White Paper on Social Services in Wales similar to Modernising Social Services (Cm 4169), published in England in November 1998. [74792]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: We hope to do so shortly.

Food Strategy for Wales

Mr. Gareth Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the progress of the three industry-led food working groups which he has established under the Food Strategy for Wales. [75712]

Mr. Michael: The three industry-led Working Groups, set up by my Department and supported by the Welsh Development Agency, have completed their Action Plans for the Lamb and Beef, Dairy and Organic Food Sectors, which we are publishing today, 8 March. I welcome this important contribution by the industry to helping farmers secure the future of their industry and to developing the Food Strategy for Wales. I am grateful to the Chairmen and members of the Groups for their work in preparing the Plans. I have placed copies of the three Action Plans and the Executive Summary in the Libraries of the House.

Following the transfer of functions, this issue will be a matter for the National Assembly.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Minimum Pension Guarantee

15. **Helen Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of the number of pensioners in the Warrington, North constituency who will benefit from the minimum pension guarantee. [73052]

Mr. Timms: We estimate around 5,000 pensioners will benefit from the minimum income guarantee in the Warrington local authority district, when it is introduced in April.

Housing Benefit

16. **Mr. Love:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to minimise fraud in the administration of housing benefit. [73053]

33. **Mr. Burns:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assessment he has made of the progress being made to combat housing benefit fraud. [73070]

Mr. Timms: We are committed to making all benefits secure against fraud and error. We will do this by getting payments right from the outset and by keeping them right for as long as the benefit is payable. For those cases which do go wrong, we will put them right promptly.

We have made substantial progress in applying this approach to Housing Benefit. For example, we have made an extra £100 million available over the next three years for the Verification Framework. This will enable all councils to check Housing Benefit claims more thoroughly.

31. **Dr. Julian Lewis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on his future plans for housing benefit. [73068]

Angela Eagle: We are taking forward a wide-ranging review of housing benefit in consultation with local authorities and other interested parties. The aim of the review is to simplify and improve both the benefit itself and the way in which it is delivered. In the meantime, we have in place several measures to drive forward better delivery of housing benefit including the Benefit Fraud Inspectorate's programme of visits to local authorities, improved communications between the Benefits Agency and local authorities through the use of IT, and extra funding and support for local authorities to operate the verification framework.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what conclusions he has reached from his consideration of the case of Stephen Gilhooly of Bathgate in relation to the withdrawal of housing benefit under new regulations relating to attendance on courses for over 25 year olds at technical institutions. [73150]

Angela Eagle: There are no new regulations withdrawing Housing Benefit from over 25 year olds at technical institutions. Most full-time students are excluded from entitlement to Housing Benefit, although certain students in vulnerable groups, such as lone parents, can continue to claim this benefit.

We are fully committed to helping unemployed people obtain the skills they need to improve their employability and, last June, introduced the New Deal for people aged over 25 to help the long-term unemployed undertake full-time education and training.

Widow's Pension

18. **Mr. Chaytor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if, following the implementation of his reform proposals, widows aged between 45 and 60 years who were widowed before 45 years of age and who are not currently receiving a widow's pension, can continue to choose to claim *(a)* retirement pension or *(b)* widow's pension on reaching 60 years of age. [73055]

Mr. Timms: Current widows who are entitled to Widow's Pension can choose to continue receiving it up to age 65. A woman who was widowed before age 45 may qualify for a Widow's Pension when her Widowed Mother's Allowance ceased or because she was widowed before April 1988.

These widows will continue to be able to receive Widow's Pension up to age 65 if they satisfy the qualifying conditions following implementation of our reforms.

Pension Reform

19. **Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on progress with pension reform. [73056]

Mr. Timms: We are currently consulting on our plans for radical reform of the pensions system that we set out in the Green Paper "Partnership in Pensions". The framework for stakeholder pension schemes laid out in the Green Paper is being taken forward in the Welfare Reform and Pensions Bill.

Welfare Reform

20. **Mr. Cawsey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what representations he has received about his recent proposals for welfare reform. [73057]

Mr. Darling: We have received numerous representations on our recent proposals for reform, towards our central aim of work for those who can security for those who cannot.

Stakeholder Pensions

21. **Mr. Flight:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to introduce *(a)* incentives and *(b)* negative disincentives to the self-employed to take out stakeholder pension contracts. [73058]

Mr. Timms: There are no such plans. Our proposals for stakeholder pension schemes were laid out in the Green Paper.

The self-employed will be able to join stakeholder pension schemes. We expect that many of them will benefit from the improved security, flexibility and value for money offered by such schemes.

Pensions Green Paper

22. **Dr. Ladyman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assessment he has made of the responses so far to the Pensions Green Paper. [73059]

Mr. Timms: Our Pensions Green Paper is continuing to attract a great deal of interest. We have already received more than 100 written responses, and expect to receive many more by the closing date on 31 March.

Pensions

23. **Mr. Wilkinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security by how much he expects the real spending powers of those dependent on the basic state old age pension to vary from that of those in employment in 1999–2000. [73060]

Mr. Darling: No one is expected to rely on the basic pension as their sole source of income. Short-term projections of the growth in pensioners' incomes are not available.

26. **Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of the cost of administration of *(a)* the current state pension and *(b)* the secondary pension proposed in the Welfare Reform and Pensions Bill. [73063]

Mr. Timms: The administration costs charged to the National Insurance Fund for awarding and paying state retirement pension and collecting and maintaining records of National Insurance contributions were some £622 million in 1996–97[1]. This represents about 1.5 per cent. of the Fund's income in that year[1].

The Welfare Reform and Pensions Bill contains provisions to enable the setting up of flexible, secure, value for money stakeholder pension schemes. Administration costs should be low; both because of the ways schemes will be set up and run, and because we propose to set a minimum standard for the charges that can be made.

[1] Source: Departmental Report 1998–99, CM3913, National Insurance Fund Account 1996–97, HC 465

27. **Dr. George Turner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assessment he has made of the difficulties faced by those on low and modest incomes in making adequate provision for retirement. [73064]

Mr. Timms: The government recognise the difficulties faced by those on low and modest incomes. That is why we are guaranteeing a decent income in retirement for all pensioners through the Minimum Income Guarantee. We plan to replace SERPS with a new State Second Pension to ensure that everyone with a lifetime of work behind them will build up rights to a pension which will take them above a Minimum Income Guarantee; and the Welfare Reform and Pensions Bill contains provisions to enable the setting up of flexible, secure value for money stakeholder pension schemes which will be particularly suitable for people on modest incomes.

28. **Dr. Naysmith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to improve the pensions of long-term disabled people. [73065]

Mr. Timms: I refer my hon. Friend to the Written Answer I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry, South (Mr. Cunningham) on 8 February 1999, *Official Report*, column *65*.

39. **Ms Dari Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how he proposes to ensure better security in retirement for the poorest households. [73076]

Angela Eagle: The measures proposed in the Green Paper, A new contract for welfare: Partnership in Pensions are intended to ensure that people who have worked throughout their working life on a low income will still be able to retire on an income above the level of the Minimum Income Guarantee. For the poorest households, the Minimum Income Guarantee will provide a secure income, which we intend over time and as resources allow, to increase in line with average earnings so that all pensioners, including the poorest, can share in the rising prosperity of the nation.

Benefit Claimants

24. **Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the upper limit permitted to benefit claimants for time spent writing material for publication before their benefit is reduced; and if he will make a statement. [73061]

Angela Eagle: The impact of time spent writing material for publication on entitlement to benefit depends on the claimant's circumstances and the benefit being claimed. For example, provided other conditions are satisfied Jobseeker's Allowance can be paid where work done for payment or in expectation is undertaken for less than 16 hours per week. Special rules apply to people on New Deal programmes.

Social Security Budget

25. **Mr. Boswell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of the proportion of Government expenditure the social security budget will comprise in 1999–2000; and what it was in 1996–97. [73062]

Mr. Darling: Social Security expenditure accounted for 29.3 per cent. of public expenditure in 1996–97 and it is estimated to be around 28.2 per cent. in 1999–2000.

Fraud

29. **Mrs. Gorman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what recent representations he has received on levels of fraud within the benefit system; and if he will make a statement. [73066]

Mr. Timms: Consultation on the Green Paper, "Beating Fraud is Everyone's Business: securing the future", ended on 30 September 1998, and 165 responses were received. The great majority of responses supported the strategy and its governing principles.

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what action the Benefit Fraud Inspectorate is taking to deal with organised fraud in housing benefit; what action is proposed following the closure of the London organised fraud investigation team; and if he will make a statement. [74281]

Mr. Timms: The Benefit Fraud Inspectorate (BFI) was launched in November 1997 to examine and report to the Secretary of State on the administration of Social Security benefits by central Government agencies and local authorities with a particular emphasis on standards of counter-fraud and security performance. It examines and reports on local authority performance in administering Housing Benefit/Council Tax Benefit and countering fraud.

Local authorities in London now refer cases of suspected organised Housing Benefit fraud to Benefits Agency organised fraud investigation teams.

We are carrying out a review of how organised fraud within Social Security benefits, including fraud in those benefits that are administered by local authorities, can be countered.

Child Support Agency

30. **Mr. Hinchliffe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what progress has been made in the reform of the Child Support Agency. [73067]

Angela Eagle: We are currently considering responses to the Green Paper "Children First: a new approach to child support" and will bring forward our final proposals for reform in due course.

Ms Buck: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to tackle the difficulties experienced by the Child Support Agency in assessing child maintenance due from self-employed parents. [75820]

Angela Eagle: Draft child support regulations have today been placed in both Houses. These will, from October 1999, allow self-employed parents to provide the figures, which they use for self assessment of their earnings for tax purposes, for use in calculating child maintenance. These provisions together with measures in the Welfare Reform and Pensions Bill currently before the House which will enable Inland Revenue to provide earnings information for the self-employed where the parent fails to supply the information to the Child Support Agency, and other operational improvements being introduced by the Agency, will lead to a simpler and more effective basis for getting maintenance flowing. The draft regulations also contain provisions to extend the suspension of fees for the Agency's assessment and collection services until April 2001.

British Pensioners Overseas

32. **Mr. Colvin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what step he is taking to ensure that British pensioners living overseas receive up-rated pensions to which they are entitled. [73069]

Mr. Timms: Over 380,000 British pensioners living overseas in around 30 countries are paid the up-rated UK State Pensions to which they are entitled. These are paid under European Community regulations, and certain long standing social security agreements which allow for the payment of upratings.

Unclaimed Benefits

34. **Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of the total amount of benefits administered by his Department unclaimed by those entitled to them; and what measures he proposes to encourage take-up. [73071]

Angela Eagle: Information relating to the total amount of unclaimed Social Security benefit is not available, because for most benefits, these data are not routinely collected. Estimates of take-up of income-related benefits published for the year 1993–94 (covering Income Support, Housing Benefit, Council Tax Benefit and Family Credit) indicate that the total amount unclaimed was in the region of £2.5 billion. More recent data are currently being reviewed following an error discovered in the data relating to take-up among pensioners, which suggests that the level of take-up is likely to be somewhat higher than previously thought.

Recent initiatives to encourage take-up include a major publicity campaign to promote in-work benefits which was launched on 1 June last year. This campaign comprised TV and radio advertisements and a direct mailshot to lone parents. A special help line was established to handle telephone enquiries arising from the campaign.

We are also planning measures to encourage take-up of the Minimum Income Guarantee by pensioners. These measures will build on the findings from research into the reasons why pensioners do not take up their Income Support entitlement, and the nine pilot projects which the Department undertook last year to test different methods of encouraging pensioners to claim. We expect to publish the results of the research and the pilots later this year.

Child Poverty

35. **Mr. Jenkins:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what proposals he has to tackle the problem of child poverty. [73072]

Angela Eagle: Since November last year an extra £2.50 a week has been made available to less well off families with children under age 11, through the income-related benefits. From April this year we will implement the largest ever increase in Child Benefit, an extra £2.95 a week for the first or eldest child. A similar increase in the family premium will ensure that those on income-related benefits also gain.

We consider that helping parents to work is the best form of assistance. The New Deal for Lone Parents and National Childcare Strategy will together make it possible for more parents to start work or increase their hours. Around two million children will be better off as a result of the introduction of the Working Families Tax Credit and Childcare Tax Credit and, along with the National Minimum Wage, will help to ensure that work pays for more families with children.

Millennium Compliance

36. **Mr. David Atkinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on progress with the millennium compliance of computer systems involved in the provision of benefits. [73073]

Angela Eagle: All the computer systems used to assess and pay benefits were made compliant during 1998 (the majority before the end of August 1998). In addition, by the end of last year, we had successfully tested all these systems using dates before and after the Year 2000.

Disabled People

37. **Mrs. Humble:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what action his Department is taking to help disabled people into employment. [73074]

Mr. Bayley: Together with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment we have introduced the New Deal for Disabled People to help disabled people and those with long term illness move into, or remain in, work: piloting a voluntary personal adviser service in 12 areas throughout Great Britain, for claimants of incapacity benefits; and funding a number of innovative schemes to test different approaches. From June we will also be piloting the Single Work Focused Gateway in twelve areas. In these areas, where appropriate, people of working age who claim benefits will be given a Personal Adviser who will be able to access information and the opportunities for employment, training and rehabilitation, and will help them plan a route back to independence.

In October 1998 we introduced a new 52 week linking rule for incapacity benefits and abolished the 16 hour limit for voluntary work. We have increased the therapeutic earnings limit from April 1999 and plan to pilot further changes to benefits from April. In addition the disabled persons tax credit, will be more generous than the Disability Working Allowance it will replace. We will also reform the All Work Test so that, as well as establishing the level of incapacity for benefit purposes, it will also provide information which will be potentially helpful to disabled people and their personal advisers when planning a return to work. The Department for Education and Employment has an extensive range of measures aimed at helping disabled people into employment.

Second-tier Pensions

38. **Kali Mountford:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what proposals he has to encourage the spread of second-tier pensions. [73075]

Mr. Timms: The proposals in the pensions Green Paper for introducing stakeholder pension schemes, strengthening occupational pension schemes and providing a new State Second Pension will all encourage second-tier pension provision.

Legislation to provide for stakeholder pension schemes forms part of the Welfare Reform and Pensions Bill introduced last month.

Single Gateway

40. **Mr. Derek Twigg:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he expects to pilot the Single Gateway to Benefits for people of working age. [73077]

Angela Eagle: The pilots for the Single Work-Focused Gateway will commence from June 1999.

SCOTLAND

Departmental Publicity

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will estimate his Department's expenditure on (i) publicity, (ii) advertising and (iii) press operations in *(a)* 1997–98, *(b)* 1998–99, *(c)* 1999–2000, *(d)* 2000–01 and *(e)* 2001–02; and if he will make a statement. [69251]

Mr. Dewar *[holding answer 4 February 1999]:* Details of expenditure on publicity, advertising and press operations are:

£

	1997–98	*1998–99*
Publicity	1,376,000	1,031,000
Advertising	2,164,000	2,231,000
Press operations	1,824,000	1,545,000

Figures for 1998–99 are for expenditure to date. Figures for subsequent years are not available.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what estimate he has made of the expenditure of his Department, its agencies and associated public bodies on publicity and advertising for each year since 1985–86. [69242]

Mr. Dewar *[holding answer 4 February 1999]:* The details are:

£

	The Scottish Office	*Agencies*	*NDPBs*
1985–86	677,000	—	—
1986–87	857,000	—	2,769,000
1987–88	1,094,000	—	2,318,000
1988–89	1,131,000	—	2,844,000
1989–90	2,251,000	—	4,318,000
1990–91	1,468,068	—	5,162,000
1991–92	2,323,653	—	6,474,000
1992–93	2,607,635	—	9,417,000
1993–94	2,361,085	508,000	9,173,000
1994–95	2,248,883	869,000	12,085,000
1995–96	2,241,189	1,008,000	13,910,000
1996–97	3,573,042	1,026,000	15,058,000
1997–98	2,740,072	799,056	15,000,000
1998–99	[1]2,528,251	[1]734,385	—

[1] To date

Expenditure by agencies prior to 1993–94 is not held centrally. Expenditure for NDPBs for the current financial year is not presently available. The figure for 1997–98 is the forecast outturn.

National Assets

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland which assets, listed in the National Assets register, have been sold off since 1 July 1997; how much money has been realised as a result; and if he will make a statement. [69197]

Mr. Dewar *[holding answer 8 February 1999]:* Those assets owned by The Scottish Office and its Associated Departments and Agencies which are listed under Scotland in the National Assets Register which have been sold since 1 July 1997 are as listed, together with the money realised.

Information about property sold by other public bodies is not held centrally.

	£
Department	
Scottish Office Core	
56 High Street, Lossiemouth	25,000
Land, Rosyth	72,000
Lowland Estate	180,438
Cars	169,324
Office Equipment	13,395
IT	14,672
Agencies & Associated Departments	
Scottish Prison Service	
29 Staff Quarters	531,077
88 Garages	27,969
2.85 ha of land	631,000
Vehicles	90,985
Plant and Equipment	1,874
Historic Scotland	
Cars	11,432
Office Equipment	500
IT	4,500
Fisheries Research Services Marine Laboratory	
Research Vessel	600,000
Registers of Scotland	
Plant and Machinery	500
Computer Hardware	3,100
Scottish Courts Administration	
Lanarkshire House	1,340,000

From 1 July 1999 this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

Departmental Properties

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his estimate of the total refurbishment bill for properties used by his *(a)* Department, *(b)* agencies and *(c)* related public bodies, for (i) 1996–97, (ii) 1997–98, (iii) 1998–99 and (iv) 1999–2000; and if he will make a statement. [69201]

Mr. Dewar *[holding answer 8 February 1999]:* The information set out relates to properties used by The Scottish Office and its Associated Departments and Agencies with the exception of the Scottish Prison Service for which figures could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

The total refurbishment cost for the years requested are:

Refurbishment

£

	Department	*Agencies*
1996–97	55,896	13,652,426
1997–98	56,323	7,219,740
1998–99	5,130,000	3,712,777
1999–2000	9,600,000	9,526,520

The refurbishment work has been carried out on a range of buildings, offices and specialist facilities and has been necessary either to preserve the fabric of the buildings or to bring systems up to a modern standard. Increased expenditure by The Scottish Office mainly relates to refurbishment of St. Andrew's House, and the buildings associated with the interim Parliament accommodation. The greater part of the expenditure under Agencies relates to the refurbishment of court buildings.

From 1 July 1999 this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the properties of his Department, agencies and public bodies which are currently vacant; how long he expects each to be vacant for; and what is the estimated annual cost of maintaining the properties in a vacant state. [69200]

Mr. Dewar *[holding answer 8 February 1999]:* The information set out relates to vacant properties which are owned by The Scottish Office and its Associated Departments and Agencies.

Information about vacant properties owned by other public bodies is not held centrally.

The information is as follows:

	Estimated date for occupation/disposal	*Annual cost*
Department		
The Scottish Office		
Cloffinburn Cottage Fairfield Glenevan Jocksthorn Longbedholm Cottage Middlegill Cottage Nether Howecleuch Nether Howecleuch Bungalow Raecleuch Farmhouse Upper Howecleuch	All of these properties are situated on land acquired for the M6 DBFO scheme. They are uninhabitable due to access problems during construction work. The scheme is due for completion in Spring 1999 with disposal expected during the financial year 1999–2000.	£6,500pa

	Estimated date for occupation/disposal	Annual cost
Corsankell Farmhouse (A78)	This scheme is subject to the Strategic Trunk Road Review, therefore it is not known at this stage when disposal will occur.	
Shore Street, Macduff	October 2001	£2,870pa
Agencies		
SASA		
3 cottages	Turnover of staff often results in short term vacancies	£350 each
Scottish Court Service		
Portcullis House, Glasgow (part)	March 2001	£83k in 1998–99 £79k in 1999–2000

From 1 July 1999 this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

Schizophrenia

Sir Alastair Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many patients with a primary diagnosis of schizophrenia psychoses were discharged from mental illness hospitals in Scotland in the last year; and how many were admitted for a hospital stay more than once during the year. [74388]

Mr. Galbraith: 3,761 patients with a main diagnosis of schizophrenia psychoses were discharged from mental illness hospitals in Scotland during the year ending 31 March 1996, of which 675 were admitted more than once.

From 1 July 1999 this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

Sir Alastair Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many people discharged from mental illness hospitals in Scotland in the last year after a main diagnosis of schizophrenia psychoses, having been proved vulnerable homeless subsequently became voluntary homeless. [74274]

Mr. Galbraith: The information requested is not collected or held centrally.

From 1 July 1999 this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

Sir Alastair Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many current occupants of National Health Service hospital and unit beds in Scotland have a main diagnosis of schizophrenia psychoses; and what these occupied beds represent as a percentage of *(a)* mental and *(b)* all beds in Scotland. [74270]

Mr. Galbraith: There were 1,751 patients with a main diagnosis of schizophrenic psychoses in mental illness hospitals and psychiatric units in Scotland at 31 March 1996, the latest year for which complete information is available. This represented 17.2 per cent. of the average available staffed mental illness beds, and 4.2 per cent. of all average available beds in Scotland for the quarter ending 31 March 1996.

From 1 July 1999 this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

CS Sprays

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland which police forces in Scotland *(a)* have and *(b)* have not equipped their officers with CS sprays since August 1996; for what reasons they were issued; and how many police officers in Scotland currently carry CS sprays. [74199]

Mr. McLeish: CS incapacitant spray is not in general use by the police service in Scotland. The Association of Chief Police Officers in Scotland (ACPOS) conducted a trial into the effectiveness of CS incapacitant spray as an item of police defence equipment during the period 1 October 1997 to 30 September 1998. The trial areas encompassed the City of Dundee in the Tayside Police area and a Division in the Strathclyde Police area. In total, 803 officers were trained to use the equipment in these pilot areas. An evaluation of the trial has been completed but ACPOS have deferred a decision on extending the use of the spray pending an independent assessment on the safety of the spray commissioned by the Department of Health. The spray continues to be used by officers in the 2 trial areas.

From 1 July 1999 this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

Road Maintenance

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to improve road maintenance in Scotland; and if he will make a statement. [74404]

Mr. Macdonald: Maintenance of local roads is the responsibility of local authorities and details of their plans are not held centrally. Funding for road maintenance on the motorway and trunk road network in Scotland was increased following the recent Comprehensive Spending Review. This will enable us to tackle the backlog of maintenance and repair and ensure that our road network is maintained in a stable condition.

From 1 July 1999 this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

M74

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he expects to announce a decision on the proposed completion of the M74 from Tollcross to Kingston Bridge; and if he will make a statement. [74408]

Mr. Macdonald: The City of Glasgow and South Lanarkshire Councils agreed that the proposal to extend the M74 should be considered within the review assessing priorities for future trunk road investment in Scotland. The outcome of the review will be announced as soon as is practicable.

From 1 July 1999 this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the estimated cost of changing the name of the M74 motorway to the M6; and if he will make a statement. [74410]

Mr. Macdonald: No estimate of the cost of changing the name of the Glasgow to Carlisle motorway to the M6 has yet been prepared. Such an estimate would require a detailed survey of signs on the existing road and connecting roads. This would be undertaken only as a precursor to initiating the proposal.

From 1 July 1999 this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

Homelessness

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what are the estimated numbers of homeless people in each council area in Scotland. [74406]

Mr. Macdonald: The table gives information on the number of households in each council area in Scotland in 1996–97 who applied to the local authority for accommodation or assistance in obtaining accommodation and the local authority in question assessed the household as being homeless or threatened with homelessness. All figures are rounded to the nearest 10 and are based on those contained in The Scottish Office Statistical Bulletin HSG/1998/4 published in August 1998.

Estimated number of households assessed as homeless or potentially homeless 1996–97

	Number
Scotland	30,690
Aberdeen City	1,470
Aberdeenshire	980
Angus	550
Argyll and Bute	390
Clackmannanshire	290
Dumfries and Galloway	650
Dundee City	640
East Ayrshire	360
East Dunbartonshire	370
East Lothian	530
East Renfrewshire	120
Edinburgh, City of	3,360
Eilean Siar	150
Falkirk	550
Fife	1,480
Glasgow City	10,540
Highland	670
Inverclyde	250
Midlothian	400
Moray	130
North Ayrshire	460
North Lanarkshire	1,010
Orkney	70
Perth and Kinross	430
Renfrewshire	440
Scottish Borders, The	570
Shetland	130
South Ayrshire	670
South Lanarkshire	1,200
Stirling	620
West Dunbartonshire	430
West Lothian	930

From May 1999 this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

Demographic Statistics

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the numbers of *(a)* young people under the age of 16 years and *(b)* retired people living in each parliamentary constituency in Scotland. [74407]

Mr. McLeish: The information requested is given in the table. The population figures have been prepared by a method which involves a certain degree of approximation and therefore should be treated with some caution.

From 1 July 1999 this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

Parliamentary Constituency	*Estimate of population aged under 16 (as at 30 June 1997)*	*Estimate of population of pensionable age (as at 30 June 1997)*
Aberdeen Central	12,423	11,717
Aberdeen North	12,723	11,999
Aberdeen South	14,101	13,299
Airdrie and Shotts	16,207	12,807
Angus	15,406	15,217
Argyll and Bute	11,666	14,299
Ayr	13,612	15,019
Banff and Buchan	16,058	13,040
Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross	10,835	10,438
Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley	17,320	16,766
Central Fife	15,327	13,964
Clydebank and Milngavie	14,014	13,113
Clydesdale	16,716	13,967
Coatbridge and Chryston	14,347	11,223
Cumbernauld and Kilsyth	14,116	8,316
Cunninghame North	15,437	13,050
Cunninghame South	13,890	11,742
Dumbarton	16,008	12,762
Dumfries	15,561	16,475
Dundee East	14,237	14,914
Dundee West	13,826	14,483
Dunfermline East	14,015	11,269
Dunfermline West	14,387	11,389
East Kilbride	18,305	13,656
East Lothian	14,814	14,322
Eastwood	17,656	15,302
Edinburgh Central	13,823	14,144
Edinburgh East and Musselburgh	13,468	13,611
Edinburgh North and Leith	13,334	13,644
Edinburgh Pentlands	13,106	13,410
Edinburgh South	13,764	14,083
Edinburgh West	13,378	13,688
Falkirk East	14,704	12,984
Falkirk West	13,631	12,037
Galloway and Upper Nithsdale	13,245	15,075
Glasgow Anniesland	13,615	12,427
Glasgow Baillieston	12,510	11,418
Glasgow Cathcart	12,858	11,736
Glasgow Govan	12,971	11,839
Glasgow Kelvin	14,549	13,279
Glasgow Maryhill	13,643	12,453
Glasgow Pollok	12,316	11,242
Glasgow Rutherglen	13,019	11,883
Glasgow Shettleston	12,292	11,220
Glasgow Springburn	13,623	12,434
Gordon	17,180	11,704
Greenock and Inverclyde	13,042	11,793
Hamilton North and Bellshill	14,795	11,985
Hamilton South	12,586	9,765
Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber	17,290	15,099
Kilmarnock and Loudoun	16,058	14,863
Kirkcaldy	13,501	12,301
Linlithgow	15,536	9,440
Livingston	17,544	10,659
Midlothian	12,792	10,416
Moray	16,518	14,136
Motherwell and Wilshaw	14,523	11,963

Parliamentary Constituency	Estimate of population aged under 16 (as at 30 June 1997)	Estimate of population of pensionable age[1] (as at 30 June 1997)
North East Fife	13,471	15,202
North Tayside	15,701	16,106
Ochil	15,399	13,289
Orkney and Shetland	9,486	7,122
Paisley North	13,198	10,918
Paisley South	14,394	11,907
Perth	15,170	16,321
Ross, Skye and Inverness West	15,111	12,744
Roxburgh and Berwickshire	11,032	13,162
Stirling	13,051	12,092
Strathkelvin and Bearsden	16,448	13,875
Tweedale, Ettrick and Lauderdale	12,762	12,858
West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine	17,445	11,896
West Renfewshire	14,065	12,005
Western Isles	5,714	5,930

[1] Comprises males aged 65 and over, and females aged 60 and over

Criminal Offences (Young People)

Mrs. Laing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what percentage of people aged 15 to 25 years committed a criminal offence in each year since 1992. [74522]

Mr. McLeish: The available information is given in the table. It relates to the number of individuals who were convicted in Scottish courts at least once in a given year for conduct classified as a crime or for breach of the peace or simple assault, which are classified as offences. It therefore excludes convictions for motor vehicle and some minor common law and statutory offences. In addition to cases dealt with in court, children in Scotland who are suspected of committing offences are generally referred to the Reporter to a children's hearing. Each year an average of around 4,500 children aged 15 and over are referred to Reporters on offence grounds, equivalent to 7 per cent. of the 15-year-old population.

From 1 July 1999, this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

Percentage of people aged 15–25 years with a charge proved in a Scottish court for a crime breach of the peace or simple assault[1] on at least one occasion in the given year, 1992–97

Year	Percentage[2]
1992	3.8
1993	3.7
1994	3.6
1995	3.6
1996	3.7
1997	3.6

[1] Excludes convictions for most motor vehicle and some minor statutory offences

[2] Percentage of the relevant mid-year GRO(S) estimate of the 15–25 year old population

Mrs. Laing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many and what percentage of people aged 15 to 25 years have been convicted of *(a)* two, *(b)* three and *(c)* four offences. [74521]

Mr. McLeish: The available information is given in the table. It relates to the number of occasions between 1989 and 1997 on which people who were aged 15–25 years at June 1997 were convicted in Scottish courts for conduct classified as a crime, or for breach of the peace and simple assault, which are classified as offences. It therefore excludes convictions for motor vehicle and some minor common law and statutory offences.

From 1 July 1999, this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

Number and percentage of people aged 15–25 years in 1997 with a charge proved in a Scottish court for a crime, breach of the peace or simple assault[1] on 2–4 occasions in the period 1989–97

Number of convictions in 1989–97	Number	Percentage[2]
2	13,712	1.9
3	7,121	1.0
4	4,577	0.6

[1] Excludes convictions for most motor vehicle and some minor statutory offences

[2] Percentage of the mid-year GRO(S) estimate of the 15–25 year old population in 1997

Criminal Offences

Mrs. Laing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many and what percentage of criminal offences were committed by *(a)* 15 to 25, *(b)* 26 to 35, *(c)* 36 to 45 and *(d)* 46 to 60 year olds in each year since 1992. [74520]

Mr. McLeish: The available information, which relates to numbers of convictions in Scottish courts, is given in the table. In addition to cases dealt with in court, children in Scotland who are suspected of committing offences are generally referred to the Reporter to a children's hearing. Each year an average of around 4,500 children aged 15 and over are referred to Reporters on offence grounds.

From 1 July 1999, this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

Persons with a charge proved in Scottish courts, by age 1992–97

	Age				
	15–25	26–35	36–45	46–60	All[1]
Number					
1992	81,874	49,944	23,569	14,449	177,483
1993	74,971	47,045	21,911	12,871	162,806
1994	71,477	47,855	21,860	12,847	159,178
1995	69,497	47,323	21,857	12,894	156,707
1996	69,446	45,845	21,222	11,879	153,087
1997	67,463	45,557	21,247	11,788	150,450
Per cent.					
1992	46	28	13	8	100
1993	46	29	13	8	100
1994	45	30	14	8	100
1995	44	30	14	8	100
1996	45	30	14	8	100
1997	45	30	14	8	100

[1] Includes persons of all ages and companies

NHS Funding

Mrs. Laing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the distribution of new funding for the NHS in Scotland. [74518]

Mr. Galbraith: Following the Comprehensive Spending Review, an additional investment of £1.8 billion is being made in the NHS in Scotland over the next three years. This will give cash growth over the original planned expenditure in 1998–99 of £300 million in 1999–2000, £590 million in 2000–01 and £910 million in 2001–02 or annual cash growth of £300/290/320 million respectively. The additional funding has been distributed as follows:

£ million

	1999–2000	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
Hospital and Community Health Services	176	200	221
Family Health Services	119	86	99
Other Health Services	5	4	0
Total	300	290	320

From 1 July 1999 this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

Victim Support

Mrs. Laing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much public money has been allocated to Victim Support Scotland in each year since 1992 in *(a)* cash terms and *(b)* 1998–99 prices. [74517]

Mr. McLeish: The amount of public money allocated to Victim Support Scotland in each year since 1992 is as follows:

£

	(a) Cash terms	*(b) 1998–99 prices*
1992–93	659,140	767,519
1993–94	784,781	890,182
1994–95	915,550	1,023,888
1995–96	1,018,229	1,106,490
1996–97	1,297,669	1,368,035
1997–98	1,536,559	1,578,814
1998–99	1,551,500	1,551,500
1999–2000	1,705,000	1,663,411

From 1 July 1999 this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

Local Government Boundary Commission

Mrs. Laing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland with reference to the Local Government Boundary Commission for Scotland's conduct of the Third Statutory Review of Electoral Arrangements, in which local authority areas amendments to the draft proposals of the Commission were incorporated in the Commission's final recommendations to him. [74526]

Mr. McLeish: In the case of every authority, amendments to the Commission's provisional proposals were incorporated in the Commission's final recommendations to the Secretary of State.

From 1 July 1999 this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

Mrs. Laing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) with reference to the Local Government Boundary Commission for Scotland's conduct of the Third Statutory Review of Electoral Arrangements, in which local authority areas the Commission agreed to hold a local hearing into its draft proposals and any counter-proposals; [74528]

(2) with reference to the Local Government Boundary Commission for Scotland's conduct of the Third Statutory Review of Electoral Arrangements, in which local authority areas the draft proposals of the Commission were amended subject to local hearings. [74527]

Mr. McLeish: No local inquiries were held.

From 1 July 1999 this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

Mrs. Laing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland with reference to the Local Government Boundary Commission for Scotland's conduct of the Third Statutory Review of Electoral Arrangements, in which local authority areas detailed counter-proposals were lodged against the Commission's draft proposals, in part or in whole, by political parties, individuals or community groups. [74524]

Mr. McLeish: The Local Government Boundary Commission for Scotland received counter-proposals from political parties, individuals or community groups in respect of all 32 Scottish local authority areas.

From 1 July 1999 this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

Mrs. Laing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) with reference to the Local Government Boundary Commission for Scotland's conduct of the Third Statutory Review of Electoral Arrangements, in which local authority areas detailed counter-proposals were examined and validated by consultants; and at what cost; [74525]

(2) with reference to the Local Government Boundary Commission for Scotland's conduct of the Third Statutory Review of Electoral Arrangements, in which local authority areas consultants were engaged to complete, validate or otherwise examine the local authorities' initial proposals to the Commission; and what was the cost of such work to the Commission. [74523]

Mr. McLeish: No consultants were engaged by the Commission for the purposes mentioned for any local authority area.

From 1 July 1999 this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

Intensive Care Beds

Mrs. Laing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many intensive care beds there were in each health board area in each year since 1992. [74519]

Mr. Galbraith: Information on the number of intensive care beds in each Health Board area in each year since 1992 is shown in the table.

From 1 July 1999, this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

NHS in Scotland—intensive care beds [1] by health board

Health Board	Years ending 31 March 1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997 [2]	1998 [2]	1 April to 31 December 1998 [2,3]
Argyll and Clyde	4	7	12	13	13	16	26	25
Ayrshire and Arran	7	8	8	8	9	9	11	14
Borders	2	2	2	2	2	4	4	4
Dumfries and Galloway	8	8	16	14	14	13	13	14
Fife	—	—	5	6	6	22	22	22
Forth Valley	9	9	9	9	7	11	16	16
Grampian	10	11	10	11	10	25	25	26
Greater Glasgow	77	77	75	75	85	82	112	119
Highland	6	6	6	6	10	10	10	10
Lanarkshire	37	37	37	37	37	37	38	38
Lothian	38	41	41	40	47	46	47	46
Orkney	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Shetland	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Tayside	20	24	28	25	25	27	29	29
Western Isles	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Scotland	219	230	250	247	266	303	353	364

[1] Average available staffed beds
[2] Due to changes in recording practice, certain figures shown for year ending 31 March 1997 onwards are not fully comparable with those for earlier
[3] Provisional
Source:
ISD, Scotland

Nurses

Mr. Moore: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many whole-time equivalent *(a)* bank, *(b)* agency and *(c)* contract nurses were employed, and at what cost, by health board area in each of the last 10 years. [74990]

Mr. Galbraith *[holding answer 5 March 1999]:* The information available for agency nursing staff is shown in the table. No cost data to match the staff numbers are available. Information for bank and contract nursing staff is not available centrally.

From 1 July 1999 this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

Agency nursing staff: average Whole Time Equivalent [1] by health board: year ending 30 September

Health board	[2]1988	[2]1989	[2]1990	[2]1991	[2]1992	[2]1993	[2]1994	[2]1995	[2]1996	[2]1997	[2]1998
Scotland [2]	238.6	187.3	317.4	255.6	249.4	301.1	195.3	382.6	459.3	455.7	50
Argyll & Clyde	—	1.3	0.2	1.1	0.1	4.6	11.6	39.0	39.8	57.0	6
Ayrshire & Arran	2.1	7.2	1.7	3.0	0.2	0.5	0.4	0.4	0.0	3.0	—
Borders	19.8	4.4	—	—	0.0	0.1	0.3	0.0	3.0	—	—
Dumfries & Galloway	—	—	—	0.4	0.4	1.3	0.1	—	—	—	—
Fife	—	—	2.3	1.3	0.6	—	3.7	0.2	1.8	6.5	—
Forth Valley	—	1.1	10.3	0.1	0.0	0.4	0.0	17.3	63.1	54.1	2
Grampian	13.0	6.1	8.0	11.9	35.3	33.6	26.5	46.2	29.4	21.8	3
Greater Glasgow	80.2	66.0	179.8	155.2	148.7	127.3	76.8	92.8	67.7	110.9	13
Highland	—	—	0.8	0.5	—	0.5	0.1	2.4	4.1	12.3	1
Lanarkshire	—	—	0.2	—	—	—	—	0.2	0.3	0.3	1
Lothian	123.5	100.4	111.2	81.0	64.0	132.8	75.8	184.0	249.0	187.8	20
Orkney	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	0.2	—
Shetland	—	0.8	2.8	0.9	—	—	—	0.0	—	—	—
Tayside	—	—	—	0.1	—	—	—	—	1.0	1.8	—
Western Isles	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—

[1] To calculate the average, 1 W. T. E. is taken as a contribution of 37.5 hours per week x 52 = 1,950 hours per year.
[2] Data for 1997 and 1998 are based on one six month period ending 30 September. Data for 1991 to 1996 are based on two six month periods ending 31 March and 30 September. Data for 1988 to 1990 are based on two three month periods ending 31 March and 30 September.
Notes:
1. Rounding of individual figures may produce slight differences between the sum of constituent items and totals.
2. Provisional data.
Source:
ISD(M)

Capercaillie (Protection)

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what instruction he has given the Deer Commission concerning the use of deer fences within areas known to support the capercaillie; and what actions are proposed to remove existing fences where they are dangerous to black grouse and capercaillie; [72893]

(2) if he will add the capercaillie to Schedule 1 part II of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 in order to protect its lekking sites from deliberate disturbance. [72894]

Mr. Macdonald: The Deer Commission for Scotland has no powers either to erect or remove fences itself. However, the prevention of strikes on deer fencing by birds such as black grouse and capercaillie is always

considered by the Deer Commission for Scotland when advice is given to woodland managers, including the Forestry Commission, on forest protection and deer control. Where new planing is considered under the Forestry Commission's Woodland Grant Scheme, wide consultation takes place to ensure that any fences which are considered necessary are sited to minimise negative effects. In some cases, fences are marked in areas known to be used by birds and removed as soon as the trees are established. The Forestry Commission is removing about 200 km of existing fencing on its own land, and is contributing towards the cost of removing over 100 km of deer fencing on private land.

My right hon. Friend has at present no plans to add the capercaillie to Schedule 1 part II of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. Additional protection for the capercaillie, under the 1981 Act, is one of a number of issues currently under consideration by the Scottish Biodiversity Group's Capercaillie Species Action Plan Steering Group.

As from 1 July these will be matters for the Scottish Parliament.

Gaelic-medium Units

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his answer of 23 February 1999, *Official Report*, column *225*, if he will name the schools which have Gaelic-medium units and state the number of pupils for each unit. [74566]

Mr. Macdonald: The information is set out in the table. In the current session there are 56 Gaelic-medium units in Scottish primary schools with a total of 1,816 pupils.

School	*Total*
Gilcomstoun, Aberdeen	57
Acharacle	33
Aird, Lewis	21
Airidhantuim, Lewis	21
Back, Lewis	44
Balivanich, Benbecula	28
Barvas, Lewis	26
Bernera, Lewis	6
Bishopbriggs, Meadowburn	48
Bowmore, Islay	16
Breasclete, Lewis	41
Broadford, Skye	39
Carinish, North Uist	22
Carloway, Lewis	35
Castlebay, Barra	30
Condorrat	21
Cornaigmore, Tiree	32
Daliburgh, South Uist	66
Dingwall	51
Dunskellar, North Uist	9
Dunvegan, Skye	21
East Kilbride: Mount Cameron	67
Edinburgh: Tollcross	61
Forfar: Kirkriggs	5
Fort William: St. Mary's RC	35
Gairloch	7
Glasgow: Sir John Maxwell	101
Inverness: Central	122
Iochdar, South Uist	45
Kilmarnock: Onthank	16
Kilmuir	12
Knockianduie, Lewis	12
Laxdale, Lewis	42
Leverburgh, Harris	20
Lionel, Ness	28
Lochcarron	17
Morar: Lady Lovat	18
Newtonmore	20
Oban: St. Columba's	11
Paible, North Uist	31
Perth: Northern District	21
Plockton	34
Portree, Skye	144
Salen	11
Sandwick	9
Shawbost, Lewis	6
Sleat, Skye	21
Staffin, Skye	22
Stirling: Riverside	3
Stoneybridge, South Uist	18
Stornoway, Lewis	47
Tain: Craighill	37
Tarbert, Harris	19
Tongue, Sutherland	17
Uig, Lewis	17
Ullapool	53

From 1 July 1999 this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

A985

Ms Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what measures he will take to improve the safety of the junction on the A985 with the Limekilns road near Rosyth. [74797]

Mr. Macdonald: The National Roads Directorate are currently reviewing the effectiveness of the measures implemented at Limekilns junction in 1996 as part of the Route Accident Reduction Plan. Any further safety measures considered appropriate will be implemented as soon as possible this year.

From 1 July 1999 this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Departmental Expenditure

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, pursuant to his answer of 12 January 1999, *Official Report*, column *145*, if he will list the expenditure incurred by *(a)* the Employment Service *(b)* his other agencies and non-departmental public bodies and *(c)* the Central Office of Information for relevant work carried out for his Department which is not included in the table. [67944]

Mr. Mudie *[holding answer 28 January 1999]:* The figures for total expenditure are as follows:

Employment Service (excluding New Deal)

Public Opinion Research

May 1997 until December 1998—£110,435

Television, Radio and Newspaper Advertising

May 1997 until December 1998—£698,503.

Therefore the total spend on research and advertising for the period May 1997 until December 1998 was £808,938 or an average of £40,941 per month. There were no direct marketing costs.

This compares with a total spend of £2,843,282; (advertising £2,824,471; research £8,811), or an average of £236,940 per month, for the previous financial year 1996–97.

New Deal

Public Opinion Research

May 1997 until December 1998—£117,177

Television, Radio and Newspaper Advertising

May 1997 until December 1998—£7,862,867.

Therefore the total spend on research and advertising for the period May 1997 to December 1998 was £7,980,044 or an average of £399,002 per month. There were no direct marketing costs.

Since New Deal was not in existence before May 1997, comparisons cannot be made with 1996–97 expenditure.

Agencies and NDPBs

The expenditure on behalf of agencies and non-departmental public bodies was included in the reply given on 12 January 1999, *Official Report*, column *145*.

COI

The expenditure incurred by the Central Office of Information is included as appropriate in the reply given on 12 January and in the above figures for the ES and New Deal.

Public Bodies

Dr. Tony Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment which of the advisory non-departmental public bodies sponsored by his Department *(a)* admit members of the public to all board or committee meetings, *(b)* hold public meetings and *(c)* have lay or consumer representatives on their boards; and if in each case this is under a statutory requirement. [69962]

Mr. Mudie: None of the advisory bodies sponsored by the DfEE admits members of the public to all meetings. The National Disability Council holds occasional consultation meetings. These are not statutory requirements.

There is no statutory requirement to have lay or consumer representatives on the boards of the advisory non-departmental public bodies sponsored by the Department. The boards of these bodies reflect a wide range of knowledge, experience and expertise and include, amongst others, people with disabilities, people from ethnic minorities, education practitioners and employers.

Dr. Tony Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment which of the executive non-departmental public bodies sponsored by his Department *(a)* admit members of the public to all board or committee meetings, *(b)* hold public meetings, *(c)* have lay or consumer representatives on their boards and *(d)* operate some form of appeal or complaints procedure; and if in each case this is under a statutory requirement. [69985]

Mr. Mudie: *(a)* None of the executive non-departmental public bodies sponsored by this Department admits the public to all of its meetings. This is not a statutory requirement.

(b) For the Funding Agency for Schools; Further Education Funding Council; Higher Education Funding Council for England; the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority; Remploy Ltd.; and, the Teacher Training Agency, holding public meetings is not a statutory requirement.

(c) The British Educational Communications and Technology agency; the Construction Industry Training Board (under a statutory requirement); the Engineering Construction Industry Training Board (under a statutory requirement); the Funding Agency for Schools; the Further Education Funding Council; the Higher Education Funding Council for England; Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, Remploy Ltd.; and, the Teacher Training Agency.

(d) The British Education Communications and Technology agency; the Construction Industry Training Board (under a statutory requirement); the Engineering Construction Industry Training Board (under a statutory requirement); the Equal Opportunities Commission; the Education Transfer Council; the Funding Agency for Schools; the Further Education Funding Council; the Higher Education Funding Council for England; the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority; Remploy Ltd.; the Student Loans Company; and, the Teacher Training Agency.

Dr. Tony Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment which of the executive non-departmental public bodies sponsored by his Department have a statutory base; and which are subject to investigation by the Parliamentary Commissioner. [69905]

Mr. Mudie: The following executive non-departmental public bodies sponsored by the DfEE have a statutory base:

the British Educational Communications and Technology agency; the Construction Industry Training Board; the Engineering Construction Industry Training Board; the Equal Opportunities Commission; the Education Transfer Council; the Funding Agency for Schools; the Further Education Funding Council; the Higher Education Funding Council for England; Investors in People UK; the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority; Remploy Ltd.; the Student Loans Company; and, the Teacher Training Agency.

Those currently within the jurisdiction of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration are:

the Construction Industry Training Board; the Engineering Construction Industry Training Board; and, the Equal Opportunities Commission.

In addition, the following will be brought within his jurisdiction shortly by means of an Order in Council:

the British Educational Communications and Technology agency; the Further Education Funding Council; the Higher Education Funding Council for England; Investors in People UK; the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority; Remploy Ltd.; and, the Teacher Training Agency.

Dr. Tony Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment which of the advisory non-departmental public bodies sponsored by his Department publish *(a)* the minutes of meetings, *(b)* the agendas of meetings and documents for those meetings and *(c)* a register of members' interests; and whether in each case this is under a statutory requirement. [69836]

Mr. Mudie: The Advisory Committee for Disabled People in Employment and Training publishes minutes of meetings. This is not a statutory requirement.

None of the advisory bodies sponsored by DfEE publishes the agendas and documents of meetings. This is not a statutory requirement.

None of the advisory non-departmental public bodies sponsored by the Department publishes a register of members' interests. This is not a statutory requirement.

Dr. Tony Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment which of the executive non-departmental public bodies sponsored by his Department publish *(a)* the minutes of meetings, *(b)* the agendas of meetings and documents for those meetings and *(c)* a register of members' interests; and if in each case this is under a statutory requirement. [69950]

Mr. Mudie: *(a)* The Education Transfer Council; the Funding Agency for Schools; the Further Education Funding Council; the Higher Eduction Funding Council for England; the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority; and, the Teacher Training Agency. The publication of minutes is not a statutory requirement.

(b) The Teacher Training Agency. The publication of agendas and documents is not a statutory requirement.

(c) The British Educational Communications and Technology agency; the Construction Industry Training Board; the Engineering Construction Training Board; the Funding Agency for Schools; the Further Education Funding Council; the Higher Education Funding Council for England; Investors in People UK; the Student Loans Company; and, the Teacher Training Agency. Publishing the members' register of interests is not a statutory requirement.

Education Action Zones

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list the parliamentary constituencies which he has allocated as education action zones broken down into *(a)* urban and *(b)* rural areas. [72057]

Ms Estelle Morris: Education Action Zones are not allocated according to political constituencies, but reflect the groups of schools involved. The current 25 Education Action Zones occur mainly in urban areas; in two zones—Norfolk and North Somerset, the zone covers both urban and rural; and one—Hereford—covers a rural area. The associated political constituencies are as follows:

Education action zone	
Barnsley	Barnsley Central; Barnsley East and Mexborough; Barnsley West and Penistone;
Birmingham (Aston & Nechells)	Birmingham, Ladywood;
Birmingham (Kitts Green & Shard End)	Birmingham Hodge Hill; Birmingham Yardley;
Blackburn with Darwen	Blackburn; Rossendale and Darwen
East Brighton	Brighton Kemptown; Brighton Pavilion;
East Basildon	Basildon; Billericay; Saffron Walden;
North East Lincolnshire	Great Grimsby; Cleethorpes
Halifax	Halifax;
Herefordshire	Hereford;
Kingston upon Hull (Bransholme Area)	Hull East; North Hull;
Lambeth	Dulwich and West Norwood; Streatham; Vauxhall;
Leicester (South and West)	Leicester South; Leicester West;
Leigh	Leigh; Worsley; Wigan; Makerfield;
East Middlesbrough	Middlesbrough; Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland;
New Addington	Croydon Central;
Newcastle	Newcastle upon Tyne Central; Newcastle upon Tyne North;
Newham	Poplar and Canning Town; East Ham; West Ham
Nottingham (Bulwell)	Nottingham North;
Plymouth	Plymouth Devonport; Plymouth Sutton;
Salford & Trafford	Manchester Central; Salford; Stretford and Urmiston;
North East Sheffield	Sheffield Attercliffe; Sheffield Central; Sheffield Brightside;
South Tyneside	Jarrow; South Shields;
North Southwark	North Southwark and Bermondsey
Thetford	South West Norfolk;
North Somerset	Weston-super-Mare

An invitation to take part in a second round of EAZ applications was announced by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 15 January.

Pre-school Learning

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will estimate the number of children who received pre-school learning in *(a)* 1997 and *(b)* 1998. [73347]

Ms Hodge: The full-time equivalent number of pupils under compulsory school age receiving pre-school education was 773,693 in Spring 1997 and 811,958 in Spring 1998.

The Government have ensured that a place is available from September 1998 for every four year old whose parents want one. In addition, the Government have set a target to double the national participation rate of three year olds in free early education places to 66 per cent. by 2002.

Mathematics

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what minimum qualifications in mathematics are required to teach mathematics in *(a)* primary schools and *(b)* secondary schools; and what were the required qualifications 10 years ago. [74021]

Ms Estelle Morris: The minimum requirement now, and also 10 years ago, for employment as a teacher in a maintained school is the holding of Qualified Teacher Status awarded by the Secretary of State after successful completion of an approved course of initial teacher training (ITT). Decisions about the suitability of a candidate to be employed to teach a particular subject or age range are a matter for the employer.

All entrants to ITT courses since 1979 have been required to have attained at least a grade C in GCSE mathematics or a recognised equivalent. All current trainees on primary ITT courses must follow the national curriculum for primary mathematics. From this September, secondary trainees specialising in mathematics must follow the national curriculum for secondary mathematics.

Our Green Paper on the modernisation of the teaching profession, published in December, made clear our determination to ensure that all new teachers have a thorough grounding in numeracy, literacy and information and communication technology. As a first step, we propose to pilot this summer a numeracy test which we intend all trainees would have to pass, from summer 2000, before they could be qualified as teachers.

Education Expenditure

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how much money has been spent since 1 May 1997 on improvements to school buildings; and what proportion of this expenditure has been generated through public private partnerships. [74790]

Mr. Charles Clarke: The following tables show the annual capital expenditure on school building repair and improvement in England of 1997–98 and the estimated outturn for 1998–99.

The figures shown for Central Government allocations include capital grants to voluntary aided and special agreement schools, capital grants to non-maintained special schools and specialist schools and grants to grant maintained schools paid by The Funding Agency for Schools. In addition, these figures also include £84 million and £250 million in 1997–98 and 1998–99 respectively for New Deal for Schools and £90 million in 1998–99 for new capital support for schools—£35 million to remove outside toilets, £15 million to improve heating and £40 million to reduce Key Stage 1 class sizes.

The figures shown for the Local Authority expenditure include credit approvals, receipts and other Local Authority funds.

Capital expenditure on school buildings in England

£ million

	Central Government	*Local Authority*	*Total*
1997–98	191.5	1,107.2	1,298.7
1998–99[1]	451.9	1,128.9	1,580.8

[1] The figures for 1998–99 show the estimated outturn for the period.

Public private partnership expenditure on school buildings in England

£ million

	1997–98	*1998–99*	*Total*
Public Private Partnership (signed projects and in procurement)	21.7	160.9	182.6

National Grid for Learning

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on progress in the development of a national grid for learning. [74775]

Mr. Charles Clarke: Plans for the National Grid for Learning and developing in accordance with achieving the targets announced in the National Grid for Learning Challenge 'Open for Learning, Open for Business', launched in November 1998 by my right hon. Friend, the Prime Minister.

To date, £216 million has been allocated for schools' purchase of ICT networking and infrastructure. A further £450 million remains to be allocated over the years 2000–2002. This funding will enable all schools to be connected to the Grid by 2002, and will provide them with online access to a wide range of educational and managerial resources.

Student Grants

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what recent representations he has received about the changes to the student maintenance grant scheme. [74778]

Mr. Mudie: We have received a number of recent representations on the new arrangements for student support in higher education. We invited representations from key interested bodies, including the National Union of Students, the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals, and the Local Government Association, in consulting them on the detail of the proposed changes to the arrangements in 1999–2000. We have also, outside those consultations, received representations from other interested bodies and individuals. We carefully considered all of these when finalising the Education (Student Support) Regulations which came into force on 3 March this year.

University for Industry

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on progress of the new University for Industry. [74777]

Mr. Mudie: Considerable progress has been made towards the establishment of the University for Industry (Ufl). A three year Corporate Plan for the UFI's development and implementation was recently agreed by Ministers as the basis for future planning. The UFI organisation intends to publish a summary of its plans shortly. Dr. Anne Wright, UFI's Chief Executive, and Lord Dearing, the newly appointed Chairman, will drive forward the Ufl's development and implementation. The Ufl is on target to launch nationally in the year 2000.

Mr. Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how much had been spent from public funds on market research about the University for Industry by 28 February. [75290]

Mr. Mudie: The total amount that has been spent from public funds on market research about the University for Industry by 28 February is £317,900.

A-levels and Vocational Courses

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on the outcome of the Government's pilot schemes to *(a)* broaden A-levels and *(b)* upgrade vocational courses; and what plans he has to extend the pilot schemes nationwide. [74807]

Mr. Mudie: We expect to make an announcement shortly on the outcome of the consultation on taking forward the Government's commitment to support broader A levels and upgraded vocational qualifications, underpinned by rigorous standards and key skills. We have already made clear that the revised AS, A level and Advanced GNVQ—which are being developed in the light of a number of pilot schemes—will be introduced nationally for teaching from September 2000.

GCSE Examinations (Entry Fee)

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans he has to allow individual schools to charge parents entry fees for GCSE examinations where students fail to attend for the examination. [74701]

Mr. Mudie: Under Section 453 of the Education Act 1996, maintained schools are already able to recover GCSE examination entry fees from parents where a student fails without good reason to attend an examination.

Further Education Lecturers

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans he has to resolve the dispute between further education lecturers who continued to retain silver book conditions of service in further education colleges after incorporation in 1993 and their employers. [74698]

Mr. Mudie: It is for individual colleges to decide the conditions of service and what pay increases they will offer their staff, within the resources available to each college and within the framework of the Government's policy on public sector pay. Ministers, however, have consistently emphasised the importance of partnership between employers and staff in delivering the vital contribution of Further Education to our lifelong learning vision. We have been encouraging the national representative bodies to collaborate in the interests of that agenda, and we warmly welcome the announcement by National Association for Teachers in Further and Higher Education (NATFHE) and the Association of Colleges (AoC) of the end of their dispute.

European Funding

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment which countries have sent him copies of their EU Objective 3 Social Fund application forms; and if he will place translations of them in the Library. [74704]

Mr. Andrew Smith: I have so far received copies of the current Objective 3 application forms from Denmark, Spain, Belgium, Finland, Sweden and Germany. These have already been placed in the Library and I will ensure translations in English are available there.

NVQ Standards

Mr. Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what proportion of all those aged from 18 to 64 years, who are in employment or actively seeking employment, are qualified to NVQ *(a)* level 3 and *(b)* level 4 in (i) the United Kingdom and (ii) England; and what the figures were in each year from 1993. [75069]

Mr. Mudie *[holding answer 5 March 1999]:* The information requested is contained in the following table.

Proportion of economically active adults [1] qualified to at least

Year	NVQ level 3 or equivalent		NVQ level 4 or equivalent	
	UK	*England*	*UK*	*England*
1993	[2]38.8	38.2	[2]21.8	21.7
1994	[2]40.2	39.6	[2]22.7	22.6
1995	40.8	40.4	23.6	23.5
1996	41.9	41.6	23.8	23.9
1997	43.3	43.0	24.5	24.4
1998	45.4	45.0	26.2	26.0

[1] Adults consist of males aged 18–64 and females aged 18–59.
[2] Figures are for Great Britain only.
Source:
Labour Force Survey, Autumn quarters

All-age Special Schools

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assessment he has made of the *(a)* benefits and *(b)* disadvantages of all-age special schools; and if he will make a statement. [75490]

Mr. Charles Clarke: When deciding statutory proposals to alter or establish special schools, my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State, takes account of professional advice from Ofsted, which will address issues such as the number and age range of the proposed pupil population and the suitability of provision to meet their special educational needs.

Teachers (Pension Scheme)

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment when he expects to receive the Working Group's report on the long-term examination of the teachers' pension scheme. [75073]

Mr. Charles Clarke: I have received the Working Group's report and am currently considering its findings and recommendations.

Foreign Language Teaching

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) what plans he has to end the statutory requirement for 14 to 16-year-old pupils to be taught a foreign language; [75410]

(2) if he will make a statement on the requirement for compulsory foreign language study as part of the national curriculum. [75411]

Ms Estelle Morris: We have no plans to end the statutory requirement for 14 to 16-year-olds to be taught a modern foreign language. We recognise the importance of foreign language learning and are considering ways of strengthening its teaching in schools.

Education Spending (Cumbria)

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) for what reasons his press notice LPN 41/99 is not available on the departmental internet; [75285]

(2) for what reason departmental press officers telephoned media outlets in Cumbria asking them not to use the press release of 24 February which they had just issued; [75286]

(3) what representations he has received from Cumbria county council since the issue of his press release on 24 February; [75287]

(4) what powers he has to compel Cumbria county council to spend on education the moneys he has allocated to it; [75288]

(5) what steps he will take *(a)* to monitor and *(b)* to enforce compliance with his request to Cumbria county council to spend their full standard spending assessment on education. [75289]

Ms Estelle Morris: The central Government grant that supports Standard Spending provision is unhypothecated. Nevertheless, we have examined local authority budget proposals in the public domain, for evidence that they have reflected the increased funding in their education budgets. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State wrote to the Leader of Cumbria county council in February to urge them to consider their plans and use all of the increase to support education, and a press notice was drafted to that effect. I am pleased to say that, since then, we have been informed by the county council that they do intend to reflect their full education SSA increase of £9.4 million (5.0 per cent.) in their 1999–2000 education budget.

CABINET OFFICE

Polling Organisations

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office if he will establish an appropriate body, with a remit equivalent to the Advisory Committee on Advertising, to check the competence and propriety of polling organisations bidding for Government work. [75209]

Mr. Kilfoyle: No. Decisions on awarding Government contracts to polling organisations are subject to the same strict requirements of value for money as any other category of Government procurement. In particular, the process of evaluating tenders includes an assessment of the competence of the tenderers to deliver the work required.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Mediation

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: To ask the Minister of State, Lord Chancellor's Department what funding he plans to make available for the Surrey Mediation Forum. [74682]

Mr. Hoon: None. It has not been the Government's policy to provide core funding to individual or local mediation organisations, although some support is provided in family mediation to national representative organisations for the development of the family mediation function.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: To ask the Minister of State, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans he has to assist the development of a national mediation council. [74683]

Mr. Hoon: None, although some support has been provided in family mediation to national representative organisations for the development of the family mediation function.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: To ask the Minister of State, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans he has to ensure common standards of practice between the private and legally aided mediation sectors. [74681]

Mr. Hoon: The Government are not aware that there are distinct private and legally aided mediation sectors. Individual family mediators, however, undertake both private and publicly funded work. The standards of practice required for publicly funded family mediation work are set out in the contracts individual family mediators have with the Legal Aid Board.

Woolf Reforms

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: To ask the Minister of State, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will make a statement on the implementation of the Woolf reforms on the conduct of litigation. [74684]

Mr. Hoon: The first phase of civil justice reforms will be introduced on 26 April. Those reforms represent a modernisation of the civil justice system, which is aimed at making it quicker, simpler and less costly to its users. Judicial case management will control the conduct of litigation, directing the work to be done in preparing a case for trial. This will ensure the time is in proportion to the complexity of that case and the issues at stake.

Civil Procedure Rules

Mr. Garnier: To ask the Minister of State, Lord Chancellor's Department if the Lord Chancellor will designate one particular publication of the new civil procedure rules as the official version to be used by judges and practitioners in court. [R] [74765]

Mr. Hoon: The Department has no intention of designating one publication as the preferred version.

Conditional Fee Arrangements

Mr. Garnier: To ask the Minister of State, Lord Chancellor's Department what assessment he has

made of the current availability of *(a)* contingent and *(b)* after-the-event insurance to cover conditional fee arrangements. [R] [74764]

Mr. Hoon: The discussions I and my officials have had with the insurance industry have clearly shown us that the provision of legal expenses insurance, both before the event and after the event, is diverse and considerable. Insurance aimed specifically at conditional fee agreements is almost exclusively after-the-event insurance, and the principal providers of insurance to underpin conditional fee agreements are well known. There is an increasing interest for insurance to underpin conditional fee agreements for proceedings other than personal injury cases. There are several well-known products in relation to personal injury cases, including the product developed jointly with the Law Society. All the indications are that good cases have no difficulty in obtaining insurance and that the market is maturing with the experience of nearly three and half years of operation. My officials keep in regular contact with the industry.

Lord Chancellor

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Minister of State, Lord Chancellor's Department what was the cost to the public purse of printing and sending out the letters from the Lord Chancellor to promote the application by Mr. Andrew Patrick to re-join the Garrick Club; and if the Lord Chancellor intends to repay the cost. [75155]

Mr. Hoon: The approximate costs were:

	£
Postage	9.80
Stationery	7.84
Typing	6.98
Total	24.62

The Lord Chancellor has repaid these costs.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Minister of State, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will estimate the man-hours used by the Lord Chancellor's Diary Secretary in pursuing replies to the invitation sent out by the Lord Chancellor in connection with the re-election of Mr. Andrew Patrick to the Garrick Club; and what was the cost incurred. [75154]

Mr. Hoon: None. Most of those written to have already replied. The Diary Secretary will not be pursuing the outstanding invitations.

HEALTH

Hospitals (Winter Pressures)

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the hospitals in the North and South Thames Regions which have received winter pressures money this winter, indicating the amounts received. [65491]

Mr. Denham: Information on winter pressures allocations by health authority is shown in the table. The information on individual hospitals is not available centrally in the form requested.

Additional resources for winter pressure 1998–99

	June 1998 allocation (Thousand)	*October/November allocation (Thousand)*	*Total*
North Thames HAs			
Barking and Havering	540	1,322	1,862
Barnet	441	1,080	1,521
Brent and Harrow	679	1,661	2,340
Camden and Islington	715	1,749	2,464
Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow	1,021	2,498	3,519
East and North Herts	583	1,427	2,010
East London and City	1,042	2,548	3,590
Enfield and Haringey	706	1,727	2,433
Hillingdon	336	821	1,157
Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster	602	1,474	2,076
North Essex	1,051	2,572	3,623
Redbridge and Waltham Forest	657	1,607	2,264
South Essex	860	2,105	2,965
West Hertfordshire	667	1,632	2,299
Total	9,900	24,223	34,123
South Thames HAs			
Bexley and Greenwich	550	1,547	2,097
Bromley	385	936	1,321
Croydon	440	1,061	1,501
Kingston and Richmond	425	1,087	1,512
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham	1,150	3,010	4,160
Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth	1,070	2,252	3,322
East Kent	925	2,009	2,934
Eastern Surrey	409	1,271	1,680
East Sussex	855	2,587	3,442
West Kent	1,275	2,824	4,099
Western Surrey	900	1,906	2,806
West Sussex	995	2,376	3,371
Total	9,379	22,865	32,244

NHS Staff (Pay)

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the cost of the proposed salary rises for NHS staff in England *(a)* in total and *(b)* broken down by category. [69992]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 8 February 1999]:* Until the negotiations with non-Review Body staff groups have been completed it will not be possible to estimate the total cost of this year's pay awards. Estimates for the costs of the Review Body awards are set out as follows:

	£ million
Nurses	370
Professions Allied to Medicine	60
Hospital and Community Health Service	
Doctors and Dentists	120
Family Health Service	
Doctors and Dentists	130

Community Psychiatric Nurses

Sir Alastair Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many community psychiatric nurses there were in each health region in England in each of the last three years. [73227]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is shown in the table.

National Health Service hospital and community health services: Nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff in the community psychiatry area of work by regional office areas In England as at 30 September of each year

Whole-time equivalents

	1995	*1996*	*1997*
England	9,540	10,530	10,720
Anglia and Oxford	900	1,020	880
North Thames	1,900	2,040	1,790
North West	1,110	1,170	1,280
Northern and Yorkshire	1,280	1,260	1,540
South and West	940	1,050	1,120
South Thames	1,510	1,900	1,960
Trent	1,180	1,270	1,270
West Midlands	730	810	890
Other	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—

[1] Less than five but more than zero

Notes:
1. Figures exclude any learners and agency staff
2. Figures are rounded to the nearest ten

Others include staff in Special Health Authorities, other Statutory Authorities, Directly Managed Units and some other organisations who employ NHS staff

Source:
Department of Health Non-Medical Workforce Census

Schizophrenia Patients

Sir Alastair Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people with a main diagnosis of schizophrenia psychoses were admitted for a hospital stay more than once during the last year in each health region in England. [73232]

Mr. Hutton: Information on the number of times patients have been admitted more than once during the year are not held centrally.

The following table shows the estimated number of finished consultant episodes by health region of treatment where the primary diagnosis was schizophrenia psychoses, 1997–98.

Estimated finished consultant episodes with a primary diagnosis of schizophrenia, by health authority of treatment, 1997–98

Health Authority	*Number*
England	33,910
Northern and Yorkshire	3,780
Trent	1,800
Anglia and Oxford	2,810
North Thames	7,730
South Thames	4,060
South and West	4,590
West Midlands	3,130
North West	6,010

Notes:
1. Data have been rounded
2. Figures for 1997–98 are provisional, no adjustments have been made for shortfalls in data (ie the data are ungrossed)

Source:
Hospital Episode Statistics

Diabetes (Prescriptions)

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what is the average cost per week of prescriptions for sufferers from diabetes; [73317]

(2) for what reasons diabetes sufferers are eligible for free prescriptions. [73315]

Mr. Denham: In 1997 the net ingredient cost of drugs used in the treatment of diabetes and dispensed in the community in England was £142.6 million, an average of £2.7 million a week. The net ingredient cost is the basic cost of a drug and does not take account of discounts, dispensing costs, fees or any prescription charge income.

Diabetes sufferers are eligible for free prescriptions, except where treatment is by diet alone, as diabetes was identified in 1968 as one of a number of readily identifiable, permanent, life long conditions requiring regular or extensive medication.

Speech Therapists (Cumbria)

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the number of speech therapists required in Cumbria; and how many were in post at the latest available date. [73480]

Mr. Denham: North Cumbria Health Authority has agreed with local National Health Service trusts and Cumbria Education Authority that the number of speech and language therapists should be increased by four. Recruitment to these posts is currently underway.

22 whole-time equivalent staff classed as therapists working in the speech and language therapy area of work were in post in North Cumbria on 30 September 1997.

Source:
Department of Health Annual Non-Medical Workforce Census.

Health Services Accreditation

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to maintain the work and methodology of Health Services Accreditation for use by the NHS. [73894]

Mr. Denham: The health authorities which sponsor the work of Health Services Accreditation will be discussing with a range of interested parties including the National Health Service Executive how the work and methodologies of that body might be of use to the NHS in the future.

Dental Services

Jackie Ballard: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of dental contract holders in each health authority area have had *(a)* an increase in the number of registrations and *(b)* a decrease in the number of registrations in the most recent year for which figures are available. [74262]

Mr. Denham: Information on the percentage of dental contract holders having a National Health Service list which increased or decreased between January 1998 and January 1999 (the latest date for which information is available) has been placed in the Library. The percentage increases and decreases may not add to 100 because some dentists will have an unchanged list size. The comparisons are for dentists with contracts open at both January 1998 and January 1999 and exclude dentists with no registrations on both dates. Dentists with contracts in several health authorities are counted in each health authority in which they have a contract but only once in the England total. The comparisons between January 1998 and January 1999 are affected by the reduction in the registration period to 15 months.

Jackie Ballard: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what is the average length of time taken to process grant applications under the Investing in Dentistry Scheme; [74260]

(2) Health what percentage of the Investing in Dentistry Scheme funding has been spent on *(a)* set up costs and *(b)* gross fees. [74261]

Mr. Denham: Each investing in dentistry funding request is dealt with as quickly as possible. The time taken to process a grant application depends on many factors, including the number of proposals received, the complexity of the request, and whether further information is required before a decision can be made.

To date, just over £7.5 million of investing in dentistry grants have been approved to enable over 600,000 patients to register with an National Health Service dentist, giving rise to treatment costs estimated to be around £2.5 million in 1998–99.

Tavistock Institute Research

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the NFM Tavistock Institute research project on mediation in public law and social services departments. [74680]

Mr. Hutton: In 1995 the Department funded a pilot project on child protection mediation. The report highlighted the advantages of effective dispute resolution as well as the difficulties of ensuring full inter-agency co-operation. The small number of cases involved suggest that further developmental work will be needed if advance dispute resolution is to make a major contribution in the handling of public law cases.

Fireworks

Mr. Sawford: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many injuries resulting from accidents involving fireworks were reported in Great Britain for each year from 1990 to 1997, broken down by hospital casualty unit. [74635]

Dr. Howells: I have been asked to reply.

The DTI's annual census of fireworks injuries is conducted over a four week period taking in the run-up to 5 November and a few days afterwards. Details of injuries recorded at each NHS Trust are available only for the years 1996 and 1997. Information for the years 1992 to 1995 is recorded by regional and district health authorities but no information on a regional basis is recorded for 1991. Copies of the annual reports of firework injuries for each of these years were placed in the Library as soon as they were published. A breakdown of the injuries recorded by each A&E unit for the years 1992 to 1995 could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

No reliable estimates of fireworks injuries outside the census period can be made because the numbers are too small to be extrapolated from data in the Home Accident Surveillance System.

Appointments

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list by region the appointments he has made since his appointment; and if he will list the known political affiliations of appointees. [75027]

Mr. Denham: Information on the political activity of those appointed to National Health Service boards is contained in the Department of Health's Public Appointments Annual Report. This Report is currently being prepared for all those in post at 1 March 1999 and will be published in June. Copies of last year's report, giving details of all those appointed at 1 March 1998, are available in the Library.

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the NHS trust and health authority appointments which were not made by the due date; and which remained outstanding on 1 March. [74833]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 5 March 1999]:* The information requested is shown in the table.

List of Health Authority and National Health Service Trust Appointments which expired in 1998 and for which no appointment had been made by 1 March 1999

Region/body	*Number of Chairs*	*Number of non-Executives*
Eastern		
Essex Rivers Healthcare NHS Trust	0	1
Horizon NHS Trust	0	1
North West		
Chester and Halton Community NHS Trust	1	2
Christie Hospital NHS Trust	1	2
Clatterbridge Centre for Oncology NHS Trust	1	2
Liverpool Women's Hospital NHS Trust	0	1
Manchester Health Authority	0	1
Mancunian Community Health NHS Trust	0	1
Tameside and Glossop Community and Priority Services NHS Trust	0	1
Warrington Community NHS Trust	0	2
Wirral Hospital NHS Trust	0	1

List of Health Authority and National Health Service Trust Appointments which expired in 1998 and for which no appointment had been made by 1 March 1999

Region/body	Number of Chairs	Number of non-Executives
Northern and Yorkshire		
Calderdale and Kirklees Health Authority	0	1
London		
BHB Community Healthcare NHS Trust	0	1
City and Hackney Community Services NHS Trust	0	2
Croydon Community Health NHS Trust	0	1
Enfield Community Care NHS Trust	0	1
Hillingdon Hospital NHS Trust	0	2
Moorfields Eye Hospital NHS Trust	0	1
North Middlesex Hospital NHS Trust	0	1
Pathfinder Mental Health Services NHS Trust	0	1
Trent		
Central Nottinghamshire Healthcare NHS Trust	0	1
Grantham and District Hospital NHS Trust	0	1
South East		
East Surrey Health Authority	0	2
South West		
Bath Mental Healthcare NHS Trust	0	1
Gloucestershire Ambulance Service NHS Trust	0	1
Gloucestershire Royal NHS Trust	1	0
Royal United Hospital Bath NHS Trust	0	1
West Midlands		
Birmingham Heartlands and Solihull (Teaching) Hospitals NHS Trust	0	1
Walsall Community Health NHS Trust	0	1
Total	4	35

Human Vaccines (Bovine Material)

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how those human vaccines which contained bovine material prohibited for use in the human food chain were disposed of when a ban was introduced on the use of those vaccines; [75095]

(2) on what date it was decided to discontinue use of human vaccines which contained bovine materials prohibited for use in the human food chain; [75094]

(3) if he will make a statement on the use prior to 1996 in human vaccines of bovine material prohibited for use in the food chain. [75096]

Ms Jowell: Vaccines licensed for use in the United Kingdom do not contain, in the finished product, bovine materials prohibited for use in the human food chain. However, bovine material is used in the early stage of manufacture of some vaccines which are subject to rigorously controlled purification processes.

In March 1989, the Committee of the Safety of Medicines issued guidelines regarding the controls on the sourcing of bovine material used in the manufacture of pharmaceuticals. These were superseded by 'Guidelines for Minimising the Risk of Transmitting Agents causing Spongiform Encephalopathies via Medicinal Products' from the Committee for Proprietary Medicinal Products in 1992. The guidelines have been updated to reflect developments in scientific knowledge and require animal-derived materials to be sourced from countries with no reported cases of bovine spongiform encephalopathy.

Children Act 1989

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will introduce legislation to amend section 4 of Children Act 1989 to provide for a duty to assist. [74726]

Mr. Hutton: As announced in the Response to the Children's Safeguards Review on 5 November 1998, the Government intend legislating to replace the current power to assist under Section 24 of the Children Act 1989 with a duty to assess and meet the needs of care leavers up to the age of 18 and will study the costs, limitations and affordability of extending this duty until the young person reaches the age of 21.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will assess the impact of Quality Protects plans on inter-departmental co-ordination between housing and social services departments; and if he will make a statement on the enforcement of existing rules under the Children Act 1989. [74723]

Mr. Hutton: The Quality Protects programme is directed at the local authority as a whole, including housing and social services departments, and is intended to promote corporate commitment to delivering improved services for children. Management Action Plans submitted to the Department by local authorities are currently being evaluated, and progress in implementation will be monitored by the Government. The Government have also stated in the White Paper "Modernising Social Services" their intention to place a duty on the local authority as a whole in planning children's services and for all parties to participate in and take responsibility for their delivery.

Post-care Provision

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to ensure local authorities provide written guidance to persons leaving care. [74724]

Mr. Hutton: Every local authority should provide an easy to read guide to its services for young people when they leave care. The Government will address this subject in the guidance on leaving care they intend issuing later this year.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what *(a)* advice and *(b)* amenities are available to persons leaving care at 18 years; and if he will make a statement. [74725]

Mr. Hutton: Local authorities have duties and powers under the Children Act 1989 to advise, befriend and assist care leavers up to the age of 21. Extensive guidance on the exercise of these responsibilities was issued to accompany the Children Act but further guidance will be issued later this year, as announced in the Government's Response to the Children's Safeguards Review.

Quality Protects Action Plans

Mr. Dawson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the Quality Protects action plans submitted by local authorities; and if he will make a statement. [75299]

Mr. Hutton: All local authorities submitted their Quality Protects Management Action Plans by the closing date of 31 January 1999. These are currently being evaluated by the Department's Social Services Inspectorate. The Department will publish a national overview report of the Management Action Plans when these evaluations have been completed.

Foster Care

Mr. Dawson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if, following the review of safeguards for children living away from home, he will ensure that children in all forms of foster care are protected from corporal punishment. [75156]

Mr. Hutton: Corporal punishment is not permitted by law, with the exception that a parent or someone acting in loco parentis is entitled to administer corporal punishment that is reasonable in all the circumstances. Legislation prohibits corporal punishment in children's homes, foster care and registered care homes.

Current legislation does not prevent the use of corporal punishment by private foster carers. Children Act guidance on assessing the suitability of private foster carers states that social workers should explore the (private) foster carers' views on discipline, including their preparedness to accept that corporal punishment is inappropriate for children who are privately fostered. A consultation document will be issued shortly on how the law can be improved in order to better protect children.

Medicines (Children)

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what assessment the Government have made under the licensing process of the side-effects of medicines used on children; [75473]

(2) if he will assess the applicability for the United Kingdom of the system for licensing medicines for children in the United States, which will compel pharmaceutical companies to provide information about the effects of their drugs on children; [75474]

(3) what is the incidence of adverse reaction of children to *(a)* unlicensed and *(b)* off-label treatments. [75472]

Ms Jowell: There is no centrally held record of suspected adverse reactions to medicines and the incidence is not therefore known. However, the Yellow Card Scheme exists for health professionals to report suspected adverse reactions to the Medicines Control Agency and Committee on Safety of Medicines on a voluntary basis. This scheme has been successful in identifying new hazards to medicines so that prescribers may be informed about the safe use of medicines. In addition, a pilot scheme has been set up in the Trent Region, with funding from the Medicines Control Agency, to monitor the safety of medicines in children. This includes suspected adverse reaction reports associated with unlicensed and off-label usage of medicines in children.

When an application is made for a licence for a medicine for use in children, the evidence submitted in support of the quality, safety and efficacy of the medicine is evaluated. The side-effects occurring during the paediatric clinical trials are assessed as part of this evaluation. A final decision regarding the grant of a licence for use in children is made after weighing the potential benefits of the proposed treatment against the potential risks.

Currently in the United Kingdom the decision to undertake appropriate trials to support an application for a licence for use of a medicine in the treatment of children rests with pharmaceutical companies. A recently adopted European guideline encourages the pharmaceutical industry to undertake appropriate clinical trials on products with anticipated therapeutic benefits in children. However, if the guidance does not have the effect of increasing the availability of appropriate medicinal products for children, there is scope for the UK and other Member States to raise with the European Commission the question of whether legislation similar to that in operation in the United States should be introduced to strengthen the European regulatory framework.

Nurses (Training)

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what perecentage of nurses' training takes place in hospital wards; and if he will make a statement. [75009]

Mr. Denham: Pre-registration nurse education programmes consist of a minimum of 4,600 hours theoretical and practical instruction of which no less than 50 per cent., or 2,300 hours, are spent in clinical placements dealing directly with patients. The large majority of placements will take place in hospital wards although community, primary care and other clinical settings are also used.

Residential and Nursing Care

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the cost to *(a)* nursing and *(b)* residential home owners of the implementation of the new national required standards for residential and nursing homes over the next five year period. [74565]

Mr. Hutton: We intend to publish the proposed standards for older people in residential care, produced by the Centre for Policy on Ageing, for consultation shortly. We will also consider the detailed cost implications for nursing home and residential care home owners of introducing the standards prior to taking any decision about their implementation.

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what provision will be made in National Health Service funding 1999–2000 to independent providers of residential and nursing care to meet the cost of pay increases awarded to nurses and auxiliary nurses; and if he will make a statement. [73981]

Mr. Hutton: None. Independent providers of residential and nursing care homes are free to decide on the pay rates for their staff according to their particular requirements and circumstances.

TREASURY

Agenda 2000

Mr. David Heath: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the effect on the British rebate under the Fontainebleau Agreement of the implementation of the Agenda 2000 proposals for co-financing the Common Agricultural Policy in the event of *(a)* an increase in overall support to British agriculture and *(b)* an increase in agricultural support provided from UK domestic funds. [71648]

Ms Hewitt: Cofinancing of the CAP would not affect overall support to agriculture, in the UK or other member states. It would increase support provided directly by member states, but reduce the support provided by the EC.

Any increase in agricultural support from UK domestic funds would, of itself, have no effect on the UK rebate. Any such increase which resulted from cofinancing would be more than matched—even after the abatement—by a reduction in UK contributions to the EU. The Commission has estimated (in its report on Own Resources) that cofinancing of 25 per cent. of CAP direct aids would reduce the UK net contribution by £146 million in 2006.

Arms Exports

Mr. David Heath: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what significant inaccuracies there have been in HM Customs and Excise data relating to the value of arms exports to individual countries; [71659]

(2) what factors underlie the significant inaccuracies found in HM Customs and Excise data relating to the value of arms exports to individual countries. [71660]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answers 16 February 1999]:* HM Customs and Excise collect data on exports from the UK as an input to the Balance Of Payments estimation, and to meet the needs of the UK government and business users for trade information. An extensive validation programme is undertaken on the information received by Customs to ensure suitability of the data for those purposes, but it would not be feasible thoroughly to check all export declarations under £3 million. Information specifically relating to arms exports has never had its accuracies questioned in the past.

But when the detailed arms exports data were examined, errors of country or commodity code were found which would have made the information unreliable. This information therefore had to be re-checked.

Minimum Wage

Mr. Sarwar: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many workers he expects to benefit from the introduction of the national minimum wage in the constituency of Glasgow, Govan. [74882]

Ms Hewitt: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Director of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Dr. M. P. G. Pepper to Mr. Mohammad Sarwar, dated 8 March 1999:

In the absence of the Director of the Office for National Statistics (ONS), I have been asked to reply to your recent question on the number of people who will benefit from the introduction of the proposed national minimum wage (NMW).

The New Earnings Survey (NES) can provide earnings data for small geographical areas. However, the release of NES data is restricted to figures which are derived from a sufficiently large sample of employees, and have an acceptable level of accuracy.

Estimates of the proportion of people who are currently earning below the proposed minimum wage for a range of geographical areas have been placed in the House of Commons Library under the title of 'New Earnings Survey 1998—National Minimum Wage Distribution Tables'. These include available information for the Glasgow Govan constituency. The tables provide an historical position against the 1998 values of the proposed NMW, and make no judgement on whether its introduction will have any effect on the number of jobs.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what percentages of suspect BSE cases were subsequently confirmed in each year from 1988 to 1997. [75062]

Mr. Nick Brown: For the years 1988–97 inclusive, the percentage of animals restricted in Great Britain as BSE suspects and subsequently confirmed as having BSE are given in the following table:

Year	*Restricted*	*Confirmed*	*Percentage confirmed*
1988	2,516	2,184	86.80
1989	8,447	7,137	84.49
1990	17,323	14,181	81.86
1991	30,009	25,032	83.41
1992	44,846	36,682	81.80
1993	42,931	34,370	80.06
1994	30,261	23,945	79.13
1995	17,946	14,302	79.69
1996	10,701	8,016	74.91
1997	5,607	4,312	76.90

Foie Gras Production

Mr. Baker: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on his policy in respect of foie gras production within the EU. [74832]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 5 March 1999]:* We are opposed to the force feeding of ducks and geese to produce foie gras—a practice which is not followed in the United Kingdom. We have therefore been glad to have the opportunity, in the Standing Committee of the European Convention for the Protection of Animals Kept for Farming Purposes, to join in the negotiation of a Recommendation on the welfare of ducks and geese. We

are pressing there for the highest standards that can be negotiated, as Recommendations adopted by the Council of Europe in this way subsequently serve as the basis for EU Directives.

Genetically Modified Foods

Mr. Baker: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what powers the Government have to ban the import of genetically modified food. [74828]

Mr. Rooker *[holding answer 5 March 1999]:* Under Article 12 of the EC Novel Foods Regulation (258/97), a Member State may act to either temporarily restrict or suspend the trade in, and the use of, an approved novel food or food ingredient in its territory if as a result of new information, or a reassessment of existing information, it has detailed grounds for believing that its use endangers human health or the environment. In such cases it is required to immediately inform the European Commission of its decision. The European Commission then has three months from the date of referral to resolve the matter or adopt the Member State's proposed measure. Under the World Trade Organisation Agreement on the Application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures, WTO members have the right to take measures necessary for the protection of human, animal or plant life or health, provided that these are based on scientific principles and are not maintained without sufficient scientific evidence.

Milk Quotas

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the progress made on the abolition of milk quotas in the EU. [75047]

Mr. Rooker: In the negotiations which are continuing in the Agriculture Council my right hon. Friend is continuing to press for a substantial reform of the dairy regime including a clear end date for milk quotas.

Lobbyists

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the role of professional lobbyists in formulating policy in his Department. [74353]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 1 March 1999]:* Any contact with lobbyists by Ministers and civil servants in this Department is conducted in accordance with the "Ministerial Code and Guidance for Civil Servants: Contact with Lobbyists".

Decommissioning

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on what projects Spain spent the funding it received under the EU scheme to reduce fishing levels. [74505]

Mr. Morley: We do not have details of actual spending by Spain under Council Regulation 3699/93 during the current structural programme (1994–99). However their planned spending on measures to reduce fishing effort during this period, as set out in their fisheries aid programme approved by the European Commission, was as follows:

Measure	*Projects*	*EU aid* [1]	*National aid* [1]
Decommissioning			
Objective 1	700	275.0	118.0
Non Objective 1	200	35.9	35.9
Joint Enterprises			
Objective 1	55	70.0	30.0
Non Objective	4	3.5	3.5
Temporary Joint Ventures			
Objective 1	30	11.0	5.0
Non Objective 1	6	1.5	1.5

[1] Mecu

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) how many vessels have been scrapped under the EU scheme to reduce fishing levels by *(a)* the United Kingdom, *(b)* Spain, *(c)* Italy, *(d)* Portugal, *(e)* Greece, *(f)* France, *(g)* Germany, *(h)* the Netherlands and *(i)* Denmark; [74502]

(2) what the funding received by the UK under the EU scheme to reduce fishing levels was spent on. [74534]

Mr. Morley: Under the current EU scheme provided for in Council Regulation 3699/93, 547 vessels have been decommissioned in the UK at public expense. In recognition of their historical significance, a small number of these were placed in the care of registered museums rather than scrapped. My Department does not have this information for other member states, although information on changes in the tonnage and power of all member states' fleets up to the end of 1996 was published in the European Commission's report on the outcome of the third Multi-Annual Guidance Programme. This was the subject of MAFF Explanatory Memorandum Number 9893/97 submitted on 28 July 1997.

This accounts for all of the £14,375,370 received by the UK in reimbursement from the EU towards the cost of permanent reductions in fishing capacity.

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) if decommissioning money received by the United Kingdom under the EU scheme to reduce fishing levels was made available in the United Kingdom to vessels fishing outside the EU waters; [74503]

(2) what proportion of vessels scrapped under the EU scheme to reduce fishing levels were fishing outside the EU waters. [74504]

Mr. Morley: UK decommissioning schemes under Council Regulation 3699/93 have been limited to vessels holding licences authorising them to fish in Community waters. Although this has included certain vessels also authorised to fish outside EU waters, no vessels with material records of fishing outside EU waters have been decommissioned at public expense.

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what determined the levels of funding received by *(a)* Spain and *(b)* the United Kingdom under the EU scheme to reduce fishing levels. [74506]

Mr. Morley: Funds for measures covered by Council Regulation 3699/93 were allocated by the European Union to Member States on the basis of programmes for structural aid for 1994–99. Account was taken of a number of factors including respective fleet sizes and the relative development of the regions concerned. Funding actually paid by the EU to Member States is determined by the amount of eligible expenditure that has been incurred.

Local Authority Inspections (Restaurants)

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what national statistics are compiled by his Department in respect of local restaurant inspections carried out by local authorities. [74538]

Mr. Rooker: Statistics on inspections of restaurants and other caterers (as a single category) are compiled by the Ministry from returns submitted by local authorities in the United Kingdom as part of the information for the annual return we are required to make to the Commission under article 14 of the Council Directive on the official control of foodstuffs (89/397/EEC).

A copy of the latest return and summary statistics for the United Kingdom and for England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland separately were recently placed in the Library of the House.

Imported Meats (Antibiotics)

Mr. Gray: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement about the use of antibiotics in imported meats. [74695]

Mr. Rooker: The use of antibiotic feed additives outside the EU and the consequences for imported meats was considered by the Council of Agriculture Ministers and the EU Commission following the recent decision to ban the use of certain antibiotic growth promoters. The Council and Commission issued a joint declaration which emphasises the importance of protecting consumers' health and the need not to prejudice the competitive position of European producers, whilst complying with the Union's international commitments. The Council called for a report from the Commission before 30 June 199 which will examine how to ensure that third countries comply with rules for feed additives, in particular antibiotics, which are at least equivalent to those laid down at Community level.

Live Animal Exports

Mr. Prosser: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to persuade EU partners, when undertaking the review of Council Directive 91/628/EEC required by Article 13 of that Directive, to abandon the long distance transport of live farm animals throughout the European Union and replace such transport with a trade in meat and carcases; and if he will make a statement. [74324]

Mr. Morley: We attach great importance to this review, which is required to take place this year. We will be pressing the European Commission to bring it forward to time. In contacts with other Member States in the run-up to the review, we shall continue to press the case for reduced journey times to slaughter, for the highest welfare standards to be set and our view that a carcase trade is preferable to long distance live transports for slaughter.

Mr. Prosser: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in respect of what proportion of consignments of live sheep exported from the UK he has requested in the last year the competent authorities in other Member States to confirm that the arrangements set out in the route plan for giving animals rest, liquid and food are adhered to; and if he will make a statement. [74322]

Mr. Morley: Monitoring compliance with route plans once sheep have left Great Britain is the responsibility of the Member States concerned. Officials of this Department maintain contacts with their opposite numbers in the other Member States to try and ensure that there is effective enforcement and that information concerning contraventions is sent back to us. We cannot expect the competent authorities concerned to check on large numbers of consignments nominated by us, but they have helped us on a case by case basis on a small proportion of consignments in the last year. We also look to the European Commission to fulfil its responsibility to ensure that Member States implement and enforce the requirements.

Animals (Religious Slaughter)

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) if he will list the major outlets for religiously slaughtered meat not consumed by adherents, indicating how many tonnes entered the food chain for the last year for which figures are available; [73324]

(2) what tonnage of animals religiously slaughtered in Britain in the last year for which figures are available was exported overseas; and to which countries. [73321]

Mr. Morley: Figures on these matters do not separately distinguish meat produced by the religious slaughter of animals.

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many slaughterhouses there are in the UK; how many undertake religious slaughter; and what is the average number of times that *(a)* slaughterhouses undertaking religious slaughter and *(b)* other slaughterhouses have been inspected in each of the last two years. [73686]

Mr. Morley: Details of licensed slaughterhouses in England and Wales are published in the Meat Hygiene Enforcement Report, which is placed in the Library of the House each month. Information is not held on those adopting religious methods of slaughter or the average number of times these methods are used. A member of the Meat Hygiene Service inspection team is present every day during operating periods.

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to label religiously slaughtered meat. [73346]

Mr. Morley: We have no such plans at present.

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list for each species the total

number of animals religiously slaughtered in the UK for the last year for which figures are available. [73484]

Mr. Morley: Information is not kept separately for the numbers of animals slaughtered by the religious or by other approved methods. The next biennial review of welfare at slaughter standards by the Meat Hygiene Service, which will take place later this year, has been designed to provide information on slaughter practices.

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list *(a)* the breaches of the approved killing methods his inspectors have discovered over the last two years in slaughterhouses undertaking religious slaughter and *(b)* the penalties imposed on the operators in each case. [73498]

Mr. Morley: Official Veterinary Surgeons of the Meat Hygiene Service monitor compliance with welfare at slaughter legislation in licensed slaughterhouses daily during operation and take on-the-spot action to put right any problems found. Figures that are available relate to prosecutions, and none of the prosecutions taken under the Welfare of Animals (Slaughter or Killing) Regulations 1995 relates to breaches of approved killing methods for religious slaughter.

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the approved killing method for each species undergoing religious slaughter. [73320]

Mr. Morley: When slaughter is by the Jewish or Muslim method the Welfare of Animals (Slaughter or Killing) Regulations 1995 provide an exemption from the general requirement for animals to be stunned. Slaughter must be carried out without inflicting unnecessary suffering: in the case of cattle, sheep and goats by the severance of both carotid arteries and both jugular veins by rapid, uninterrupted movements of a knife and, in the case of turkeys, domestic fowl, guinea-fowl, ducks, geese or quail by the severance of both carotid arteries by rapid and uninterrupted movements of a knife.

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what estimate he has made of the proportion of an animal carcase religiously slaughtered which is consumed by adherents of the religion concerned; and what use is made of remaining edible parts of the carcase. [73483]

Mr. Morley: The acceptability for consumption of carcases and parts of carcases is a matter for the religious authorities.

Genetic Material

Mr. Livsey: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food who *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* carried out the tests conducted on Ciba-Geigy maize gluten feed to establish the effects of processing on modified and non-modified genetic material. [74429]

Mr. Rooker: In 1996, the Ministry commissioned tests at the Laboratory of the Government Chemist on samples of maize gluten feed, specifically to determine the effect of processing on DNA.

Japanese Whaling

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to the letter from the Parliamentary Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley), ref 123733, on Japanese whaling, if he will make a statement on the bilateral meeting with Japanese officials held on 8 February. [72895]

Mr. Morley: Whaling was only one of the issues discussed at the meeting in question; a large number of other environmental issues were discussed. The UK delegation made clear the UK's opposition to Japan's whaling activities, stressing in particular, our disappointment that Japan continues to whale under special permit and to ignore all IWC calls to halt scientific whaling in the Southern Ocean Sanctuary. We emphasised that the UK view does not consider that there is any scientific justification for Japanese scientific whaling and called upon Japan to restructure its research programmes so that its objectives could be achieved by non-lethal means. We also drew attention to the fact that the UK was not alone in expressing these views; a large majority of IWC members have also made clear their opposition to Japanese scientific whaling. Japan reiterated its formal position on this issue. I can assure my hon. Friend that we shall continue to raise this issue with Japan at every appropriate opportunity.

Hops

Mr. Paice: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the advice given by the EU Commission with regard to payment to hop producers under Regulation 1098/98 for hops planted during the winter 1997–98; and what discussion he has had with the Intervention Board for Agricultural Produce concerning the interpretation of that advice. [75282]

Mr. Rooker: MAFF has undertaken extensive discussion with the Intervention Board about payments to hop growers under the new EU special temporary measures for hops. Advice from the Commission has been sought and further clarification is awaited before any final decisions are taken.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 9 March 1999

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Departmental Expenditure

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Minister of State, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will list the expenditure incurred by his Department, agencies and non-departmental public bodies on *(a)* the setting up and *(b)* the operation of websites, indicating the cases in which the expenditure has been above that budgeted; and if he will list for each web site (i) the topics covered, (ii) the current average number of hits per month and (iii) the estimated expenditure on each web site for each of the next three years. [70968]

Mr. Hoon *[holding answer 15 February 1999]:* The information sought regarding the websites of my Department, agencies and non-departmental bodies is listed. In no case was expenditure above budgeting.

Websites

1. *The Lord Chancellor's Department*

   (a) Set up costs: £7,368

   (b) Operation costs: £16,200

   (c) Topics covered: What's New?, Press Notices, The Department, LCD Research, The Courts, Judges & QCs, Magistrates, Speeches, Consultation Papers, Access to Justice, Legal Aid, Civil Matters, Individual and Family Matters, Criminal Matters, Statute Law Database, Related Sites, and Complaints Procedures.

   (d) Average number of hits per month: 10,000

   (e) The estimated expenditure on the website for each of the next three years includes the appointment of a full-time web manager.
   (i) 2000–2001: £45,000
   (ii) 2001–2002: £45,000
   (iii) 2002–2003: £45,000

2. *The Court Service*

   (a) Set up costs: £18,542

   (b) Operating costs: £15,404

   (c) Topics covered: Court of Appeal and High Court judgments, Practice Directions, Daily Lists and Notices; Supreme Court Taxing Office; Crown Court Daily Lists and Warned Lists; county court contact details; court forms and information leaflets, the Court Service IT strategy, annual report and the Courts' Charter; the Office of Social Security and Child Support Commissioners and the Immigration Appellate Authority and links to the Lord Chancellor's website and to various other related sites.

   (d) Average number of hits per month: 50,377

   (e) The estimated expenditure on the website for each of the next three years:
   (i) 2000–2001: £18,000
   (ii) 2001–2002: £18,000
   (iii) 2002–2003: £18,000

3. *The Northern Ireland Court Service*

   (a) Set up costs: nil

   (b) Operating costs: nil. The NICS maintains a number of pages on the Northern Ireland Civil Service website.

   (c) Topics covered: Courts Charter and complaints procedures.

   (d) Average number of hits per month: not monitored by NICS.

   (e) The estimated expenditure on the website for each of the next three years:
   (i) 2000–2001: unknown at this stage
   (ii) 2001–2002: unknown at this stage
   (iii) 2002–2003: unknown at this stage

4. *The Public Trust Office*

   (a) Set up costs: £2,500

   (b) Operating costs: £2,000

   (c) Topics covered: introduction to the PTO; the work of its Divisions; and details of the complaints procedure.

   (d) Average number of hits per month: Not currently monitored. The PTO monitors the number of e-mails received.

   (e) The estimated expenditure on the website for each of the next three years:
   (i) 2000–2001: £5,000
   (ii) 2001–2002 and 2002–2003: With a view to Better Government targets, the website is to be developed further. Consideration will be given to the provision of forms for downloading and possible inter-active completion. Costs associated with this project will probably be in excess of £100,000.

5. *The Public Record Office*

   (a) Set up costs: nil

   (b) Operating costs: £14,250 (1998–99)

   (c) Topics covered: the public records, the services provided by the PRO and Family Records Centre, the operation of the public records system, the PRO contribution to the National Grid for Learning and information for records managers, conservators and the archives profession.

   (d) Average number of hits per month: 135,000

   (e) The estimated expenditure on the website for each of the next three years:
   (i) 2000–2001: £17,000
   (ii) 2001–2002: £22,000
   (iii) 2002–2003: £30,000

6. *Her Majesty's Land Registry*

   (a) Set up costs: £1,000

   (b) Operating costs: £8,675 (1998)

   (c) Topics covered: About the Land Registry; Exhibitions and events; How to complain; Press Notices; Areas served by the Land Registry; Direct Access Service; Fees calculators; On-line publications including Annual Report and Accounts; Business Plan; information leaflets; District Land Registries; Year 2000 Compliance Reports; Residential Property Price Reports; Guide to Land Registry services; Feedback facility

   (d) Average number of hits per month: 30,000

   (e) The estimated expenditure on the website for each of the next three years:
   (i) 2000–2001: £15,152
   (ii) 2001–2002: £15,152
   (iii) 2002–2003: £15,152

7. *The Law Commission*

   (a) Set up costs: £2,400

   (b) Operating costs: £10,675

   (c) Topics covered: a library containing the full texts of publications since March 1997; background information on the organisation and work of the Law Commission; details of current recruitment campaigns.

   (d) Average number of hits per month: 1,400

(e) The estimated expenditure on the website for each of the next three years:
(i) 2000–2001: £9,900
(ii) 2001–2002: £9,900
(iii) 2002–2003: £9,900

8. *The Lord Chancellor's Advisory Committee on Legal Education and Conduct (ACLEC)*

(a) Set up costs: £673

(b) Operating cots: £75

(c) Topics covered: Membership of the Committee and its members' biographies; the work of the Committee; Sub-Committees and Working Groups; and the Committee's publications.

(d) Average number of hits per month: 480

(e) The estimated expenditure on the website for each of the next three years: It is likely that ACLEC will be disestablished and the Committee is working on the premise that this will happen before the end of 1999. The Committee therefore has no plans to incur further expenditure on its website.

9. *The Judicial Studies Board*

(a) Set up costs: £925

(b) Operating costs: nil to date

(c) Topics covered: the structure and work of the JSB and its committees, the JSB Annual Report, Specimen Directions, training materials available to the public.

(d) Average number of hits per month: 450

(e) The estimated expenditure on the website for each of the next three years:
(i) 2000–2001: £2,180
(ii) 2001–2002: £180
(iii) 2002–2003: £180

10. *The Magistrates' Court Service Inspectorate*

(a) Set up costs: £7,000.

(b) Operating costs: due to go 'live' in the summer.

(c) Topics to be covered: What's New?, MCSI executive summary reports; thematics, MCSI's remit; operational plan and strategic plan; organisational chart; pen pictures of inspectors; publications order form; and related sites.

(d) Average number of hits per month: nil.

(e) The estimated expenditure on the website for each of the next three years:
(i) 2000–2001: £5,490
(ii) 2001–2002: £4,590
(iii) 2002–2003: £4,590

11. *The Civil Justice Council*

(a) Set up costs: £1,116

(b) Operating costs: £1,175 (1998–99)

(c) Topics covered: the background of the Council, the membership of the Council and its Sub-Committees, and summary reports of Council and Sub-Committee meetings.

(d) Average number of hits per month: Not monitored.

(e) The estimated expenditure on the website for each of the next three years:
(i) 2000–2001: £1,175
(ii) 2001–2002: £1,175
(iii) 2002–2003: £1,175.

Marriage Preparation Schemes

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Minister of State, Lord Chancellor's Department what assessment he has made of the marriage preparation pilot schemes. [74808]

Mr. Hoon: The Lord Chancellor's Department funded a programme of 13 marriage support pilot projects in 1997–98. Three of the projects were concerned with marriage preparation.

The Department assessed the effectiveness of each project in terms of its achievement of specific aims and objectives, and its cost effectiveness. Take-up of the marriage preparation offered was limited, but those who did participate generally found it helpful.

Mediation Schemes

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Minister of State, Lord Chancellor's Department what assessment he has made of the mediation pilot schemes under the Family Law Act 1996. [74809]

Mr. Hoon: Research has been carried out, by a consortium led by the University of Bristol on behalf of the Legal Aid Board, into the mediation pilot schemes run by the Board. This research is not yet complete and it is therefore too early for the Government to make any assessment of those pilot schemes.

Family Law Act 1996

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Minister of State, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will postpone the introduction of the remaining provisions of the Family Law Act 1996, until after the implementation of the initiatives set out in the Government consultation document "Supporting Families". [74810]

Mr. Hoon: The Government have indicated that they will implement Part II of the Family Law Act during the year 2000. It is too early to say whether the outcome of the consultation paper "Supporting Families" will lead to any of the initiatives in that document being implemented.

Deregulation

Mr. Quinn: To ask the Minister of State, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans he has to bring forward proposals under the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994. [74953]

Mr. Hoon: It would not be appropriate to announce any specific deregulation order proposals at this time as they are subject to detailed consultation with all interested parties.

However, I propose to use the contracting out order-making power to facilitate the contracting out of functions relating to the summoning of jurors under section 2(6) of the Juries Act 1974.

TREASURY

Working Families Tax Credit

Mr. Webb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will estimate the total number of people who will receive the proposed working families tax credit if everyone entitled to the credit were to take up their entitlement; and what would be the cost in 2000–01 of the credit on that basis; [70078]

(2) what assumption was made, for the purposes of forecasting the public expenditure consequences of the working families tax credit, about the percentage of those who will be eligible for the new credit who will take up that entitlement. [70077]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 9 February 1999]:* In forecasting the cost of the Working Families Tax Credit (WFTC), it has been assumed that the behavioural response of those households eligible to claim WFTC will be broadly similar to that in Family Credit. This response partly depends on net incomes and differences in the shape of the income distribution of those eligible for Family Credit and WFTC and means that the assumed take-up percentage is slightly higher for WFTC. The assumptions for costing WFTC are consistent with other welfare-to-work measures where the costings and entitlement figures do not take into account any benefit savings from people moving from welfare to work. It is estimated that, if everyone entitled to the WFTC were to take up their entitlement, in 2000–01 there would be about 1.65 million in receipt of the credit, with a total expenditure of about £4.9 billion.

Tax Ready Reckoner

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he plans to publish the "Tax Ready Reckoner and Tax Reliefs 1999;" and if he will make a statement. [75352]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 8 March 1999]:* Copies have today been deposited in the Library of the House.

Student Loans

Ms Lawrence: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the Government's policy on the second student loan debt sale; and what assessment he has made of the costs. [76048]

Mr. Milburn: I welcome the successful second sale of student loan debt of around £1bn announced today, *Official Report, House of Lords*, columns *20–21*, by my noble friend the Minister for Education and Employment.

My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer explained the Government's approach to the student loan debt sales to the House on 10 July 1997, *Official Report*, columns *607–08*. The overriding policy considerations which determined that approach were as follows.

The Government are committed to the development of a wide range of public-private partnerships which involve a transfer of risk to the private sector. As with the first sale, this sale will shift much of the default risk to the private sector, which has much more experience in dealing with such risks. The sales will also enable the markets to establish a clearer understanding of student loans and could in future encourage financial institutions to play a more direct role in the provision of student support.

In addition, the Government were elected on the basis of a manifesto pledge to work within the spending plans already announced for 1997–98 and 1998–99. This, and our other economic pledges on inflation and taxes, were designed to create the conditions for economic stability and a platform for sustained growth. Going ahead with both student loan debt sales has played a critical role in enabling us to keep this pledge.

These overriding objectives were paramount in the decision to proceed with the first and second debt sales.

The Government accept that the sales will result in the payment of subsidies to purchasers of the loan debt, much of which flows from our commitment to preserve the existing favourable terms for borrowers. We accept that the level of subsidy will vary from year to year in the light of economic conditions, including movement in interest rates, and that it will vary between the sales, as each is based on a separate competition.

The extra cost of selling loan debt under the first sale compared with the cost of retaining the loans was calculated at £50m-£60m, in accordance with the guidance in the Green Book, "Appraisal and Evaluation in Central Government", published by my Department. Using the same methodology, the additional costs of the second sale will be £85m-£100m. The difference between the two costs reflects changing circumstances at the time of the two sales, including market conditions and the maturity of the portfolio of loans sold. A strong competition was run and the most competitive bid has been accepted. We have therefore achieved the most competitive outcome consistent with our policy objectives.

National Minimum Wage

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the number of people who will benefit from the introduction of the national minimum wage in *(a)* the Tamworth constituency, *(b)* Staffordshire and *(c)* the West Midlands. [75737]

Ms Hewitt: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Director of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Brian Jenkins, dated 9 March 1999:

As Director of the Office for National Statistics (ONS), I have been asked to reply to your recent parliamentary question on the number of people who will benefit from the introduction of the proposed national minimum wage (NMW).

The New Earnings Survey (NES) can provide earnings data for small geographical areas. However, the release of NES data is restricted to figures that are derived from a sufficiently large sample of employees, and have an acceptable level of accuracy. Accordingly, no estimates for the parliamentary constituency of Tamworth can be given.

Estimates of the proportion of people who are currently earning below the proposed minimum wage for a range of geographical areas have been placed in the House of Commons Library under the title of *New Earnings Survey 1998 - National Minimum Wage Distribution Tables*. These include available information for Staffordshire and the West Midlands. The tables provide an historical position against the 1998 values of the proposed NMW, and make no judgement on whether its introduction will have any effect on the number of jobs.

Dividends

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he expects to reply to the letter

from the hon. Member for Tewkesbury dated 22 July 1998, regarding tax payable on dividends by non-taxpayers. [75762]

Dawn Primarolo: I have responded to the hon. Member's letter.

Government Borrowing

Ms Lawrence: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will give details of the Government's borrowing programme in 1999–2000. [76047]

Ms Hewitt: The main details of the Government's borrowing programme are set out in Annex B of the Financial Statement and Budget Report, published today. Copies of the financing remits for 1999–2000 set by the Government for the Debt Management Office and for National Savings have been placed in the Libraries of the House. They will also be included in the 1999–2000 Debt Management Report to be published on 17 March, and copies of the Report will be made available to the Libraries of the House on that day. The report will also set out the Government's debt management policy, review the Government's borrowing programme in 1998–99, and give details of the Government's borrowing programme in 1999–2000.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Summer Schools Programme

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assessment has been made by Ofsted of the summer schools programme; and what changes will be made this year. [73198]

Ms Estelle Morris *[holding answer 9 March 1999]:* I have asked Chris Woodhead, HM Chief Inspector of Schools, to write to my hon. Friend to address the first part of his question regarding Ofsted's assessment of the summer schools programme, and for a copy of his letter to be placed in the Library.

This summer, the numeracy programme will expand from a pilot of 51 schools to over 300 schools and 9,000 pupils.

For Literacy the number of schools participating in this summer's programme will rise from over 500 schools to 900 schools catering for over 27,000 pupils. Each school will also introduce a literacy intervention programme during the first four terms of secondary school, to support those children who transfer from primary to secondary with poor literacy skills.

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what evaluation he has undertaken of the effectiveness of literacy summer schools. [74772]

Ms Estelle Morris: Evaluation of the 1998 Summer Schools Programme was carried out by the National Foundation for Educational Research. A report of the key findings will be made available to Local Education Authorities next week. Copies will be placed in the Library.

Cultural Diversity

Dr. Starkey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) what additional resources his Department plans to make available in order to support the training of teachers and head teachers to implement the new emphasis in the national curriculum on valuing cultural diversity and preventing racism, as proposed in the Macpherson report; [74548]

(2) if valuing cultural diversity and preventing racism will be designated as a priority area for school management and included as a compulsory element in the new qualifications for deputy and head teachers. [74549]

Ms Estelle Morris: The Government will shortly be publishing a detailed response and action plan about all the recommendations in the Macpherson report, including those relating to education and the national curriculum.

We are committed to an inclusive education service which enables and encourages all children to achieve to the best of their abilities. As part of our vision for a modernised teaching profession, set out in the Green Paper, "Teachers, Meeting the Challenge of Change", published on 3 December, we are determined to ensure teachers have the skills and knowledge they need effectively to raise standards for all their pupils.

The national standards for teachers, published by the Teacher Training Agency (TTA) and endorsed by Government, which span qualified teacher status through to headship, make clear the need for teachers, on entry to the profession and at all stages in their careers, to have the skills and understanding necessary to meet the needs of an ethnically diverse pupil body. The national standards for head teachers, which underpin the training programmes for aspiring and serving head teachers, make clear the responsibility of heads for ensuring that pupils are aware of the ethnic and cultural diversity in their schools and in society and that there are positive strategies for developing good race relations and for dealing with racial harassment. The TTA also will be producing supplementary materials for Initial Teacher Training providers to ensure that new teachers have the skills to deal with ethnic and cultural diversity in schools.

Class Sizes

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many additional full-time qualified teachers have been identified by local education authorities in their plans for reducing infant class sizes submitted to his Department as being required to implement *(a)* the required reduction in infant class sizes in the school years 1999–2000 and 2000–01 and *(b)* measures required under paragraph 10 of the Schedule to the Education (Plans for Reducing Infant Class Sizes) (England) Regulations 1998. [75489]

Ms Estelle Morris *[holding answer 8 March 1999]:* We have allocated £71,882,000 to fund 4,308 additional teachers to reduce infant class sizes in 1999–2000 (including 1,527 teachers funded from September 1998). For the following two financial years, we will be monitoring local authorities' progress in implementing their plans before making allocations to fund the teachers required. As a result of the Comprehensive Spending Review we have made available £160 million for the revenue costs in each of those years of achieving

the pledge. Local education authorities confirmed in their plans the arrangements they have put in place to ensure that no child will have to attend a school more than a reasonable distance from home.

Sunderland City TEC

Mr. Etherington: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will allow Sunderland City Training and Enterprise Council to retain the proceeds of sale of an asset purchased with funds deriving from his Department. [76008]

Mr. Mudie: I have agreed that Sunderland City Training and Enterprise Council can use the proceeds of sale to lever in matched European funds to further develop their Business Innovation Centre thus creating more business opportunities and jobs for the area.

Student Loans

Kali Mountford: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on the outcome of the competition to sell a second part of the Student Loan Portfolio. [76009]

Mr. Mudie: My noble Friend the Minister for Education and Employment has today, *Official Report, House of Lords*, columns *20–21*, announced the conclusion of the second sale of a portfolio of student loans to the private sector for around £1 billion in a written answer to Lord Burlison. The sale has been achieved after a very vigorous competition and we have accepted the most competitive bid. A consortium of the Nationwide Building Society and Deutsche Bank AG was the successful bidder. As a result, the portfolio will be sold to HONOURS Trustee Limited, a company formed for the purpose of acquiring the assets.

The loans sold are those made under the original loan scheme. None of the new income contingent loans introduced at the beginning of the current academic year are involved.

My right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury has confirmed the policy considerations which have determined the Government's approach to student loan debt sales in a written answer today, *Official Report*, columns *101–02*, to my hon. Friend the Member for Preseli Pembrokeshire (Mr. Lawrence).

HONOURS Trustee Limited have appointed the Student Loans Company, the existing administrator, to administer the sold loans on their behalf. Borrowers who are currently repaying their loans or who have made deferment arrangements will consequently notice little change. We have legislated previously to ensure that the position of borrowers is protected. Borrowers will retain their existing rights of deferment, where their income is below 85% of average earnings, and interest rates will continue to be linked solely to inflation.

These rights mean that original scheme student loans are provided at subsidised rates. Subsidies will therefore be paid to the purchaser to reflect this. During the 1999–2000 financial year a subsidy of about £64m will be paid.

Part of the gross subsidy payment will be repaid to the Government through the administration charges paid to the Student Loans Company and tax receipts on private sector profits. Given the value of loans sold, and that some of the loans will be outstanding for a considerable length of time, the estimated net present value of these subsidies is broadly in the region of £395-£405m. This compares with estimated net present value costs of around £310m which we would have incurred had the loans remained publicly owned. The estimated cost to the Government of selling these loans will therefore be in the region of £85-£100m or 25–30% above the cost of keeping loans in the public sector over the lifetime of the portfolio.

The agreement between the Government and HONOURS Trustee Limited, with commercially confidential information removed, will be placed in the Library of the House on completion of the sale.

School Funding

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list for each local education authority in England, the funding made available to date through *(a)* the Standards Fund and *(b)* the New Deal for Schools. [73537]

Ms Estelle Morris: Details of funding made available through the Standards Fund for 1997–98, 1998–99 and 1999–2000, and through the New Deal for Schools for 1997–98 and 1998–99, are given in tables that have been placed in the Library. The allocation of the grants for New Deal for Schools for 1999–2000 have not yet been made. For the Standards Fund the figures shown in tables include the grant made by the Department and the contribution made by the local education authority.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Prisons (Drugs)

Mr. Moss: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will list the amount of illegal drugs discovered in Northern Ireland prisons in each of the last three years, broken down by type of drug. [71400]

Mr. Ingram: The amount of illegal drugs discovered in Northern Ireland prisons in each of the last three years is shown in the following table:

	1996–97	*1997–98*	*[1]1998–99*
Cannabis	314 grammes	1,176 grammes	79 grammes
Ecstasy	6 tablets	121 tablets	29 tablets
LSD	—	1 square	—
Amphetamines	—	—	2.5 grammes
Anabolic Steroids	—	2x10 ml bottles	6x10 ml bottles
Other tablets[2]	389	981	182

[1] Up to 31 December 1998
[2] Mostly prescribed drugs found on a non-prescribed basis

Mr. Moss: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what public funds have been spent on mandatory drug tests in Northern Ireland prisons in each of the last three years. [71401]

Mr. Ingram: There is no mandatory drug testing in Northern Ireland prisons. The Northern Ireland Prison Service drugs strategy focuses on four key action areas of

control, care, education and information. As part of the strategy, a voluntary testing scheme is currently in operation on a pilot basis in one prison establishment.

Schizophrenia Psychoses

Sir Alastair Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many of those convicted of crimes in Northern Ireland in the last year for which figures are available have ever been admitted to National Health Service mental illness hospitals with a main diagnosis of schizophrenia psychoses. [73355]

Mr. McFall: The subject of criminal convictions is a matter for the Lord Chancellor's Department. However, I understand from that Department that these figures are not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mater Hospital

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland which hospital services Her Majesty's Government are obliged to maintain at the Mater Hospital, Belfast, under the terms of the 1971 Deed of Arrangement. [74453]

Mr. McFall: The Mater Infirmorum Hospital entered the health service under the 1971 Deed of Arrangement, which secured the preservation of the Roman Catholic character and association of the hospital. The Deed set out specific requirements for the general administration of the hospital and provided for a review of the internal allocation of beds and facilities and for the preparation of a scheme for the initial reconstruction and modernisation of the hospital's buildings and facilities. The deed of Arrangement does not require the maintenance of specific services at the hospital. Whatever services are provided must however preserve the character and associations of the Hospital.

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what extension plans have been prepared for the Mater Hospital, Belfast; and if she will make a statement. [74454]

Mr. McFall: The Trust have recently completed an extension to provide a 50-bed acute psychiatric unit. This was approved by the HSSE. A building programme for the construction of a new three storey block containing wards, a day procedures unit and a pharmacy has now started. This will be funded by the Mater Hospital Trustees and does not require Departmental funding. The Trust also has plans for the refurbishment and upgrading of the original building. These have not yet been submitted for Departmental approval.

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what extension plans for the Mater Hospital, Belfast, have had approval from the Department of Health. [74495]

Mr. McFall: A 50 bed acute psychiatric unit has recently been completed. No further extension plans for the Mater Hospital have been approved by the Department at present.

Maternity Services

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what progress has been made on the 1997 recommendations by Professor Donaldson's Medical Review Panel on *(a)* the development of a Province-wide strategic plan for maternity services and *(b)* smaller obstetric units without 24 hour on-site paediatric cover. [74496]

Mr. McFall: As with other hospital services, strategic decisions about maternity services will be a matter for the new Northern Ireland Assembly. An analysis of the issues involved was contained in the paper "Putting it Right", which I presented to the Assembly on 14 December 1998. It envisages the concentration of acute hospital services, including maternity services, at Area and Regional level, supported by a network of local hospitals. Board reviews of acute hospital services, some of which have already taken place will be completed in the near future, will help to inform the Assembly's consideration of the issues involved.

Task Forces

Dr. Tony Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will publish a list of (1) task forces and (2) policy reviews established by her Department since May 1997 which *(a)* had external members recruited by way of public advertisement, and details of any person so appointed and *(b)* engaged in public consultation exercises, and the form that these took. [74471]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The information for the Northern Ireland Office and the Northern Ireland Departments is as follows:

(a) Nil

Most task forces and reviews are short-term bodies established to give thorough consideration to important and difficult issues. External members are invited to sit on some reviews and task forces because they are able to contribute specific experience and expertise. In such cases, public advertising would be inappropriate and disproportionate.

(b)

Task forces/review groups	*Public consultation exercises*
NIO	
Independent Commission on Policing	A series of 35 public meetings were held throughout Northern Ireland, and written and oral submission were invited.
Northern Ireland Drugs Strategy Review	Public invited by newspaper advertisements to comment on current NI Drugs Strategy.
Criminal Injuries Compensation Review	Notices were placed in the local press in September 1998 and February 1999 inviting evidence from anyone with an interest in the Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme. A series of semi-public meetings also held throughout Northern Ireland to hear from those who had experience of claiming criminal injuries compensation.

(b)

Task forces/review groups	Public consultation exercises
DED	
Economic Development Services Review	Advertisement in newspapers and associated press release inviting comment.
Economic Development Strategy Review	A consultation panel, with representation from some 60 organisations (academic, business, trade union, voluntary and community sectors) was established. Three meetings of the panel have been held and members were also invited to make written contributions.
Working Group to plan for a single NI Equality Commission	Consultation paper issued to some 220 organisations/individuals on 2 February 1999. Seminar held on 19 February.
New Deal in Northern Ireland	Consultation Seminars, which focused on the design of New Deal for 18–24 year olds, took place at a number of venues throughout Northern ireland during October and November 1997.
Review of Training Centres and FE Colleges	Report and Consultation Paper on the Review's findings and recommendations published in September 1998 with comments invited.
DENI	
Youth Service Policy Review Group	'Initial Considerations' consultation paper was published in January 1998 and a 'Youth Service Policy Review—A Consultation Report' in October 1998. These were launched at a one-day Conference for young people and at a launch event for delegates from the statutory and voluntary youth sectors respectively.
DHSS	
Review of the District Councils' Community Services Programme	Written submissions invited from relevant interests including Political Parties. Focus group meetings held with voluntary and community groups, District Councils' Community Services Officers, and key informants.
Strategy for Reducing Alcohol Related Harm in Northern Ireland-A Policy Development Project	Advertisements in local newspapers requesting contributions; letters sent to 587 'key stakeholders' asking for contributions and to identify other people/organisations who might have an interest; three workshops with key stakeholders; a series of seven focus groups, five with ex-addiction service users and two with young people; and a 'mini' consultation exercise where initial proposals were sent out to all 587 stakeholders for comment.

Human Rights Commission

Rev. Ian Paisley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will list the known *(a)* religious and *(b)* political affiliations of the Commissioners recently appointed to the new body on human rights for Northern Ireland. [75291]

Mr. Paul Murphy *[holding answer 8 March 1999]:* The Secretary of State announced on 18 January and 1 March appointments to the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission. There are 10 Commissioners including the Chief Commissioner. The religious background of candidates is established for monitoring purposes only. It is not the Government's policy to release the religious affiliation of each member, but we are satisfied that the Commissioners, as a group, are representative of the community in Northern Ireland. Candidates are asked to declare political activity over the last 10 years; only one of those appointed had declared any political affiliation, which was to the SDLP and the Women's Coalition.

Rev. Ian Paisley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many applications for appointment to the Human Rights Commission were received; on what dates the posts were advertised; and in what journals. [75279]

Mr. Paul Murphy *[holding answer 8 March 1999]:* There were 28 applications for Chief Commissioner and 154 for Commissioners. The Chief Commissioner post was advertised as follows:

	Date
The Guardian	5, 6 & 9 November
The Guardian Website	25 November
Belfast Telegraph	24 November & 1 December
Newsletter	26 November & 3 December
Irish News	26 November & 3 December
NIO Website	5 November onwards

The Commissioner posts were advertised as follows:

	Date
The Guardian	2 & 3 December
Belfast Telegraph	1 December
Irish News	3 December
Newsletter	3 December
NIO Website	1 December onwards

Bovine Tuberculosis

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many herds were restricted due to evidence of tuberculosis, in each month, from January 1995 to January 1997. [74571]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The information requested is provided in the following table.

Number of herds restricted due to TB from January 1995-January 1997

Month	*Number of herds*
January 1995	127
February 1995	117
March 1995	144
April 1995	114
May 1995	121
June 1995	99
July 1995	82
August 1995	92
September 1995	99
October 1995	93
November 1995	88
December 1995	86
January 1996	105
February 1996	128
March 1996	138
April 1996	141
May 1996	120
June 1996	70
July 1996	77
August 1996	78
September 1996	87
October 1996	90
November 1996	96
December 1996	102
January 1997	108
Total	2,602

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many tuberculosis-infected animals were discovered in each veterinary division area, in each month, from January 1995 to January 1997. [74570]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The information requested is provided in the following table.

Number of tuberculosis infected cattle discovered in each veterinary division area from January 1995 to January 1996

	Armagh	*Ballymena*	*Coleraine*	*Dungannon*	*Enniskillen*	*Larne*	*L'Derry*	*Newry*	*Newtownards*	*Omagh*
January 1995	80	10	31	35	23	21	3	123	65	15
February 1995	49	7	14	59	24	21	4	103	73	23
March 1995	83	19	33	65	17	74	4	140	31	35
April 1995	52	32	26	63	15	22	1	97	17	12
May 1995	54	14	15	62	21	12	5	106	46	18
June 1995	53	30	17	37	21	14	2	75	37	10
July 1995	23	11	12	45	13	16	5	104	35	4
August 1995	71	19	15	55	7	21	2	68	45	10
September 1995	79	12	15	66	16	4	6	57	29	17
October 1995	28	17	15	74	13	21	8	94	39	22
November 1995	20	20	21	68	8	33	6	78	33	16
December 1995	25	33	10	67	21	22	4	52	28	25
January 1996	41	20	20	66	23	41	8	83	26	15
February 1996	34	17	27	50	24	47	15	116	74	32
March 1996	31	10	22	49	32	14	11	141	38	30
April 1996	89	44	29	66	10	35	21	81	50	32
May 1996	37	27	17	22	28	35	1	82	41	52
June 1996	41	10	16	20	16	21	2	46	36	15
July 1996	16	21	12	22	8	13	4	115	38	23
August 1996	66	28	16	27	15	17	2	83	48	23
September 1996	33	24	19	28	9	10	1	156	35	19
October 1996	44	45	13	70	14	12	1	157	125	63
November 1996	18	21	22	110	11	5	8	128	59	32
December 1996	[illegible]	39	14	78	17	30	2	81	37	122
January 1997	[illegible]	29	20	70	10	36	9	83	50	63
Total	1,139	559	471	1,374	416	597	135	2,449	1,135	728
Grand total	9,003									

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Transatlantic Postal Services

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list *(a)* the air cargo carriers which are currently contracted to transport post in each direction between the United Kingdom and the United States of America and *(b)* the weight which each carried in each of the last three years. [72881]

Mr. Ian McCartney: The contracting of air carriers to transport post to the United States of America is a commercial matter for The Post Office. The air transport of post from the United States Postal Services to the United Kingdom is a matter for that administration.

Credit Unions

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans he has to allow credit unions to gain easier access to post offices to *(a)* encourage saving and *(b)* publicise their activities. [73914]

Mr. Ian McCartney *[holding answer 3 March 1999]:* Arrangements for access to post offices for credit unions are an operational and commercial matter for the Post Office and the credit unions. However, I have asked the Post Office to consider what actions can be taken to improve working relations between them and the credit unions, within the context of the Post Office's strategic plans.

Social Partners Meetings

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list those items of legislation since 1 May 1997 which originated from the Social Partners meetings at European Communities level. [75078]

Mr. Wilson: The items of legislation since 1 May which originated from agreements between the Social Partners at European Communities' level are the Parental Leave Directive and the Part-Time Work Directive. These measures will be implemented through provisions in the Employment Relations Bill and through subsequent secondary legislation.

Discretionary Grants (Worcestershire)

Mr. Lock: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list (i) the names of the beneficiaries of all the discretionary grants awarded by his Department to organisations within Worcestershire during 1998, (ii) their monetary value, (iii) their total value and (iv) the proportion that total sum comprises of the total sums awarded by his Department in discretionary grants in 1998. [75251]

Mr. Wills: If organisations can be interpreted as companies, we can provide the following information about the RSA, Smart and SPUR schemes for the calendar year 1998 in Worcestershire.

(i) & (ii) Regional Selective Assistance

Company name	*Value of offer (£)*
Premier Bathrooms Ltd.	35,000
Advanced Casting Co Ltd.	45,000
Metal Pressings Group Ltd	80,000

(iii) Total value of these offers = £160,000

(iv) Total RSA offered in the West Midlands Assisted Area in 1998 was £36,614,000. On that basis, RSA offered in Worcestershire accounted for 0.43 per cent. of the total offered in the West Midlands.

Note:

Only a very small part of Worcestershire falls within the West Midlands Assisted Area.

(i) & (ii) Smart and SPUR

Company name	*Value of offer (£)*
C P Eng Systems Ltd.	88,391
Newbow Eng Industries Ltd.	45,000
D Parmenter	45,000
Lorica Research Ltd.	45,000
Bioriginal Ltd.	45,000
Spring Electronic Ltd.	44,071
Red Deer Herbs Ltd.	122,276
Enigma Research Ltd.	45,000
Greenfinch Ltd.	88,390
Sencon Europe Ltd.	53,037
Haydon Marketing Ltd.	45,000
Arden Services	45,000

(iii) Total value of these offers = £711,165

(iv) Total Smart and SPUR offered in West Midlands in 1998 = £2,862,665. Therefore, Worcestershire received 25 per cent. of all grant offered on these schemes in the West Midlands during the calendar year.

Black-start Facility, Keadby

Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he is yet in a position to make his decision on Keadby Generation Ltd's application to construct a black-start facility at its Keadby power station in North Lincolnshire. [76013]

Mr. Battle: I have today granted consent under Section 36 of the Electricity Act 1989 to Keadby Generation Ltd's application to construct a 25MW gas-fired black start facility (the extension) at its existing power station at Keadby. The decisions have been taken in accordance with the policy set out in the White Paper entitled 'Conclusions of the Review of Energy Sources for Power Generation and Government response to fourth and fifth Reports of the Trade and Industry Committee' (Cm 4071).

I have also given Keadby Generation Ltd. clearance to build the extension under Section 14(1) of the Energy Act 1976 and directed that planning permission for the extension be deemed to be granted, subject to 36 planning conditions agreed with the North Lincolnshire Council. These conditions meet issues raised by the Council and others.

Decisions on other applications under consideration will be announced in due course.

Copies of the Press Notice and decision letter are being placed in the Library of the House.

Children (Employment Law)

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he expects to report the outcome of his review of Employment Law relating to children. [74811]

Mr. Hutton: I have been asked to reply.

We expect that the review will report shortly.

DEFENCE

Brunei (Jungle Training)

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the countries which had armed forces involved in the jungle training exercise in Brunei carried out between 1 April 1997 and 31 March 1998. [72789]

Mr. Doug Henderson: The armed forces of the United Kingdom only were involved in this exercise.

Fast Insertion Craft

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many fast insertion craft are operated by his Department; what is their cost; and when the first craft was brought into service. [72643]

Mr. Spellar: Each vessel costs between £600,000 and £950,000, and they have been in service since 1994. Details of the numbers operated are withheld under exemption 1 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the cost of repairing the damage to the Royal Marines' fast insertion craft incurred on 19 January in Norway. [72645]

Mr. Spellar: The cost is estimated to be £106,000.

Infantry Exercises (France)

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the countries which had armed forces involved in the three infantry exercises in France carried out between 1 April 1997 and 31 March 1998. [72928]

Mr. Doug Henderson: The armed forces of the UK and France were involved in these exercises.

Defence Agencies

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to set targets for the *(a)* Defence Secondary Care Agency and *(b)* Defence Vetting Agency for the year 1999–2000. [72952]

Mr. Doug Henderson: Key targets for both agencies will be published by the end of April 1999.

Departmental Policies

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what systems he has in place to ensure that policies being developed by his Department are subject to a crime impact *(a)* assessment and *(b)* audit and are not likely to lead to enhanced criminal opportunities. [72693]

Mr. Doug Henderson *[holding answer 24 February 1999]:* In addition to the regular audit of systems carried out by our Internal Audit organisation, my Department has a Fraud Analysis Unit which is tasked with the evaluation of suspected irregularity in the conduct of MOD business. Lessons learnt are incorporated in the process of policy development. The Department also has, in the Ministry of Defence Police, an independent constabulary whose tasks include the prevention and investigation of crime and fraud in the Defence environment; local policing plans have been developed to reflect the crime concerns at areas policed by the Force.

Single Currency

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to issue information from his Department to help the public make an informed decision when they vote on the single currency. [73588]

Mr. George Robertson: Any plans by the Government to issue information during a referendum campaign on whether or not the UK should join the single currency would be made in light of the Government's response to the recommendations from the Neill Committee on the conduct of referendums. The Government will announce their conclusions on those recommendations when my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary publishes a White Paper and draft Bill before the summer recess.

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the subject areas within his Department's responsibilities which will be covered by the information campaign on Britain's membership of a single currency. [73668]

Mr. George Robertson: The Treasury will continue its dialogue with key external bodies to determine what information the public and business would need at each stage of the changeover process. Any information campaign would cover key concerns that the public and business may have. Chapter eight of the Treasury's Outline National Changeover Plan provides further information. Copies of the Plan are available in the Library of the House.

NATO Exercise (South Africa)

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the countries which had armed forces involved in the NATO joint exercise in South Africa carried out between 1 April 1997 and 31 March 1998. [72985]

Mr. Doug Henderson *[holding answer 2 March 1999]:* There were no NATO joint exercises in South Africa between 1 April 1997 and 31 March 1998.

Military Exercises (Jordan)

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will list those countries which had armed forces involved in the two desert exercises in Jordan carried out between 1 April 1997 and 31 March 1998; [72972]

(2) what is his assessment of the principal benefits of the two desert exercises in Jordan carried out between 1 April 1997 and 31 March 1998. [72976]

Mr. Doug Henderson *[holding answer 1 March 1999]:* Exercise DESERT SONG comprised two exercises involving members of the UK and Jordanian armed forces and was conducted in Jordan in September and October 1997. These exercises were intended to maintain and develop the capacity of the participating personnel to conduct operations in a desert environment, and are assessed to have succeeded in their aim.

Joint Venture Oversight Group

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on what dates the US/UK Joint Venture Oversight Group on the defence response to the threat posed by chemical and biological weapons is due to meet in 1999; in which country each meeting is due to take place; which of his Department's officials attend these meetings; and if any other Government Departments attend these meetings. [74257]

Mr. George Robertson: It is currently envisaged that the Joint Venture Oversight Group will meet twice a year and that the meetings will be held alternately in the United

States and the UK. The inaugural meeting of the Group having taken place in the United States in December 1998, the next will be held in the UK in June.

The principal UK official for these meetings is the MOD Deputy Policy Director. The composition of his supporting team depends on the business of each meeting, but is likely normally to include staff with responsibility for relevant policy issues, operational assessment and scientific research. Other Departments would be represented if required.

Press and Broadcasting Advisory Committee

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list members of the Ministry of Defence, Press and Broadcasting Advisory Committee. [74312]

Mr. George Robertson: The current make-up of the Defence, Press and Broadcasting Advisory Committee is:

Chairman

K. R. Tebbit Esq. CMG

Permanent Under Secretary of State Ministry of Defence

Vice Chairman and Chairman, Press and Broadcasting Side

R. Hutchinson Esq.

Editorial Policy Adviser to Jane's Information Group

[Nominated by Periodical Publishers Association]

Government Members

D. B. Omand Esq.

Permanent Under Secretary of State Home Office

R. T. Jackling Esq. CB CBE 2nd Permanent Under Secretary of State Ministry of Defence

D. J. Manning Esq. CMG Deputy Under Secretary of State Foreign and Commonwealth Office

Press and Broadcasting Members

S Anderson Esq. Controller News and Current Affairs, ITV [ITV]

J. D. Bishop Esq. Editor-in-Chief, Illustrated London News Group [Periodical Publishers Association]

G. Brock Esq. Managing Editor, The Times [Newspaper Publishers Association]

J. Cassidy Esq

Editor, Sunday Mail [Scottish Daily Newspaper Society]

T. H. S. Cole Esq. Managing Editor, Sky Television plc [Sky TV]

R. Esser Esq. Executive Managing Editor, Daily Mail [Newspaper publishers Association]

A. Goode Esq. Chief Executive, Bristol Evening Post and Press [Newspaper Society]

P. Harding Esq. Controller, Editorial Policy, BBC [BBC]

A. S. M. Hutchinson Esq. Associate Editor, The Daily Telegraph [Newspaper Publishers Association]

P. J. Potts Esq. Editor, PA News [Press Association]

R. G. Tait Esq. Editor-ins-Chief, Independent Television News Ltd. [ITN]

W. Wilson Esq. Editor, Express and Star, Wolverhampton [Newspaper Society]

Secretary

Rear Admiral D. M. Pulvertaft CB

Deputy Secretary

Commander F. N. Ponsonby LVO OBE.

Membership of the Committee and the Defence Advisory Notices themselves are kept up-to-date on the Internet at the Committee's home page: *WWW.bitinternet.com/~d.a.notices*

MOD Police (Jurisdiction)

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what powers of jurisdiction over civilians *(a)* not employed by his Department and *(b)* employed by his Department the Ministry of Defence Police Agency has. [74309]

Mr. Doug Henderson: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given on 2 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *655*, by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence, which outlined the circumstances in which MOD Police officers have the powers and privileges of constables. There are a variety of circumstances in which MOD Police officers might be able to exercise constabulary powers in relation to civilians whether or not they are employed by the Ministry of Defence.

Gifts (Weapons and Military Equipment)

Mr. John Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the countries which have received gifts of *(a)* weapons and *(b)* other military equipment from Her Majesty's Government since 1 May 1997, indicating the (i) types and (ii) value of equipment given. [74679]

Mr. Spellar: According to central records, the countries which have received gifts of weapons and other military equipment from Her Majesty's Government since 1 May 1997 are as follows:

Country		*Value (£)*
(a) Weapons		
Canada	2 x Chieftain main battle tanks	@ 5,000 each
(b) Other military equipment		
Congo (Army)	Pickets and barbed wire	450
Congo (Red Cross)	Ration packs	2,578
Canada	4 x Ferret scout cars	4,000
Former Yugoslavia (Vitez)	Accommodation equipment	14,040
Hong Kong	Hardstick furniture	21,605
Italy	25 x Portakabins	25,000
USA	Inert WE 177 training round	1
Canada	2 x Land Rovers	1,154

All these items were surplus to requirements. The main battle tanks were gifted to museums.

VALUE Programme

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the key milestones and timetable for the Value-added Acquisition and Logistics for Ultimate Efficiency Programme; and if he will list the names and appointments of *(a)* civil servants, *(b)* military personnel and *(c)* external consultants on the programme. [74660]

Mr. George Robertson *[holding answer 4 March 1999]:* The VALUE programme is analysing the processes and key data elements of defence logistics, in support of the formation of the Defence Logistics Organisation and the implementation of the Smart Procurement Initiative. The main analytical work will be completed by 31 March 1999; the remaining work, which is due to be completed by 30 June 1999, will support the establishment of a programme of continuous improvement in defence logistics.

Members of the VALUE team are listed on the MOD website (http:/www.mod.uk). No external consultants are directly employed on the VALUE work.

Smart Procurement

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the names and appointments of the *(a)* civil servants, *(b)* military personnel and *(c)* external consultants who make up the Smart Procurement Implementation Team. [74647]

Mr. George Robertson *[holding answer 4 March 1999]:* The Implementation Team for the Smart Procurement Initiative planning phase comprises 48 full and part-time members. Team members include 25 civilian and 15 military personnel and 8 representatives from industry. The Implementation Team is being supported during the planning phase by external consultants from McKinsey & Co and KPMG, supplemented by occasional temporary attachments of civilian and military personnel on ad hoc activities. The names of some members of the Smart Procurement Implementation Team are included on the team's website (www.mod.uk/policy/smart).

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the impact of the recent merger of BAe and Marconi on his Department's Smart Procurement policy. [74643]

Mr. George Robertson *[holding answer 4 March 1999]:* The MOD is currently assessing the impact of the proposed merger and will be advising the regulatory authorities in due course. It is not, however, expected to have any impact on our Smart Procurement policy.

Strategic Defence Review

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the names and appointments of the *(a)* civil servants and *(b)* military personnel of the Strategic Defence Review Implementation Team. [74645]

Mr. George Robertson *[holding answer 4 March 1999]:* The central Strategic Defence Review Implementation Team is a small civilian/military team of 9 personnel including support staff. The team has responsibility for monitoring and chasing progress on implementation of the Strategic Defence Review.

The Implementation Team works closely with many others across the Ministry of Defence and the Armed Forces engaged in implementing particular aspects of the Review.

Scout Reconnaissance Vehicle Programme

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the project definition, milestones and costs of the armoured scout reconnaissance vehicle programme. [69571]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 8 February 1999]:* The Armoured Scout Reconnaissance Vehicle is a collaborative programme between the UK and the USA to study candidate technologies to meet our common requirements for battlefield reconnaissance for the Army of the future. Contracts for a 42 month Project Definition Phase were awarded to the SIKA and LANCER consortia on 29 January 1999. No commitment has been made to the programme beyond the Project Definition Phase. Decisions will be made following a Balance of Investment Study, which will determine the optimum solution to the Land Commander's information gathering requirement. As part of the wider study, we will also be investigating the use of Unmanned Aerial and Land Vehicles.

The total cost to the UK for the joint elements of the Project Definition Phase contracts will be around £90 million, excluding VAT. In addition, the UK will be spending around £7 million, excluding VAT, on UK specific issues.

Holy Loch

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence for what reasons the projected cost of the Holy Loch clean-up of debris left behind by US visiting forces has risen to between £8 million and £10 million. [75116]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 8 March 1999]:* The estimated costs of the Holy Loch clean-up operations are based on the practical experience gained during operations covered by the current contract. This has led to the forecasted final expenditure of £8 million to £10 million.

Iraq

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what has been the total weight of bombs dropped by British forces on Iraq *(a)* during Operation Desert Fox and *(b)* subsequently. [75671]

Mr. George Robertson: During Operation DESERT FOX in December last year, a total of 28,560kg of bombs were dropped by British forces on Iraqi military targets. Subsequently, British forces have dropped 20,520kg of bombs in the course of operations over Iraq.

Mr. Gill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence to what extent RAF pilots forced down in Iraq will be protected by the terms of the Geneva Convention; and if he will make a statement. [75670]

Mr. George Robertson: The Geneva Conventions are applicable in any international armed conflict, whether or not a state of war exists between the parties; the application of the Conventions are not dependent upon a formal declaration of war or hostilities. Accordingly, any of our aircrew forced down in Iraq would be entitled to the status of prisoners of war. We would expect Iraq to meet all its obligations under international law, including all applicable international conventions.

Falkland Islands

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will review his Department's decision to reduce the number of Tristar flights to the Falkland Islands. [75756]

Mr. Doug Henderson: The reduction in the number of RAF Tristar Airbridge flights to the Falkland Islands by one flight per calendar month was one of a range of efficiency proposals identified by the Strategic Defence Review. It represents a rationalisation of the use of Tristar aircraft, following technical improvements that allow them to carry an increased payload, rather than representing any significant reduction to the overall capacity of the Airbridge. Final arrangements for the implementation of this measure are still under consideration.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Police Officers (Ethnic Minorities)

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police officers from an Asian or Afro-Caribbean background hold the rank of *(a)* chief constable, *(b)* assistant chief constable and *(c)* chief superintendent. [74539]

Mr. Boateng: Currently there are *(a)* no Chief Constables, *(b)* one Assistant Chief Constable, *(c)* three Chief Superintendents (one currently on temporary promotion) and six Superintendents from an Asian or Afro-Caribbean background.

The rank of Chief Superintendent was abolished on 1 April 1995. At that time, the number of existing Chief Superintendents maintained their rank and a number of forces continue to use the designation.

Equine Welfare

Mr. Alan Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what representations he has received from equine welfare organisations on the tethering of horses; [75122]

(2) what assessment he has made of the welfare standards of the existing legislation on the tethering of horses; and if he will make a statement. [75120]

Mr. George Howarth: We have not received recent representations from equine welfare organisations about the tethering of horses.

The welfare of horses that are tethered is safeguarded by the general protection afforded by the Protection of Animals Act 1911 and the Protection Against Cruel Tethering Act 1988. Additional protection is provided by the Abandonment of Animals Act 1960.

Under the 1911 Act, it is an offence to cause any unnecessary suffering to any domestic or captive animal. The Protection Against Cruel Tethering Act 1988 created a specific offence under the 1911 Act of causing unnecessary suffering to a horse by the manner of condition of its tethering. In addition, the Abandonment of Animals Act 1960 makes it an offence to abandon a domestic or captive animal, whether or not permanently, without reasonable excuse and in circumstances likely to cause suffering.

Mr. Alan Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prosecutions there were in England during 1998 of individuals for their ill treatment of horses. [75121]

Mr. Boateng: Information held on the Home Office Court Proceedings Database concerning offences under the Protection of Animals Act 1911 does not distinguish individual offences within the Act or identify the species of animal involved.

London Fire Brigade

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many firefighters in the London Fire Brigade are of black or ethnic minority origin; what proportion of the total they form; and what measures are planned to increase the number of black and ethnic minority firefighters in London. [75135]

Mr. George Howarth: At 31 March 1998, there were 5,771 firefighters on the operational strength of London Fire Brigade. Of these, 249 (4.3 per cent. of the total) classified themselves as black or from an ethnic minority group.

We have announced that targets will be set for the recruitment of ethnic minority groups into the Home Office and its services. All chief fire officers have been asked to set targets to improve black and ethnic minority representation to reflect the community their brigade serves. The London Fire and Civil Defence Authority has already taken a number of initiatives of its own to increase the numbers of black and ethnic minority firefighters in London.

Horses (Nutritional Deprivation)

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department for what reasons he granted a project licence for the study of the effects of nutritional deprivation in the womb of horses at the Equine Fertility Unit near Newmarket, with particular reference to the cost benefit test under section 5(4) of the Animal (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986; into what severity band the procedures were placed and for what reasons; and if he will review the application of the cost benefit test in relation to these procedures. [75174]

Mr. George Howarth: The project licence authorising this work was granted in 1994. The objectives of the research were to study pregnancy in mares to determine how genetic and growth factors might affect the nutrition of the foetus, given that poor nutrition of the developing foetus can result in abortion or the birth of poorly viable offspring. The potential benefits of the work are, therefore, to the welfare of horses. It is, however, possible that the results will also be beneficial to other species, including man.

The procedures on the horses entailed mainly non-surgical recovery of uterine material from pregnant and non-pregnant animals. This involved sedation but no general anaesthesia and the procedures were classified as being of mild severity. However, in the early work under the authority of this licence, some of the procedures also involved surgery, which was classified as being of moderate severity. The overall severity for the project licence is mild.

The relevant project licence is no longer in force. If further work is to be carried out in this area, a new application will have to be made and the costs and benefits will again be weighed before deciding whether to grant a new licence.

Criminal Memoirs

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to prevent criminals profiting from the publication of *(a)* memoirs and *(b)* magazine and newspaper articles based on their criminal activities. [74879]

Mr. Boateng: In the light of the concerns expressed last year after the publication of Gitta Sereny's book 'Cries Unheard' an inter-departmental group is considering the law relating to criminal memoirs, and whether it might sensibly be strengthened. The issues raised are difficult and complex, and include how the need to prevent criminals from benefiting by publishing details of their crimes and causing distress to victims and their families can be balanced against the rights to freedom of expression set out in the European Court of Human Rights and the Human Rights Act. The working group expects to report in the summer.

Sexual Assaults

Mr. Leigh: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many people aged (i) under 14, (ii) 14 to 17, (iii) 18 to 20, (iv) 21 to 40, (v) 41 to 64 and (vi) 65 years and over, convicted of the offence of rape of a man in each year from 1987 to 1997 were sentenced to immediate custody; [75034]

(2) how many people aged (i) under 14, (ii) 14 to 17, (iii) 18 to 20, (iv) 21 to 40, (v) 41 to 64 and (vi) 65 years and over, convicted of the offence of indecency between males in each of the years 1987 to 1997 were sentenced to immediate custody; [75031]

(3) how many *(a)* prosecutions, *(b)* convictions and *(c)* cautions for the offence of indecent assault on a male there were of persons who were aged (i) under 14, (ii) 14 to 17, (iii) 18 to 20, (iv) 21 to 40, (v) 41 to 64 and (vi) 65 years and over giving in each age group how many were (1) male and (2) female, in each year between 1987 and 1997; [75032]

(4) how many (1) cautions and (2) convictions there were for the offences of (i) indecent assault on a female under 16 years, (ii) unlawful sexual intercourse with a girl under 16 years, (iii) indecent assault on a male under 16 years, (iv) gross indecency with a girl under 14 years, (v) unlawful sexual intercourse with a girl under 13 years, (vi) gross indecency with a boy under 14 years, (vii) buggery of a male under 16 years and (viii) incest in *(a)* 1985 and *(b)* 1995; and if he will indicate in each case the percentage change; [75029]

(5) in how many cases the victim of a person convicted of indecent assault or other party to an offence of indecent assault for which a conviction was secured was aged *(a)* under 14, *(b)* 14 to 17, *(c)* 18 to 20, *(d)* 21 to 40, *(e)* 41 to 64 and *(f)* 65 years and over, giving in each age group the number who were (1) male or (2) female for each year between 1987 and 1997. [75030]

Mr. Boateng: Available information is given in the tables. Information held on the Home Office Court Proceedings Database on the age of victims of the offence of indecent assault is restricted to identifying those 'under 16' and '16 and over'.

Table A: Number of persons convicted at all courts for the offence of indecent assault on a male or female by sex and age of victim, England and Wales, 1987–97

Offence/sex	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*	*1997*
Indecent assault on a male person under 16 years of age											
Males	420	455	400	413	338	356	287	316	331	349	353
Females	10	5	6	8	13	7	6	8	8	6	10
Indecent assault on a male person aged 16 years or over											
Males	76	86	101	152	113	98	112	84	123	124	112
Females	1	—	1	—	2	2	2	—	—	—	4
Indecent assault on a female person under 16 years of age											
Males	1,542	1,640	1,643	1,525	1,458	1,320	1,193	1,350	1,440	1,590	1,621
Females	14	10	14	12	11	11	12	5	6	7	6
Indecent assault on a female person aged 16 years or over											
Males	755	858	1,009	1,036	944	925	855	847	925	818	852
Females	4	3	5	3	4	4	6	1	6	4	5

Table B: Number of persons convicted at all courts of the offence of male rape[1] by sex, age and result, England and Wales, 1995–97

Year/disposal	*Aged 10–13*	*Aged 14–17*	*Aged 18–20*	*Aged 21–40*	*Aged 41–64*	*Aged 65+*	*All Ages*
1995							
Convicted							
Male	—	2	—	5	2	—	9
Sentenced							
Male	—	2	—	5	2	—	9
Immediate custody[2]							
Male	—	2	—	5	2	—	9
1996							
Convicted							
Male	1	9	4	5	5	—	24
Sentenced							
Male	1	9	4	5	5	—	24
Immediate custody[2]							
Male	—	9	4	5	5	—	23

Table B: Number of persons convicted at all courts of the offence of male rape[1] by sex, age and result, England and Wales, 1995–97

Year/disposal	Aged 10–13	Aged 14–17	Aged 18–20	Aged 21–40	Aged 41–64	Aged 65+	All Ages
1997							
Convicted							
Male	1	7	4	15	14	1	42
Sentenced							
Male	1	6	4	15	14	1	41
Immediate custody[2]	—	5	4	15	14	1	39

[1] New offence created under the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994. Prior to this defendants would have been charged with non-consensual buggery.
[2] Includes persons sentenced under section 53 of the Children and Young Persons Act 1933.

Table C: Number of offenders cautioned for the offence of indecent assault on a male by sex and age, England and Wales, 1987–97

Age and Sex	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997
10–13											
Male	33	38	29	44	43	39	35	35	19	25	18
Female	7	3	6	5	3	2	1	5	1	1	1
14–17											
Male	54	62	70	83	83	81	54	64	54	30	34
Female	4	4	9	7	7	7	4	4	6	3	4
18–20											
Male	10	8	10	22	14	22	12	7	10	7	5
Female	3	2	2	1	1	7	3	2	2	2	1
21–40											
Male	27	27	32	40	38	49	57	47	30	40	20
Female	11	8	10	11	3	9	13	7	12	2	8
41–64											
Male	9	24	13	29	31	22	60	40	30	28	25
Female	1	1	—	—	1	2	—	1	—	2	1
65+											
Male	19	13	24	16	20	16	20	14	14	12	12
Female	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
All ages											
Male	152	172	178	234	229	229	238	207	157	142	114
Female	26	18	27	24	15	27	21	19	21	10	15

Table D: Number of defendants prosecuted at magistrates' courts for the offence of indecent assault on a male by sex and age, England and Wales, 1987–97

Age and Sex	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997
10–13											
Male	5	6	3	4	3	1	7	11	4	3	4
Female	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	2
14–17											
Male	47	48	46	49	33	42	32	41	49	57	64
Female	1	—	4	—	—	1	—	1	1	2	3
18–20											
Male	37	49	58	47	42	48	29	32	23	16	13
Female	1	—	—	4	—	2	2	1	—	—	1
21–40											
Male	290	306	322	331	315	280	269	231	247	159	178
Female	16	9	7	15	11	11	9	14	11	10	14
41–64											
Male	235	244	238	288	290	243	231	262	239	206	241
Female	1	—	3	1	2	3	5	4	2	2	2
65+											
Male	34	35	34	33	38	25	37	42	33	28	20
Female	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
All ages											
Male	678	688	701	752	721	639	605	619	595	469	520
Female	19	9	15	20	13	17	16	21	14	14	22

Table E: Number of offenders convicted[1] at all courts for the offence of indecent assault on a male by sex and age, England and Wales, 1987–97

Age and Sex	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*	*1997*
10–13											
Male	4	3	3	2	2	1	4	6	—	2	3
Female	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	2
14–17											
Male	33	37	32	32	24	31	22	26	34	39	44
Female	1	—	1	—	—	—	—	1	1	2	2
18–20											
Male	29	32	44	32	24	24	22	24	18	21	13
Female	—	—	1	3	2	—	1	—	—	—	1
21–40											
Male	232	246	202	254	188	180	168	160	174	172	163
Female	8	5	4	5	12	7	5	7	6	4	9
41–64											
Male	172	192	193	211	184	197	155	165	230	208	221
Female	2	—	1	—	1	2	2	—	2	—	—
65+											
Male	26	31	27	34	29	22	29	20	25	31	21
Female	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
All ages											
Male	496	541	501	565	451	455	400	401	481	473	465
Female	11	5	7	8	15	9	8	8	9	6	14

[1] Includes persons proceeded against in earlier years or for other offences

Table F: Number of males convicted at all courts for the offence of indecency between males by sex, age and result, England and Wales, 1987–97

Year/disposal	*Aged 10–13*	*Aged 14–17*	*Aged 18–20*	*Aged 21–40*	*Aged 41–64*	*Aged 65+*	*All ages*
1987							
Convicted	—	9	42	523	353	24	951
Sentenced	—	9	42	522	353	24	950
Immediate custody[1]	[2]—	1	—	19	11	—	31
1988							
Convicted	—	12	52	645	553	71	1,333
Sentenced	—	12	52	645	553	71	1,333
Immediate custody[1]	[2]—	—	—	8	12	—	20
1989							
Convicted	1	15	46	772	606	63	1,503
Sentenced	1	15	46	772	605	63	1,502
Immediate custody[1]	[2]—	2	1	13	7	—	23
1990							
Convicted	—	14	36	532	427	37	1,046
Sentenced	—	14	36	530	429	37	1,046
Immediate custody[1]	[2]—	—	—	6	5	—	11
1991							
Convicted	—	5	15	349	232	26	627
Sentenced	—	5	15	349	231	26	626
Immediate custody[1]	[2]—	—	—	5	6	—	11
1992							
Convicted	—	3	20	298	230	27	578
Sentenced	—	3	20	298	231	27	579
Immediate custody[1]	[2]—	1	—	4	3	—	8
1993							
Convicted	—	—	6	192	169	22	389
Sentenced	—	—	6	191	169	21	387
Immediate custody[1]	[2]—	—	—	4	2	—	6
1994							
Convicted	—	4	8	226	226	16	480
Sentenced	—	4	8	226	226	16	480
Immediate custody[1]	[2]—	—	—	3	4	1	8
1995							
Convicted	—	3	3	203	176	25	410
Sentenced	—	3	3	203	176	25	410
Immediate custody[1]	—	—	—	5	12	1	18

Table F: Number of males convicted at all courts for the offence of indecency between males by sex, age and result, England and Wales, 1987–97

Year/disposal	Aged 10–13	Aged 14–17	Aged 18–20	Aged 21–40	Aged 41–64	Aged 65+	All ages
1996							
Convicted	—	2	4	108	97	8	219
Sentenced	—	2	4	108	97	8	219
Immediate custody[1]	—	—	—	3	1	—	4
1997							
Convicted	—	—	3	112	105	17	237
Sentenced	—	—	3	112	104	17	236
Immediate custody[1]	—	—	—	3	3	—	6

[1] Includes persons sentenced under section 53 of the Children and Young Persons Act 1933
[2] Not applicable
Note:
In some cases total sentenced is higher than total convicted—this will include persons convicted at magistrates' courts but sentenced at a later date at the Crown Court

Table G: Number of offenders cautioned and convicted at all courts for specific sexual offences for the years 1985 and 1995 and showing percentage change, England and Wales

Offence	Cautioned			Convicted		
	1985	1995	% change	1985	1995	% change
Indecent assault on a female under 16	970	670	–31	1,446	1,446	0
Unlawful sexual intercourse with a girl under 16	1,155	400	–65	395	203	–49
Indecent assault on a male under 16	146	137	–6	528	339	–36
Gross indecency with a girl under 14	46	30	–35	160	99	–38
Unlawful sexual intercourse with a girl under 13	58	41	–29	110	81	–26
Gross indecency with a boy under 14	16	28	+75	106	56	–47
Buggery of a male under 16[1]	22	11	–50	167	129	–23
Incest	21	14	–33	128	48	–63

[1] For 1995 may include buggery of a woman or animal

Hostels

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the national average occupancy rate in hostels in England and Wales on the latest date available; and what are his Department's relevant key performance indicators for 1998–99. [75242]

Mr. George Howarth: The average occupancy rate in approved probation and bail hostels for the year 1998–99 currently stands at 84 per cent. This is above the 83 per cent. target for the key performance indicator for hostel occupancy, which will increase to 87 per cent. in 1999–2000.

Gaming Act 1968

Ms Moran: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what responses he received to the consultation paper on modernising the Gaming Act 1968 in respect of *(a)* postal and group applications, *(b)* limited print advertising and *(c)* introduction of casino gaming machines; and if he will make a statement. [75219]

Mr. George Howarth: We consulted on 5 August 1998 about proposals to relax certain Gaming Act controls on casino membership, advertising and jackpot machines. The consultation period ended on 21 October.

We received 39 responses, most supporting the proposals. We have been discussing specific issues with the Gaming Board and the industry, and hope to make an announcement shortly.

Immigration Officers

Mr. McCabe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if training for immigration officers includes guidance on facilitating legitimate travellers who wish to visit family and friends in the United Kingdom. [75650]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The greater majority of passengers are, of course, entitled or qualified to enter the United Kingdom. This includes those wishing to visit family and friends here. Immigration Officers are given training which reflects this priority, with particular emphasis on professionalism, inter-personal skills and awareness of the needs and concerns of those with whom they come into contact, including the family and friends of passengers.

Mr. McCabe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what common training is given to all immigration officers. [75649]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Immigration Officers undergo a variety of common training during their careers in the Immigration Service. In particular, they are given ten weeks induction training to enable them to apply the requirements of immigration-related legislation and instructions. Areas covered include their powers and obligations, operating the controls in accordance with Government policies, interview skills, professional standards and skills such as forgery detection.

Thereafter, Immigration Officers are given consolidation training in order to reinforce their knowledge and experience, as well as more specialised training for those working in areas such as computerisation, resource management and training.

Mr. McCabe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what training is given to immigration officers working in the Indian sub-continent. [75648]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: All Immigration Officers working abroad, including those in the sub-continent, receive a comprehensive Entry Clearance Officer course which addresses a number of issues in the operation of a faster, fairer and firmer immigration control overseas. Officers are required to demonstrate a sound knowledge and understanding of the principles of Best Practice in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and its importance in the successful management of an entry clearance operation. The course reflects the importance of treating each applicant with courtesy and respect as an individual, with particular emphasis on a professional approach to the interview process.

The four-day course is delivered by Immigration Service trainers all of whom have had recent experience in entry clearance work overseas. Areas covered include types of interviews that Entry Clearance Officers carry out and the range of different applications, including visitors and students. A substantial part of the course is devoted to the area of family settlement.

On arrival in post, they receive additional training, with particular guidance on the cultural background and life specific to the country in which they will be working. This includes those going to the sub-continent.

Metropolitan Police

Mr. Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what the additional special payment allocated to the Metropolitan Police was for each of the years 1997–98, 1998–99 and 1999–2000; [75755]

(2) pursuant to his answer of 1 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *556*, if he will set out the basis upon which the additional special payment allocated to the Metropolitan police was calculated; and what criteria were adopted; [75753]

(3) what new factors he took into account in calculating the additional special payment allocated to the Metropolitan Police for 1999–2000 compared with 1998–99. [75754]

Mr. Boateng: The special payment was £130 million for 1997–98, £151 million for 1998–99 and will be £176 million for 1999–2000.

The payment was set at £151 million for 1998–99 following a review by Home Office officials which was the first comprehensive attempt to cost the Metropolitan Police's national and capital city functions. The report provided a degree of transparency about the additional payment which was not previously available.

In setting the special payment for 1999–2000, factors taken into account included inflation, policing related to millennium celebrations, and the overall importance of maintaining public confidence in the policing of the capital city.

Correspondence

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to reply to the letters of 3 December and 26 January, from the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed concerning a computer database for tracing stolen property. [75744]

Mr. Boateng: I am sorry for the delay and shall reply to the right hon. Gentleman as quickly as possible.

Number Plates

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the auto number-plate recognition system in reducing crime. [75659]

Mr. Boateng: No systematic assessment has been made, but the technical performance of automatic number plate recognition systems is kept under review.

Stephen Lawrence Inquiry Report

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if the investigation into the leak of the Macpherson report will extend to those members of Ministers' staff who are not civil servants and are not based within the Department. [75791]

Mr. Straw: The conduct of the inquiry, including the question of who should be interviewed, is a matter for the investigator to determine.

Ministerial Staff

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what guidelines are in place regarding the disciplinary action which can be taken against those members of Ministers' staff who are not civil servants and are not based within the Department, where they are found guilty of misconduct or gross misconduct; [75797]

(2) what guidelines are in place regarding access to *(a)* unpublished documents and *(b)* material with a restricted classification by members of Ministers' staff who are not civil servants and are not based within the Department. [75798]

Mr. Straw: Ministers' staff are either civil servants or paid or unpaid special advisers. Paid special advisers are civil servants, employed under individual contracts (the model of which was promulgated by the Prime Minister on 19 May 1997), and are subject to the same conditions of service and the same rules of conduct as other civil servants. Unpaid advisers are subject to the normal rules of confidentiality, as the Ministerial Code, published in July 1997, makes clear. The employment by Ministers, in their capacity as Members of Parliament, of staff to assist with constituency business, is not a matter for me.

SCOTLAND

Departmental Expenditure

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his answer of 14 January 1999, *Official Report*, column *232*, if he will list the expenditure not included in his answer incurred by *(a)* his agencies and non-departmental public bodies and *(b)* the Central Office of Information for relevant work carried out for his Department. [71022]

Mr. Dewar *[holding answer 15 February 1999]:* The information requested is not held centrally for non-departmental public bodies and could be collected only at disproportionate cost. The Central Office of Information has carried out no work for my Department in the period.

Care and Repair Grants

Mr. Davidson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish *(a)* a list of care and repair grants made for each local authority in Scotland and *(b)* how much each local authority in Scotland received for such grants per 1,000 of population, for each of the last three years. [74014]

Mr. Macdonald *[holding answer 8 March 1999]:* Details of individual Care and Repair grants provided by local authorities are not held centrally. The cost of grants given to owners benefiting from the Care and Repair scheme is met from the gross capital resources available to local authorities. The Scottish Office and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities have agreed that expenditure on Care and Repair should be a shared priority for central and local government. The value of works completed in 1997–98 was around £6 million, covering some 1,400 homes. Revenue funding in 1997–98 amounted to £1.2 million.

From 1 July, this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

M74

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will review the proposal to change the name of the M74 motorway to the M6; and if he will make a statement. [74409]

Mr. Macdonald: The previous Government had proposed that once the Glasgow to Carlisle road was upgraded to motorway throughout, its name should change to the M6. I confirm that there is no intention to renumber the route before all the remaining sections of the all-purpose route have been upgraded. From 1 July 1999, this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

University Attendance

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment he has made of the proportion of school children who went on to university, broken down by residence in each Scottish parliamentary constituency, in each of the last five years. [74399]

Mrs. Liddell: Information is not available in the format requested. However, information is available on the percentage of school leavers from publicly funded secondary schools in Scotland entering a full-time course of higher education for each Local Authority area. This information is set out in the table:

Percentage of school leavers from publicly funded secondary schools in Scotland entering full-time higher education 1993–94 to 1997–98

	Percentage of school leavers entering full-time HE [1]				
Local authority	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1996–97*	*1997–98*
Scotland	27	27	28	29	30
Aberdeen City	23	22	26	26	30
Aberdeenshire	28	28	33	36	38
Angus	32	32	33	34	33
Argyll and Bute	35	35	32	34	33
Clackmannanshire	28	26	22	25	27
Dumfries and Galloway	30	31	33	33	30
Dundee City	23	21	22	22	22
East Ayrshire	24	26	25	24	30
East Dunbartonshire	41	42	45	43	44
East Lothian	30	24	30	29	26
East Renfrewshire	43	42	45	42	47
Edinburgh, City of	25	26	25	27	27
Eilean Siar	31	38	37	37	39
Falkirk	22	20	27	25	27
Fife	29	29	31	30	30
Glasgow City	14	14	15	17	17
Highland	30	30	30	28	31
Inverclyde	28	24	26	29	28
Midlothian	24	25	26	26	22
Moray	27	27	26	29	30
North Ayrshire	29	26	28	27	27
North Lanarkshire	24	23	25	26	28
Orkney Islands	46	39	37	36	40
Perth and Kinross	34	32	32	35	35
Renfrewshire	32	32	30	31	34
Scottish Borders	29	32	31	33	33
Shetland Islands	30	32	32	24	33
South Ayrshire	36	38	39	38	33
South Lanarkshire	28	30	31	32	32
Stirling	30	34	33	39	38
West Dunbartonshire	21	21	23	26	25
West Lothian	20	18	21	24	26

[1] Figures for 1997–98 (but not other years) include those school leavers who have an unconditional offer of a place in higher education, deferred for a year.

Note:
Figures exclude school leavers from special and independent schools and people who do not enter higher education directly from school.

Source:
HMI Audit Unit Leaver Destinations from Scottish Secondary Schools.

As from 1 July 1999, this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

Primary Education

Mrs. Laing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what the level of primary education funding was per primary school pupil in *(a)* cash terms and *(b)* 1998–99 prices in each year since 1992 in each local authority area. [74544]

Mrs. Liddell: The information is given in the tables. 1996–97 is the latest financial year for actual expenditure information is currently available. The figures, which are derived from local authority returns, do not include the cost of home-to-school transport, school meals, education authority central administration costs and loan charges.

Net current expenditure per pupil in local authority primary schools

(£ at out-turn prices)

Regional/Islands Councils	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*
Borders	1,885	1,935	1,943	1,870
Central	1,722	1,733	1,724	1,732
Dumfries and Galloway	1,745	1,749	1,719	1,761
Fife	1,729	1,721	1,752	1,771
Grampian	1,842	1,805	1,774	1,860
Highland	1,907	1,970	2,000	1,893
Lothian	1,659	1,650	1,695	1,745
Strathclyde	1,763	1,769	1,811	1,906
Tayside	1,709	1,711	1,766	1,757
Orkney	2,106	2,560	2,537	2,640
Shetland	2,382	2,945	2,576	2,499
Western Isles	2,429	2,390	2,490	2,478

Net current expenditure per pupil in local authority primary schools

(£ at 1998–99 prices)

Regional/Island Councils	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*
Borders	2,193	2,193	2,171	2,030
Central	2,003	1,964	1,926	1,880
Dumfies and Galloway	2,030	1,982	1,921	1,912
Fife	2,011	1,950	1,957	1,923
Grampian	2,143	2,045	1,982	2,019
Highland	2,218	2,232	2,235	2,055
Lothian	1,930	1,870	1,894	1,894
Stratclyde	2,051	2,005	2,023	2,069
Tayside	1,988	1,939	1,973	1,907
Orkney	2,450	2,901	2,834	2,866
Shetland	2,771	3,337	2,878	2,713
Western Isles	2,826	2,708	2,782	2,690

Net current expenditure per pupil in local authority primary schools in 1996–97

Councils	*(£ at out-turn prices)*	*(£ at 1998–99 prices)*
Aberdeen, City	1,805	1,901
Aberdeenshire	1,857	1,955
Angus	1,799	1,894
Argyll and Bute	2,382	2,508
Clackmannanshire	1,761	1,854
Dumfries and Galloway	1,766	1,860
Dundee	1,793	1,889
East Ayrshire	1,820	1,917
East Dunbartonshire	1,659	1,748
East Lothian	1,764	1,858
East Renfrewshire	1,571	1,654
Edinburgh, City	1,774	1,869
Eilean Siar	2,531	2,666
Falkirk	1,755	1,848
Fife	1,754	1,847
Glasgow City	2,007	2,114
Highland	1,966	2,070
Inverclyde	1,780	1,875
Midlothian	1,882	1,983
Moray	1,513	1,593
North Ayrshire	1,750	1,843
North Lanarkshire	1,836	1,934
Orkney	2,711	2,855
Perth and Kinross	1,834	1,931
Renfrewshire	1,785	1,880
Scottish Borders	1,896	1,997
Shetland	2,497	2,630
South Ayrshire	1,723	1,815
South Lanarkshire	1,893	1,993
Stirling	1,947	2,050
West Dunbartonshire	1,912	2,014
West Lothian	1,830	1,928

From 1 July 1999, this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many primary school classes there were in Scotland in *(a)* 1996, *(b)* 1997 and *(c)* 1998. [74981]

Mrs. Liddell: There were 17,731 classes in publicly funded primary schools in Scotland in 1997. Of these, 13,052 were single-stage classes and 4,679 were composite classes. The information requested was not collected in 1996 and information for 1998 is not yet available.

From 1 July 1999 this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

Schools Statistics

Mrs. Laing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) how many *(a)* primary schools and *(b)* secondary schools in each local authority area were opened in each year since 1992; [74511]

(2) how many *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary schools in each local authority area were closed in each year since 1992. [74555]

Mrs. Liddell: Information derived from the database of schools held by The Scottish Office to enable it to conduct the annual School Census and other surveys is given in the following tables. 1993 is the earliest year for which reliable information is available in this form. The figures represent the primary and secondary schools/departments added to or removed from the database. In a number of instances this may be for reasons other than closure, such as merger. Specific information on such circumstances is not held centrally.

Number of publicly funded primary and secondary schools/departments in each local authority area that were opened in each year since 1993

	1993		1994		1995		1996		1997		1998	
	Primary	Secondary	Primary	Secondary	Primary	Secondary	Primary	Secondary	Primary	Secondary	Primary	Secondary
Aberdeen City	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	—
Aberdeenshire	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Angus	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	2	—	—	—
Argyll and Bute	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Clackmannanshire	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Dumfries and Galloway	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Dundee City	—	—	—	—	—	—	2	1	1	1	—	—
East Ayrshire	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—
East Dunbartonshire	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	—
East Lothian	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	—
East Renfrewshire	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Edinburgh City	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Eilean Siar[1]	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Falkirk	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Fife	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—
Glasgow City	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	—
Highland	—	—	—	—	3	1	1	—	—	—	1	—
Inverclyde	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Midlothian	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Moray	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
North Ayrshire	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	—
North Lanarkshire	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Orkney	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Perth and Kinross	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Renfrewshire	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Scottish Borders	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Shetland Islands	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
South Ayrshire	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—
South Lanarkshire	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	—
Stirling	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
West Dunbartonshire	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
West Lothian	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—

[1] Formerly known as Western Isles

Number of publicly funded primary and secondary schools in each local authority area that were closed in each year since 1993

	1993		1994		1995		1996		1997		1998	
	Primary	Secondary	Primary	Secondary	Primary	Secondary	Primary	Secondary	Primary	Secondary	Primary	Secondary
Aberdeen City	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	4	—
Aberdeenshire	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	2	—
Angus	—	—	—	—	—	—	2	—	—	—	—	—
Argyll and Bute	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	2	—	2	—
Clackmannanshire	—	1	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	—
Dumfries and Galloway	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Dundee City	—	—	—	—	—	—	5	2	2	2	—	—
East Ayrshire	—	—	—	—	—	—	5	—	—	—	—	—
East Dunbartonshire	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
East Lothian	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
East Renfrewshire	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Edinburgh City	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Eilean Siar[1]	—	—	2	1	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	—
Falkirk	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Fife	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Glasgow City	—	—	1	2	—	—	5	—	3	1	—	7
Highland	1	—	1	—	1	—	4	—	2	—	1	—
Inverclyde	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Midlothian	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Moray	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—
North Ayrshire	—	—	—	—	—	—	2	—	—	—	—	—
North Lanarkshire	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Orkney	—	—	—	—	2	—	1	—	—	—	—	—
Perth and Kinross	1	—	1	—	1	1	—	—	—	—	1	—
Renfrewshire	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Scottish Borders	3	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—
Shetland Islands	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—
South Ayrshire	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
South Lanarkshire	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Stirling	—	—	1	—	—	—	2	—	—	—	2	—
West Dunbartonshire	1	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	—
West Lothian	—	2	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—

[1] Formerly known as Western Isles

From 1 July 1999, this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

Nurses

Mrs. Laing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many people *(a)* undertook nurse training and *(b)* qualified as trained nurses, and how many and what percentage of qualified nurses gained employment in the NHS, in each year since 1992. [74514]

Mr. Galbraith: The available information is as follows:

	(a) Student nurse intakes	*(b) Student nurse completions*
1992–93	2,325	2,359
1993–94	2,377	2,295
1994–95	2,230	2,047
1995–96	2,209	1,805
1996–97	2,386	1,683
1997–98	2,367	1,606

(c) Information on the percentage of qualified nurses gaining employment in the NHS is available centrally for the years 1992 to 1994 only. It is published in Table 9.16 of Scottish Health Statistics 1996, a copy of which is held in the Library of the House.

Note:

The reduction in completions results from reduced intakes during the period 1990–95, which included the introduction of P2000 courses in place of the old style '1982' courses.

From 1997–98 onwards, intakes have been informed by the annual Student Nurse Intake Plans, which assess the supply and demand of nurses. These exercises are conducted in partnership with the Management Executive, NHS Trusts, Health Boards and the Private Sector and includes all specialist areas in nursing. The model used takes account of demographic trends including the age profiles of nurses currently employed within the NHS, and the number of students which require to be trained is estimated over a 5 year cycle.

Source:

Training Data—National Board for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting for Scotland

Employment Data—Information and Statistics Division of the Common Services Agency for the NHS in Scotland.

From 1 July 1999, this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

NHS Bureaucracy

Mrs. Laing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much money has been saved from reducing bureaucracy in the NHS in Scotland since 1 May 1997; and what these savings have been spent on. [74540]

Mr. Galbraith: The estimated savings from reducing bureaucracy for 1997–98 and 1998–99 are approximately £25 million.

The savings have been generated and retained at individual Health Board level and have been re-invested in patient care in line with local priorities and needs.

From 1 July 1999, this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

Class Sizes

Mrs. Laing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list by individual school and local authority, the average number of pupils per *(a)* primary school class, *(b)* primary years one, two and three class and *(c)* secondary school class. [74545]

Mrs. Liddell: The answer to parts *(a)* and *(b)* of the question is lengthy and I have arranged for a table giving the information requested to be placed in the Library. The information requested in part *(c)* of the question is not held centrally.

From 1 July 1999, this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

NHS Staff

Mrs. Laing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many *(a)* NHS administrators and managers, *(b)* nurses, *(c)* hospital doctors, *(d)* hospital consultants and *(e)* general practitioners there were in each health board area, in each year since 1992. [74512]

Mr. Galbraith: As the information requested is rather lengthy, I have arranged for copies to be placed in the House of Commons Library.

From 1 July 1999, this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

Primary Care Trusts

Mrs. Laing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what estimate he has made of the cost *(a)* in total and *(b)* by health board area for the introduction of primary care trusts and local health care co-operatives. [74516]

Mr. Galbraith: The introduction of Primary Care Trusts is part of the overall reconfiguration of NHS Trusts in Scotland that is expected to yield net savings of £6 million per annum. With mergers taking place in all 12 mainland Health Board areas, the saving per Board area will be £500,000 on average.

In 1998–99, just under £1 million was made available to mainland Health Boards to support the development of Local Healthcare Co-operatives.

Individual Health Board allocations are detailed in the table.

Health board	*Support for LHCCs 1998–99*
Argyll and Clyde	100,000
Ayrshire and Arran	80,000
Borders	30,000
Dumfries and Galloway	70,000
Fife	70,000
Forth Valley	95,000
Grampian	90,000
Greater Glasgow	120,000
Highland	80,000
Lanarkshire	80,000
Lothian	101,500
Tayside	80,000
Total	996,500

From 1 July 1999, this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

Nursery Education

Mrs. Laing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many *(a)* free nursery school places, *(b)* hours of free nursery schooling per child and *(c)* children in the nursery school age group, there are in each local authority area. [74530]

Mrs. Liddell: Information on the number of free nursery school places available in each local authority area is not held centrally. Government grant funding covers up to 412½ hours of pre-school education for each eligible child over the school year. The Government's pledge to provide a free, quality, part-time education place for every child in their pre-school year, whose parents want one, has been met in Scotland: I announced this on 4 March. The estimated number of pre-school children in each local authority area eligible for pre-school education grant in the school year 1998–99 is in the table.

Local authority	*Estimate of pre-school year children*[1]
Aberdeen City	2,433
Aberdeenshire	2,717
Angus	1,021
Argyll and Bute	1,296
Clackmannanshire	643
Dumfries & Galloway	1,708
Dundee City	1,637
East Ayrshire	1,487
East Dunbartonshire	1,380
East Lothian	1,245
East Renfrewshire	1,089
City of Edinburgh	5,039
Eilean Siar	290
Falkirk	1,758
Fife	4,129
City of Glasgow	5,863
Highland	2,506
Inverclyde	1,055
Midlothian	998
Moray	1,057
North Ayrshire	1,649
North Lanarkshire	4,168
Orkney Islands	232
Perth and Kinross	1,452
Renfrewshire	2,152
Scottish Borders	1,169
Shetland Islands	293
South Ayrshire	1,197
South Lanarkshire	3,711
Stirling	926
West Dunbartonshire	1,252
West Lothian	2,059
Scotland	59,611

[1] The estimated number of children in each local authority is based on information provided by GRO, incorporating information provided by authorities where appropriate.

From 1 July 1999, this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

Ministerial Costs

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will estimate the total cost to his Department of all Ministers at the Scottish Office for each of the years *(a)* 1995–96, *(b)* 1996–97, *(c)* 1997–98, *(d)* 1998–99 and *(e)* 1999–2000 broken down by (i) salaries, (ii) travel and (iii) other costs; and if he will make a statement. [74497]

Mr. Dewar *[holding answer 4 March 1999]:* For information on 1996–97 to 1999–2000 I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 3 March, *Official Report*, column *753*. Expenditure for 1995–96 is shown in the table. The table shows Ministerial pay and total non-pay expenditure for ministerial offices. This includes travel and subsistence, office services and general administration costs for both Ministers and the staff of their offices. It is not possible to disaggregate this amount into the categories requested.

£

	Ministerial pay	*Ministerial office non-pay*
1995–96	178,943	766,483

Victim Support

Mr. Sarwar: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on Government measures for Victim Support in Scotland and its future plans for this work in Glasgow. [74884]

Mr. McLeish: Government measures for Victim Support Scotland include an increase in funding for 1999–2000 of £200,000 to £1.705 million. This is made up of £105,000 for general support and £95,000 to allow a roll-out of court-based witness support programmes beyond the current services at Ayr, Hamilton and Kirkcaldy.

Victim Support Scotland has recently completed a reorganisation of local services from 77 to 32 to coincide with local authority boundaries. The level of funding for loam services is a matter for the organisation.

From 1 July 1999, this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

New Deal (Costs)

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what has been the total cost of implementing and running the New Deal in Scotland since January 1998. [74982]

Mr. Dewar: Expenditure to the end of January 1999 on the New Deal programmes for 18 to 24-year-olds and for those aged 25 and over was £12.97 million.

Student Finance

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will estimate, for each of the next 10 years, the annual cost of abolishing tuition fees for Scottish students at all UK universities on *(a)* a cash accounting basis and *(b)* a resource accounting basis; and if he will make a statement. [74562]

Mrs. Liddell *[holding answer 5 March 1999]:* No separate estimates have been made for tuition fee income from students at universities as requested. The table provides estimates for fees income from Scottish higher education students at higher education institutions and further education colleges for the years 1998–99 to 2001–02 only.

Scottish and EU [1] students contribution to UK higher education institutions and further education colleges

	£ million
1998–99	18
1999–2000	29
2000–01	36
2001–02	38

[1] EU students are included as they have to be treated in the same way as Scottish students

Note:
Figures are at current prices

The figures show the estimated total cash transfer from Scottish (and EU) students to institutions in each year. If this cash transfer is not made each year, that funding would have to be met from central Government current resources. The figures for annual costs would be the same on a resource accounting basis as on a cash accounting basis. The estimates assume other student support remains unchanged.

From 1 July 1999, this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

Public Appointments

Mr. Moore: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list by region the number of appointments of which he has *(a)* made personally and *(b)* been consulted on; and if he will list for those appointments the political affiliations of the successful candidates. [74992]

Mr. Dewar *[holding answer 5 March 1999]:* I have made some 550 appointments to public bodies in Scotland since May 1997 and am also consulted on an on-going basis about appointments to GB or UK bodies operating in Scotland. All appointments are made in accordance with Nolan principles involving selection on merit and independent scrutiny of candidates. Where bodies do not have purely local remits I make an effort to ensure as wide a geographical representation as possible. Candidates for public appointments are not required to state their political affiliation.

From 1 July 1999, this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

Bed Blocking

Mr. Moore: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many patients *(a)* in each health board area and *(b)* nationally were retained past their original discharge date in NHS beds before moving to social service beds in the last year for which figures are available; and if he will estimate the cost of the NHS of this delayed discharge. [75067]

Mr. Galbraith *[holding answer 5 March 1999]:* Information to a consistent definition is not currently available. A Working Group of representatives from The Scottish Office, Health Boards, NHS Trusts and Local Authorities is developing arrangements to enable data to be recorded on a consistent basis. These arrangements will be piloted in Scotland from April 1999. Standardised information should be recorded throughout Scotland from April 2000.

From 1 July 1999, this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

Teachers (In-service Training)

Mrs. Laing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many days of in-service training are provided for *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary school teachers in each local authority area per year. [74639]

Mrs. Liddell: Under the current Scheme of Salaries and Conditions of Service for teachers employed in education authority-controlled schools there is provision for a maximum of 5 working days out of the school year to be spent on planned activities such as in-service training. The timing and planning of such dates are drawn up by the headteacher in consultation with staff, and within guidelines provided by the local authority.

As from 1 July 1999, this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

Right to Buy

Mr. Russell Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he will announce the results of the public consultation on proposed changes to the Right to Buy Cost Floor Rules in Scotland; and if he will make a statement. [76122]

Mr. Macdonald: We received 38 responses to the consultation paper which was issued in February 1998, the majority of which were broadly supportive of the proposals outlined in the paper. Having considered the comments received, I have today laid before Parliament a Statutory Instrument which will extend the cost floor period in Scotland from 5 to 10 years with effect from 1 April 1999. This change will protect for a longer period investment made by landlords in their housing stock.

A separate Determination will also be issued which will set out in detail how landlords should calculate the cost floor in future. This will also introduce a new threshold, which will allow landlords to include significant repairs and maintenance costs within the calculation of the cost floor. The changes will affect both local authorities and other landlords whose tenants have a Preserved Right to Buy.

From 1 July 1999, this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Zimbabwe

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, pursuant to her answer of 26 February 1999, *Official Report*, column *456*, how long she spent in Zimbabwe in January 1998; and if she will list the people she met. [75763]

Clare Short: The visit took less than a day. The purpose was to meet the staff of my Department in Harare. As I stated in my answer of 1 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *582*, I also met the right hon. Herbert Murerwa, Zimbabwean Minister of Finance.

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development when the detailed country strategy paper on Zimbabwe will be published. [75764]

Clare Short: We expect to publish our Country Strategy Paper for Zimbabwe next month.

Biological Resources (Patents)

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment she has made of the implications for poorer countries of the patents granted within the United States on *(a)* quinoa, *(b)* the neem tree, *(c)* j'oublie and *(d)* basmati. [74847]

Clare Short: We have made no assessment of the implications for developing countries of the patents granted for quinoa, the neem tree, j'oublie and basmati by the United States.

Patents can have only national effects and as such are effective only against acts within the jurisdiction concerned, in these cases the US. They have no power elsewhere. The owner of a patent can prevent the use of the protected material by others within the state concerned, including imports based on the protected technology.

Patents can protect only new technology, not natural discoveries nor existing technology and can be challenged in the courts where they are invalid.

ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND THE REGIONS

Integrated Transport Commission

18. **Mr. Walter:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he will bring forward plans to implement his integrated transport policy; and if he will make a statement. [73430]

Dr. Reid: We are already implementing our integrated transport policy. We are investing an extra £1.8 billion in integrated transport, and local transport plans—the key tool for making it happen—will be in place this summer.

Council Tax

19. **Mr. Gill:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he has made of the effect of the local government settlement for 1999–2000 on council tax levels. [73431]

Ms Armstrong: Decisions on the level of council tax are a matter for each authority. Our settlement provides that if local authorities increased their budgets in line with SSAs, council taxes would rise by 4.5 per cent. on average.

33. **Mr. Burstow:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement about council tax levels in 1999–2000. [73445]

Ms Armstrong: Decisions on the level of council tax are a matter for each authority.

Mrs. Shephard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will place in the Library a table showing for each notifiable authority in England, the band D council tax for 1999–2000; and the level of increase over 1998–99, expressed *(a)* in cash terms and *(b)* as a percentage. [75547]

Ms Armstrong: I refer the right hon. Member to my reply given to the hon. Member for Croydon, South (Mr. Ottaway) on 3 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *733*.

Electric Cars

20. **Ms Blears:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to encourage the use of electric cars in urban areas. [73432]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Electric vehicle technology has the potential to offer significant environmental benefits, especially if used in urban areas. That is why the Government is undertaking research and development into this technology through the Foresight Vehicle programme, and providing grants to help cover the additional purchase costs of electric vehicles through the Powershift programme. The Cleaner Vehicles Task Force is also considering their longer-term role.

Professional Drivers

21. **Mr. Clapham:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what representations he has received about managing road risk for professional drivers. [73433]

Mr. Meale: I receive representations from time to time from a number of organisations in the field of road safety including ROSPA and BRAKE, on the question of the management of occupational road risk.

Road Congestion

22. **Mr. Syms:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he last met representatives from the Automobile Association regarding his proposals to tackle road congestion. [73434]

Dr. Reid: Ministers from the Department meet representatives of the Automobile Association from time to time to discuss matters arising out of the Integrated Transport White Paper. A number of such meetings took place in October and November last year.

Single Regeneration Budget

23. **Mr. Salter:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what the time scale is for consideration and implementation of regeneration schemes under the new single regeneration budget, SRB5. [73435]

Mr. Caborn: Final bids must be submitted to Regional Development Agencies (or in London, the Government Office) by 30 April. Decisions on which to support will be made in June.

Mr. McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will publish the names of those people serving as members of the local Single Regeneration Budget partnerships. [75158]

Mr. Meale: This information is not held centrally and can be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if hon. Members are eligible to serve as members of local Single Regeneration Budget partnerships. [75159]

Mr. Meale: I am not aware of any rules that prevent hon. Members, other than Ministers and Parliamentary Private Secretaries, from serving as members of local Single Regeneration Budget partnerships. Ministers and Parliamentary Private Secretaries are governed by the terms of the Ministerial Code.

Community Forest Schemes

24. **Helen Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what action he is taking to encourage companies to participate in community forest schemes; and if he will make a statement. [73436]

Mr. Meacher: This is for the Community Forest teams, who I am pleased to say are succeeding in attracting an increasing amount of support from the business community. The £7.7 million of support received in 1997–98 represented a 400 per cent. increase on the level in 1994–95.

Climate Change Programme

25. **Mr. Barry Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what estimate he has made of the contribution of business to meeting the targets in the UK climate change programme. [73437]

Mr. Meacher: The climate change consultation paper which we published last October set out the options on how we might meet our climate change targets. The paper looked at the potential contribution from all sectors. The consultation has now closed and we are in the process of analysing the responses. We are aiming to publish a draft UK programme later this year.

Greater London Authority

26. **Sir Sydney Chapman:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what estimate he has made of the cost of the administration of the Greater London Authority in its first year of operation. [73438]

Mr. Raynsford: No estimate has yet been made specifically for the GLA's first year of operation. As noted in "A Mayor and Assembly for London" (Cm 3897), we estimate that the annual cost of entirely new administration costs—such as for the Mayor, the Assembly, their support staff and central services—will be about £20 million.

Bus Services

27. **Mrs. Organ:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what measures he is taking to encourage the improvement of bus services. [73439]

Ms Glenda Jackson: We have made an additional £150 million available to local authorities over 3 years to support rural bus services and an additional £700 million of capital resources for local transport expenditure. Our policy proposals for buses were set out in the Transport White Paper last July.

Regional Development Agencies

28. **Mr. Gray:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what factors were taken into account in appointing board members to regional development agencies. [73440]

Mr. Caborn: Our primary concern in appointing the Board members for the RDAs was to choose people who would make an effective contribution and represent the interests of the region as a whole. Board members have a wide range of experience, including business, local government, rural affairs, education, trade unions and the voluntary sectors.

Housing Development

29. **Jackie Ballard:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he has made of the provision for housing development in structure plans currently under review. [73441]

Mr. Raynsford: Provision for housing development in structure plans is a matter for local planning authorities in the first instance. In determining provision, they must have regard to national policies (for example, "Panning for the Communities of the Future") and Regional Planning Guidance. Assessment of plans by the Secretary of State will include, amongst other things, the extent to which the local authority has had regard to these matters.

Road Schemes

30. **Mr. Paterson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on private finance initiative road schemes. [73442]

Dr. Reid: Using private finance for road construction and maintenance can offer good value for money to the taxpayer. Highway Authorities should consider what form of procurement is likely to offer best value for money after they have satisfied themselves on the transport need for a scheme.

Animal Rendering Plants

31. **Mr. Dawson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will ensure that local authorities continue to have the role of monitoring and setting environmental standards at animal rendering plants. [73443]

Mr. Meale: Animal rendering plants fall within the scope of EU directive 96/61 concerning integrated pollution prevention and control. My Department issued a third consultation paper on the implementation of this directive in December last year. Paragraph 52 of the paper specifically invited views on the proposal that animal rendering plants should be regulated by the Environment Agency rather than local authorities under the directive. The consultation period ended on 28 February. The Government will make a decision on future regulation of animal rendering plants thereafter.

Standard Spending Assessments

32. **Mr. Chaytor:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what discussions have taken place with the Local Government Association regarding the principles underpinning the review of SSAs. [73444]

Ms Armstrong: The principles of the review of revenue grant distribution were set out in the White Paper "Modern Local Government: In Touch with the People", which was presented to the House in July 1998. Officials from a number of Departments met representatives from local government, including the LGA, the Association for London Government and the Treasurers' Societies on 10 February to discuss the review. Further regular meetings with the LGA are planned during the course of the review.

Workplace Health and Safety

34. **Mr. Olner:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what proposals he has to improve health and safety in the workplace. [R] [73446]

Mr. Meale: The Government are working with the Health and Safety Commission and Executive to improve health and safety in the workplace. The Health and Safety Commission will shortly be submitting a three-year strategic plan to the Government. My right hon. Friends the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for the Environment met the Commission recently to discuss the Plan. It will be published in May and copies will be placed in the House Library. The Government are providing an extra £13 million in running costs to the Commission next year, and a further £23 million and £27 million for the following two years to enable the Commission and Executive to increase their efforts still further. This signals our strong commitment to improving health and safety standards.

British Waterways

35. **Mr. Miller:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how the extra resources to British Waterways are planned to be allocated. [73447]

Mr. Meale: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave earlier today to my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, North-West (Mr. Naysmith).

Thames Gateway

36. **Mr. Austin:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will set out his priorities for road improvements and public transport improvements to achieve the regeneration potential of the Thames Gateway. [73448]

Mr. Caborn: The main public transport priority to achieve the regeneration potential of the Thames Gateway remains the construction of the Channel Tunnel Rail Link. More localised public transport projects, in association with the major developments, should bring benefits throughout the Gateway.

Key priorities for roads are improvements to the A2, providing enhanced access to Kent Thames-side, one of the two main centres for development in the Thames Gateway, and a second Swale crossing to the Isle of Sheppey.

Walking-to-school Initiative

37. **Ms Stuart:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what progress he has made with his walking-to-school initiative; and if he will make a statement. [73449]

Ms Glenda Jackson: We established the School Travel Advisory Group in December to identify practical action to reduce car use and improve safety on the journey to school, including ways of encouraging walking to school. Guidance for local authorities and schools is in preparation and will be published in late spring 1999.

New Deal (Motorists)

38. **Ms Rosie Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what steps he is taking to implement the new deal for motorists. [73450]

Dr. Reid: My Department, along with other departments, is taking forward the "New deal for Motorists" in a number of ways. These include increasing funds for road maintenance on both trunk and local roads, focusing investment on making the best use of the current road system, improving road and car safety, bringing forward proposals to regulate the private security industry to control cowboy wheelclampers, encouraging alternatives to car travel so as to reduce pollution, and taking forward various initiatives such as the Vehicle Crime Reduction Action team to help deter and detect vehicle theft and fraud.

BEST Bus Pensioners

39. **Mr. Bob Russell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what progress has been made since 1 May 1997 in returning the outstanding pension money to the Bus Employees superannuation trust pension fund. [73451]

Ms Glenda Jackson: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to him on 12 January 1999, *Official Report*, column *167*.

Genetically Modified Crops

Mr. Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if *(a)* the local community and *(b)* farmers living in the locality of the genetically modified crops that have marketing consent are required to be informed of the presence of those crops. [72173]

Mr. Meacher: Council Directive 90/220/EEC controls the deliberate release of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) in the European Community. Once a GM crop has marketing consent under the Directive, it applies across all member states and there is no automatic requirement to notify the authorities, local people or local farmers where the crop is grown or the area it covers.

Details of each marketing application, ACRE's advice and the opinion of the UK Competent Authority are contained in the statutory public register held in the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions.

Mr. Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the sites and the area each covers which are proposed to be planted with each of the genetically modified crops that have marketing consent; and when they will be planted. [72171]

Mr. Meacher: Council Directive 90/220/EEC controls the deliberate release of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) in the European Community. Once a GM crop has marketing consent under the Directive, it applies across all member states and there is no automatic requirement to notify the authorities where the crop is grown or the area it covers. Therefore, this information is not available. However, the statutory public register held in the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions contains details of each marketing application, ACRE's advice and the opinion of the UK Competent Authority.

The scope of the permitted use under the marketing consent does not in every case allow these crops to be cultivated commercially in the European Community.

Mr. Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the genetically modified crops which have received marketing consent; and to which company each belongs. [72170]

Mr. Meacher: Council Directive 90/220/EEC controls the deliberate release of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) in the European Community. Once a GM crop has marketing consent under the Directive, it applies across all member states. The GM crops which have received marketing consent under this Directive and the companies involved are listed below.

Description of GM crop	*Company*	*Scope of permitted use*
Tobacco modified for herbicide tolerance	Societe National d'Exploitation des Tabacs et Allumettes	Cultivation in European Community and use in tobacco industry
Oilseed rape hybrid system with herbicide tolerance	Plant Genetic Systems NV	Cultivation in European Community for commercial seed production only
Soybeans modified for herbicide tolerance	Monsanto Europe	Importation and processing. Not for cultivation in European Community
Maize modified for insect resistance and herbicide tolerance	Novartis	Importation, processing and cultivation in the European Community
Red-hearted chicory modified for altered fertility	Bejo Zaden BV	Cultivation in the European Community for commercial seed production only
Maize modified for herbicide tolerance	AgrEvo France	Cultivation in European Community
Maize modified for insect resistance	Monsanto Europe	Importation, processing and cultivation in the European Community
Oilseed rape modified for herbicide tolerance	AgrEvo UK Crop Protection	Importation and processing. Not for cultivation in European Community
Maize modified for insect resistance and herbicide tolerance	Northrup King Company	Importation and processing. Not for cultivation in European Community
Carnations with modified flower colour	Florigene Europe BV	For production of cut flowers and horticulture
Carnations modified for increased Vase-life	Florigene Europe BV	For production of cut flowers and horticulture
Carnations with modified flower colour	Florigene Europe BV	For production of cut flowers and horticulture

Details of each marketing application are contained in the statutory public register held in the Department of the Environment Transport and the Regions.

Mr. Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if the release of the genetically modified crops that have marketing consent will be recorded in the public register of GMO releases. [72172]

Mr. Meacher: The releases will not be recorded on the public register as none of the consents for marketing issued so far contains such a requirement.

Once a GM crop has marketing consent under Part C of Council Directive 90/220/EEC it applies across all member states and there is no automatic requirement to notify the authorities where the crop is grown. Therefore, this information is not available.

However, the statutory public register held in the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions contains details of each marketing application, ACRE's advice and the opinion of the UK Competent Authority. The register is open to public inspection.

The scope of the permitted use of GM crops which have received marketing consent under Directive 90/220/EEC does not in every case allow them to be cultivated commercially in the European Community. There will be no commercial releases of GM crops in the UK before spring 2000 at the earliest.

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the creation of a stakeholders' forum with respect to genetic modification issues. [75281]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 8 March 1999]:* The creation of a stakeholders' forum is one of the issues covered by the review of the framework for overseeing developments in biotechnology announced by my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Cabinet Office in December. No decision has yet been taken.

Speed Cameras

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) what progress his Department has made on a comprehensive scheme for speed cameras throughout England and Wales; and if he will make a statement; [73661]

(2) if he will estimate the potential reduction in road deaths if 7,000 speed cameras were installed in England and Wales. [73660]

Dr. Reid: The siting of speed enforcement cameras is an operational matter for chief officers of police and their local traffic authorities. My Department issues advice on the deployment of speed enforcement cameras in Circular Roads 4/90. That advice makes clear that, in order to maximise their benefit, cameras should be placed at sites with a history of speed-related accidents. Information about the number of cameras in use is not kept centrally. It is not possible, therefore, to estimate fatality reductions resulting from camera use.

Fish Processing (Waste Water Charges)

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what proposals he has for ensuring equality of treatment *(a)* between British ports and *(b)* between British and European ports in respect of waste water charges on fish processing. [74172]

Mr. Meacher: Every part of the United Kingdom and every European Union country is equally bound by the requirements of Directives including the Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive. It is for each Member state to ensure compliance with the implementation timetable for each Directive, and failures to implement are matters for the Commission to pursue. The Government expects other Member states and the Commission to fulfil these obligations.

In the United Kingdom, the private sector water and sewerage undertakers in England and Wales and the public sector water authorities in Scotland and Northern Ireland are all undertaking investment programmes in treatment works to meet the requirements of the Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive, which sets deadlines phased between 1998 and 2005 depending on the size of the discharge and sensitivity of the receiving waters. The costs falling on individual customers will depend on the costs incurred in meeting treatment requirements and the way in which such costs are apportioned between customers.

The Government strongly supports investment to upgrade coastal discharges, which will make a major contribution to improving the environment.

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what proposals he has for ensuring that waste water charges for fish market *(a)* merchants and *(b)* processors become operational at the same time and at the same amounts. [74173]

Mr. Meacher: The level of trade effluent charges depends on the volume and characteristics of the waste produced and the level of treatment. In some cases the level of treatment required is being increased under the Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive.

It is not feasible to bring every new treatment works into operation on the same date. However, the Directive sets deadlines phased between 1998 and 2005.

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will estimate how many effluent treatment plants have been built since the directive on waste water became operational in *(a)* Denmark, *(b)* Holland, *(c)* France, *(d)* Spain and *(e)* the United Kingdom to comply with the waste water directive; and to what extent the cost of these is charged to the fish processing industry. [74171]

Mr. Meacher: The Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive was adopted by EC Member States in May 1991. Under Article 17 of the Directive, Member States have reported on implementation programmes. A broad estimate of the number of larger plants to be built or upgraded can be obtained from the difference between the number of plants in each country which were estimated to be achieving compliance with the Directive's treatment requirements in 1992 (the baseline year used for the reports) and in 2000 (the first main deadline under Article 4 of the Directive).

Denmark estimated 75 additional effluent treatment plants would be compliant with the standards of the Directive; Holland estimated 17 fewer plants (through rationalisation of treatment systems); France estimated 560 additional plants and Spain estimated 585 additional plants. The United Kingdom estimated an additional 503 plants would be compliant for the same period.

The fish processing industry does not directly incur costs associated with the construction of effluent treatment plants. Costs to the fish processing industry, and other dischargers of trade effluent, arise from the treatment by sewerage undertakers of effluent discharged to sewers before final discharge to receiving waters. Costs levied by the sewerage undertakers are based on the volume and concentration of trade effluent.

Inland Waterways

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the effect on United Kingdom inland waterway transport tonnage of COM (98) 792. [74436]

Dr. Reid: The amended proposal for a Council Regulation on a Community fleet capacity policy to promote inland waterway transport contained in Commission document (1998) 792 does not apply to inland waterway tonnage in the United Kingdom.

Task Forces

Dr. Tony Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will publish a list of (1) task forces and (2) policy reviews established by his Department since May 1997 which *(a)* have external members recruited by way of public advertisement, and details of any person so appointed and *(b)* engaged in public consultation exercises, and the form that these took. [74467]

Mr. Meale: I have today placed in the Library of the House a list of the task forces and reviews established by my Department since 1 May 1997 which engaged in public consultation exercises and details of the form that these took.

My Department has no task forces or reviews which had external members recruited by way of public advertisement. Most task forces and reviews are short-term bodies established to give thorough consideration to important and difficult issues. External members are invited to sit on some reviews and task forces because they are able to contribute specific experience and expertise. In such cases, public advertising would be inappropriate and disproportionate.

M42

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he expects measures to be put in place to alleviate traffic problems at junction 10 of the M42 motorway. [74553]

Ms Glenda Jackson: I have asked the Chief Executive of the Highways Agency, Mr. Lawrie Haynes, to write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Peter Nutt to Mr. Brian Jenkins, dated 9 March 1999:

Glenda Jackson has asked Lawrie Haynes, the Chief Executive of the Highways Agency, to reply to your recent question about when measures may be put in place to alleviate traffic problems at junction 10 of the M42 motorway. I am replying in Lawrie's absence from the office.

I understand the concern about the operation of junction 10. Traffic congestion at this large junction is a particular problem during peak periods. There are also problems with the high speed of circulating traffic on the roundabout. All this contributes to tailbacks on the M42 and A5.

The installation of the traffic lights on the northbound exit slip road some time ago has improved operation of this part of junction 10. However, congestion on the slip road is still a problem with queues extending back on to the M42. We are therefore preparing a scheme to provide a dedicated lane to connect the slip road direct to the west bound carriageway of the A5. This should greatly reduce queuing on the slip road, improve operation of the roundabout and make the junction safer.

We are also preparing a scheme to improve the merging area between the southbound entry slip road and the M42. This should improve conditions for traffic joining the motorway, reducing congestion in the merge area and make conditions safer for all drivers.

It is difficult to give firm timings for carrying out these improvements until the preparation work is further advanced but we are planning for site work to begin in early 2000.

In addition to these improvements, the Highways Agency is currently pursuing an agreement with developers who have proposals to develop the Birch Coppice site adjacent to the A5 east of junction 10. These proposals would include installing traffic signals on all arms of the roundabout at junction 10 and widening the circulating carriageway, similar to the works nearing completion at junction 9 on the M42. This would improve operation of the whole junction, reducing traffic speeds on the roundabout and making it easier and safer to use.

I anticipate that we will soon reach agreement with the developers about the extent of the improvements to junction 10. However, the site does not yet have planning permission and there is no guarantee that it will go ahead. Should it not go forward we will review the improvements needed to the junction.

I hope this is helpful.

Newbury Bypass

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what steps he is taking to monitor the effects of the A34(T) Newbury Bypass on traffic on *(a)* the A36/A46 from the M4 to Southampton and *(b)* the A338/A346 from the M4 to Bournemouth. [74721]

Ms Glenda Jackson: None, specifically in relation to the effects of the Newbury Bypass. The Highways Agency has standing arrangements for monitoring traffic on trunk roads, including the A36/A46 route. Monitoring on the A338 and the A346 is a matter for the relevant local highway authority.

Migratory Birds

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the action his Department is taking to increase the protection of migratory birds *(a)* in United Kingdom and *(b)* internationally. [74816]

Mr. Meale: The protection of migratory birds within the European Union is covered by the EC Directive on the Conservation of Wild Birds (79/409/EEC). This Directive covers the protection, management and control of these species and lays out rules for their exploitation. It is the responsibility of the European Commission to ensure Member States comply with the Directive. The Commission has recently taken action against France for the failure of its national legislation on the hunting of migratory species to comply with the Directive.

In Great Britain, the Directive on the Conservation of Wild Birds is implemented by the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. The provisions of this Act are consistent with the Directive. Northern Ireland has similar legislation.

The UK has recently ratified the Agreement on the Conservation of African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds. The Agreement, which covers over 170 states, requires Parties to take co-ordinated measures to maintain migratory waterbird species in a favourable conservation

status or to restore them to such a status. The Agreement should help improve protection of migratory species at an international level.

Sustainable Renewal

Mr. McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans the Government have to respond to the Joseph Rowntree Foundation's report, Sustainable Renewal of Suburban Areas. [75172]

Mr. Meale: The Report made a range of recommendations directed at the Government, local authorities and others. Many are relevant to the Urban Task Force, to the Urban Policy White Paper due later this year, and to the Policy Action Teams established by the Social Exclusion Unit carrying forward work on the Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal, and they will be considered in those contexts.

Jubilee Line Extension

Mr. McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will provide a breakdown of the accidents which have occurred to workers engaged in the construction of the Jubilee Line extension, by severity of the accident, in *(a)* 1996, *(b)* 1997, *(c)* 1998 and *(d)* 1999 to date. [75170]

Mr. Meale: The accident figures requested are set out in the table. These figures have been taken from HSEs live database and are, therefore, highly provisional and may be subject to change.

Jubilee Line Extension Project (JLEP)
Accidents to JLEP workers engaged in the construction of the Jubilee Line, reported to HE under the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 1995 from 1 April 1996 to 3 March 1999

Year	*Fatal*	*Major*	*Over 3 days*
1996–97	0	48	116
1997–98	0	24	46
1998 to 3 March 1999	0	5	10
Total	0	77	172

Mr. McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many accidents have occurred in the construction of the Jubilee Line extension. [75173]

Mr. Meale: I refer my hon. Friend to my answer above. HSE's live database currently does not go back before 1996–97. Any accident figures before this date could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the occasions when work has ceased on the construction of the Jubilee Line extension as a result of health and safety concerns in *(a)* 1996, *(b)* 1997 *(c)* 1998 and *(d)* 1999 to date. [75161]

Mr. Meale: The information is not available in the form requested.

Since 1996, the HSE has not served any Prohibition Notices requiring work to be stopped on the Jubilee Line Extension Project. However, during visits across the project, numerous unsafe activities or situations have been dealt with by the work being stopped at the request of the HSE Inspector. In these cases work did not re-start until the relevant contractors took appropriate action. These would not necessarily be recorded on HSE's information recording system and therefore precise numbers cannot be given.

Mr. McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will place in the Library the reports of the Health and Safety Executive on the health and safety of the working practices pursued in the construction of the Jubilee Line extension. [75162]

Mr. Meale: Reports, compliant with current Government guidelines on disclosure of information, will be placed in the Library shortly.

Mr. McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the arrangements established to ensure the health and safety of the workers engaged in the construction of the Jubilee Line extension. [75169]

Mr. Meale: The main legal responsibility for ensuring the health and safety of the workers lies with the contractors involved in the construction of the Jubilee Line Extension. JLE, the client, also has duties to protect workers working on the project. HSE held meetings with the client prior to the project starting and subsequently frequent inspections across the Jubilee Line have been carried out by HSE inspectors and will continue until the project is completed.

Hayes Railway Station Hub

Mr. McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the development of the Hayes railway station hub. [75160]

Ms Glenda Jackson: This is in the first instance a commercial matter for Railtrack. I understand that the company are currently working on proposals for a development at Hayes but that no formal application has been submitted to the local authority.

Ships (Inspections)

Mr. Prosser: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many foreign ships have been inspected under port state control arrangements in United Kingdom ports; of those, how many and what proportion were detained; and what percentage of inspected ships were found to have deficiencies in each year since 1990. [74967]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The number of inspections and detentions, and the percentage of ships detained and with deficiencies from 1990 are given.

Port state control inspections in the UK

	Number of Inspections	*Number of Detentions*	*Percentage detained*	*Percentage with deficiencies*
1990	2,118	79	3.7	60.8
1991	2,500	116	4.6	65.9
1992	2,133	124	5.8	69.8
1993	2,271	174	7.7	70.7
April 1994 to March 1995	2,153	212	9.8	73.2
April 1995 to March 1996	2,098	206	9.8	70.7
April 1996 to March 1997	1,880	157	8.4	71.3
April 1997 to March 1998	1,890	179	9.5	73.4

Mr. Prosser: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many professional ship surveyors and inspection staff have been employed by the Surveyor General's Organisation or Marine Safety Agency in each year since 1990. [74963]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Figures requested are given in the table below. The Marine Safety Agency merged with the Coastguard Agency to become the Maritime and Coastguard Agency on 1 April 1998.

Staff in post figures as at 1 April 1998

		Number
1 April 1990	Surveyor General's Organisation	188
1 April 1991	Surveyor General's Organisation	193
1 April 1992	Surveyor General's Organisation	187
1 April 1993	Surveyor General's Organisation	185
1 April 1994	Marine Safety Agency	189
1 April 1995	Marine Safety Agency	189
1 April 1996	Marine Safety Agency	166.5
1 April 1997	Marine Safety Agency	159
1 April 1998	Maritime and Coastguard Agency	160

Freight Transport

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if the Strategic Rail Authority will have a duty to promote the transfer of freight from road to rail. [74850]

Dr. Reid *[holding answer 5 March 1999]:* Subject to Parliament's consideration of the necessary legislation, the Strategic Rail Authority will have a duty to promote integrated transport and powers to promote the transfer of freight from road to rail by means of grants. One of the Strategic Rail Authority's most important tasks will be to address the needs of freight as well as passengers, and the balance between the demands of each.

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if the Strategic Rail Authority will have *(a)* a duty and *(b)* a power to influence matters outside the rail industry but which nevertheless affect it, with particular reference to maximum lorry weights. [74831]

Dr. Reid *[holding answer 5 March 1999]:* The Strategic Rail Authority will act as a champion for the railways, taking an overview of the industry and speaking for it, subject to Parliamentary consideration of the necessary legislation. The Strategic Rail Authority will be consulted by the Commission for Integrated Transport as part of its remit in advising the Government on lorry weights and the development of railfreight.

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if the Strategic Rail Authority will have a duty to require a minimum percentage of train paths to be available for freight traffic. [74851]

Dr. Reid *[holding answer 5 March 1999]:* Subject to Parliament's consideration of the necessary legislation, the Rail Regulator will remain responsible for approving track access agreements. The Strategic Rail Authority will, however, develop targets for both the passenger and the freight railway, and address the balance between the demands of passenger and freight services.

English Partnerships

Mrs. Ellman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how much of the indicative budgets proposed to be passed to the regional development agencies from English Partnerships for 1999–2000 and future years is not committed *(a)* in contractual terms and *(b)* in principle for each of the regional development agencies. [74901]

Mr. Meale *[holding answer 5 March 1999]:* The indicative budgets have yet to be finalised. Based on the latest provisional budgets, the percentage not committed in contractual terms (defined in this context as projects which have reached the final internal appraisal stage within English Partnerships) is as follows:

	Percentage
North East	27
North West	1
Yorkshire and Humberside	2.5
East Midlands	12
West Midlands	51.5
Eastern	37
South West	22
South East	40

The figures are still being reviewed.

It will be for the RDAs themselves to consider how to handle in principle commitments within the overall resources available to them.

Budgets for 2000–01 and 2001–02 will be determined taking into account the RDAs' corporate plans.

Mrs. Ellman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how much is being allocated to *(a)* the reclamation and development of the Greenwich site, *(b)* the setting up and running of databases on brown-field sites and *(c)* the managing of

the programme of millennium villages from the funding proposed to be retained centrally by English Partnerships in 1999–2000. [75743]

Mr. Meale: The Department will make an allocation to EP for the tasks it has been agreed the Agency should undertake. It is for EP to decide how to allocate those resources in accordance with proposals presented in their corporate plan.

EP's proposed allocations for these projects for 1999–2000 are as follows:

Allocation	*£ million*
(a) Greenwich	18
(b) Brownfield Sites	0.5
(c) Millennium Villages	5.4

Note:
In addition to the funding at (a), EP have a separate ringfenced grant in aid budget of some £15m for the Greenwich Millennium Dome site. 1999–2000 is the final year of this three-year programme.

Planning Policy

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will offer additional guidance to local planning authorities seeking to promote re-use of buildings in their local development plans. [75500]

Mr. Raynsford: Guidance on the re-use of buildings for residential purposes will be included in the revised version of Planning Policy Guidance note 3: Housing, which will be issued for public consultation shortly.

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions which planning policy guidance notes issued by the Planning Inspectorate are currently being reviewed. [75502]

Mr. Raynsford: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 11 February 1999, *Official Report*, column *308*. No Planning Policy Guidance notes are issued by the Planning Inspectorate.

Monarch Butterfly

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what steps he is taking to ensure the survival of the Monarch butterfly. [75102]

Mr. Meale *[holding answer 8 March 1999]:* There are no known wild populations of the Monarch butterfly in Britain. It is one of the most widely distributed butterflies in the warmer parts of the world, occurring throughout the Americas, Asia and Australasia, and is not considered to be threatened.

Asbestos

Mr. Frank Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many HSE inspectors by region are *(a)* qualified and *(b)* available to police the new regulations and codes of practice relating to the safe removal of asbestos. [74795]

Mr. Meale *[holding answer 8 March 1999]:* In 1999–2000, HSE's Field Operations Directorate plans to have the full-time equivalent of 530 fully trained inspectors in operational groups; just over 500 are currently in post. Their regional distribution is shown in the following table.

Inspector years

Region	*Current number of qualified inspectors in operational groups*	*Planned allocation of all operational inspections (including) trainees) for 1999–2000*	*Planned allocation of qualified operational inspectors for 1999–2000*
Scotland	52	63	53
North West	68	79	69
Yorkshire and North East	67	83	72
Midlands	67	86	76
Wales and West	93	107	96
Home Counties	82	93	84
London and South East	74	93	80

All trained inspectors are able to deal with asbestos removal work which they encounter in the course of their work. They are familiar with the legal requirements, the hazard and the risk and can call on other colleagues in Regional Specialist Groups for assistance and support as necessary.

In practice, however, the majority of asbestos removal work is carried out in specific types of premises eg those owned or controlled by local authorities, the health service and construction, particularly demolition sites.

116 operational inspectors are allocated to the construction sector. Construction inspectors develop their knowledge and skills by attending a specific Asbestos Removal training course. Some of these inspectors are given additional training and assessment, including health surveillance, so that they can undertake higher-level inspection work inside asbestos removal enclosures.

Currently, some 50 inspectors are trained to this higher level; most regions have 7, one has 8 in post. This number may fluctuate depending on staff movement.

EC Environmental Councils

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will publish agendas for the forthcoming EC environmental councils on *(a)* 11 to 12 March and *(b)* 24 to 25 June. [75194]

Mr. Meale *[holding answer 8 March 1999]:* The following is the agenda for the Environment Council 11 March:

Community strategy on climate change

Council conclusions

Amended proposal for a Council Directive establishing a framework for Community action in the field of water policy

Common position

Proposal for a Council Directive on end-of-life vehicles

Common position

Community strategy to reduce CO2 emissions from private cars. Commission Negotiations with car manufacturers which are not members of ACEA Council Conclusions

Proposal for a Council regulation allowing voluntary participation by organisations in a community eco-management and audit system

Policy debate

Proposal for a Council Directive amending Directive 88/609/EEC, on the limitation of emissions of certain pollutants into the air from large combustion plants.

Policy debate

Proposal for a Council Directive on the incineration of waste.

Progress report.

The agenda for the Council on the 24 to 25 June will not be decided until nearer the time.

EC Transport Councils

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will publish agendas for the forthcoming EC transport councils on *(a)* 29 March and *(b)* 17 to 18 June. [75195]

Ms Glenda Jackson *[holding answer 8 March 1999]:* At the Transport Council to be held on 29 March, the following topics are on the agenda: development of the Community's railways; combined transport; working time in road transport; operation of 15 metre buses; modernisation of the Warsaw system for airline liability; intermodal terminals; and satellite navigation systems. The agenda for the 17–18 June Transport Council will be known nearer the time.

Chemical Emissions

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the procedures for monitoring the emission of dangerous chemicals into the atmosphere. [75011]

Mr. Meale *[holding answer 8 March 1999]:* Processes with the potential to emit dangerous substances to air are regulated under Part I of the Environmental Protection Act 1990, under which plant operators must obtain an authorisation and use the best available techniques not entailing excessive cost (BATNEEC) to prevent, minimise or render harmless such emissions. The authorisations issued by the Environment Agency or local authorities will include appropriate monitoring requirements and the results of such monitoring will appear on the public register.

Grant-maintained Schools

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 4 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *838*, on local authority councillors employed by grant-maintained schools, what estimate he has made of the numbers of staff likely to be so disqualified. [75746]

Ms Armstrong: We have made no estimate of the numbers of teachers who are likely to be so disqualified.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 4 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *838*, concerning teachers employed by grant-maintained schools, what consultations his Department has undertaken on this matter; and what representations have been received. [75747]

Ms Armstrong: I have undertaken no consultation about the continuation of the well-established policy that a person is disqualified from being a councillor of an authority of which they are an employee. However, officials from the Department for Education and Employment have met interested parties to discuss a range of staffing matters, including this issue of local authority councillors employed by grant-maintained schools, in the transition to the new framework.

Black Cabs

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if currently licensed black cabs will be permitted to operate within the current Metropolitan Police District boundaries after the establishment of the Greater London Authority. [75734]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Once the Metropolitan Police District boundary has become aligned with that of Greater London, taxis licensed by the Public Carriage Office will be able to ply for hire only within the new boundary.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what representations he has received concerning the impact of the Greater London Authority Bill's provisions for realigning the Metropolitan Police District with the Greater London administrative boundary on taxi cabs licensed to operate in outer London. [75735]

Ms Glenda Jackson: I have received representations from London suburban-licensed taxi drivers concerned about the implications of the boundary change for their customary operations, from local authorities seeking guidance on their new licensing responsibilities, and from applicants to the Public Carriage Office for suburban London taxi driver licences concerned about the processing of their applications whilst the Public Carriage Office reviewed the suburban licensing sectors in the light of the boundary change.

Driving Test Centre, Crosby

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions on what dates staff at Crosby Driving Test Centre were transferred temporarily to other locations after its closure; on what date such transfers were made permanent; and to what date the transfers were backdated. [74072]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The driving examiner staff at Crosby transferred to other test centres from 6 April 1998, when the Crosby centre was closed. Formal transfer letters were given during May 1998, advising that these transfers would be permanent. Transfers were dated from 6 April so that staff would receive appropriate allowances. This did not preclude the possibility of the staff being moved back to a centre in Crosby had the Driving Standards Agency opened a replacement centre there.

Countryside Agency

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when the appointment of the Chairman of the new Countryside Agency will be announced. [75198]

Mr. Meacher: I refer my hon. Friend to the statement I made to the House on 8 March 1999, *Official Report*, columns 21–33, when I announced that Ewen Cameron would be appointed as the first Chairman of the Countryside Agency. I also announced that Pamela Warhurst would be appointed as Deputy Chair.

Coalfields Portfolio

Mrs. Ellman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how much he expects each English region to receive from the coalfields portfolio in *(a)* 1999–2000 and *(b)* future years; and who will be taking the decision on these allocations. [75738]

Mr. Meale: Some £195 million is planned to be spent on the coalfields portfolio over the next three years.

The regional allocation of the coalfields portfolio programme for 1999–2000 is expected to be as follows:

	£ million
North East	11
North West	3.8
Yorkshire and Humberside	15
East Midlands	17.1
West Midlands	1.5
South East	0.9
South West	0.3

These figures have been agreed between English partnerships and the respective Regional Development Agencies. Regional allocations for future years will be determined in the same way.

Mrs. Ellman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how much each English region received from the coalfields portfolio in each of the past five years. [75739]

Mr. Meale: The coalfields portfolio did not transfer to English Partnerships until the end of 1996–97. The following chart sets out total spend by English partnerships in the five EP regions which contain coalfields over the past two years.

£ million

	1997–98	*1998–99*
North East	3.2	1.7
North West	1.4	0.7
Yorkshire	6.2	12.2
East Midlands *(all Midlands, 1997–98)*	12.1	3.9
West Midlands	—	5.7

Note:
The expenditure includes both grant in aid and Agency-generated receipts

India (Ministerial Visit)

Mr. Hawkins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions which of his Ministers is deputising for him in respect of duties relating to the Budget Statement during his visit to India. [75544]

Mr. Prescott: My Ministerial colleagues will pursue their normal duties in relation to the Budget.

Mr. Hawkins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many days he spent *(a)* in India and *(b)* in the Maldives during his recent visit. [75542]

Mr. Prescott: I will spend eight days in India and three days in the Maldives during my visit.

Mr. Hawkins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what arrangements have been made in respect of the costs of transport for his visit *(a)* to India and *(b)* to the Maldives; and in what class he flew for each leg of the journey. [75546]

Mr. Prescott: All travel for this trip has been arranged in accordance with the Ministerial Code and long-standing Ministerial practice under this and previous administrations.

Mr. Hawkins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what role his Department played in setting up a satellite TV link-up from India to the United Kingdom to enable him to comment on the Budget Statement. [75545]

Mr. Prescott: None. There is no satellite TV link-up from India.

Heavy Goods Vehicles

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what regulations are in place to ensure that heavy goods vehicles operating in the United Kingdom from overseas meet British safety standards. [75758]

Ms Glenda Jackson: All such vehicles must comply with the standards of roadworthiness defined in the Road Vehicles (Construction and Use) Regulations 1986. Under the Road Traffic (Foreign Vehicles) Act 1972, a vehicle which fails to comply may be prohibited from continuing its journey and its driver may be liable to prosecution.

Local Rail Heads

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what *(a)* grants are and *(b)* support is available from his Department for the establishment of local rail heads by haulage companies. [75760]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Two grants are available from the Department to assist companies facing higher costs as a result of choosing to move freight by rail rather than road. Freight Facilities Grants assist with the capital costs often associated with rail movements (e.g. rail infrastructure and specialised loading/unloading equipment). Track Access Grants are paid to freight operators to help defray Railtrack charges for access to the rail network in respect of traffic which would otherwise move by road.

During the last 12 months, the availability of these grants and the greatly increased annual budget, currently standing at £40 million, has been widely advertised in both the trade and national press.

Workplace Parking Levy

Mr. Ottaway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what estimate he

has made of the amount which will be raised under the workplace parking levy from schools and hospitals in the Greater London Area. [75765]

Ms Glenda Jackson: None. Decisions on whether to introduce a scheme and, if so, on geographical extent, levels of charge and possible exemptions, will all be matters for the Mayor.

Rail Vehicle Accessibility Regulations

Mr. McNulty: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he has any plans to exempt new rail vehicles from the provisions of the Rail Vehicle Accessibility Regulations 1998; and if he will make a statement. [76049]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The Rail Vehicle Accessibility Regulations 1998 apply to all new rail vehicles first brought into use after 31 December 1998. Operators who introduce new rail vehicles into service after this date which do not fully meet the regulations must apply to the Secretary of State for exemption.

We are expecting to receive a number of exemption applications from rail operating companies whose design of rail vehicles was well advanced prior to the new regulations coming into force. We are required to consult our statutory disabled advisers, the Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee (DPTAC), in considering any such application.

The first application was received for the trams for use on Line 1 of the Midland Metro System. Exemption regulations relating to those trams have been placed before Parliament today. DPTAC recommended that the exemptions should be granted subject to certain conditions being applied to them. The exemptions are mostly of a very minor nature and have been requested for a short time only. We have accepted DPTAC's recommendations. The exemptions will not prevent disabled people from using the new system and we believe the system will make a significant contribution to improving mobility opportunities for disabled people in the area.

Spot-listed Buildings

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many buildings have been spot-listed in Greater London in the past year. [75503]

Mr. Alan Howarth: I have been asked to reply.

163 buildings and structures in Greater London were spot-listed between 1 March 1998 and 28 February 1999. A further 497 were listed as a result of reviews of the Camden and Southwark lists and 101 following thematic studies of particular building types.

PRIME MINISTER

European Commissioners

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Prime Minister what regulations provide for political neutrality in speeches made by European Commissioners; and if he will make a statement. [75163]

The Prime Minister: As has always been the case, Commissioners have a collective responsibility not publicly to oppose decisions made by the College of Commissioners.

Foreign Media Articles

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list those members of his office involved in the drafting and distribution of articles written by him for publication by the international media. [75644]

The Prime Minister: Depending on the subject matter, various civil servants and special advisers in my office assist me in drafting articles for publication by the international media. This is a practice adopted by successive Administrations.

Ministerial Meetings

Mr. Baker: To ask the Prime Minister if he will set out the basis for his practice of not making information available regarding meetings with private individuals or companies. [75673]

The Prime Minister: Ministers and civil servants meet many people as part of the process of policy development and analysis. All such contacts are conducted in accordance with the *Ministerial Code*, the *Civil Service Code* and *Guidance for Civil Servants: Contacts with Lobbyists*. Some of these discussions take place on a confidential basis, and in order to preserve confidentiality, it is not the normal practice of Governments to release details of specific meetings with private individuals or companies.

European Policy Discussions

Mr. Howard: To ask the Prime Minister on how many occasions and on which dates he has discussed matters of European policy with the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Minister with responsibility for Europe, the right hon. Member for Gateshead, East and Washington, West (Ms Quin) in the absence of the Foreign Secretary. [75794]

The Prime Minister: I have regular meetings with Ministerial colleagues and others on a wide range of subjects, and will continue to do so. As with previous Governments, it is not my practice to provide details of confidential discussions.

Sierra Leone

Sir Brian Mawhinney: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer to the right hon. Member for North-West Cambridgeshire on 3 March 1999, *Official Report*, columns *773–74*, on the Foreign Affairs Committee's report on Sierra Leone, if he was informed by his officials of the contents of the report before 10.00 a.m. on 9 February. [75767]

The Prime Minister: As I made clear in my answer to the hon. Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire) on 23 February 1999, *Official Report*, column *231*, in accordance with normal convention my Office received advance embargoed copies of the report from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office at approximately 08.30 hours on Tuesday 9 February, the day the report was published.

Select Committees (Leaked Documents)

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Prime Minister if *(a)* he, *(b)* civil servants in his Department or *(c)* special advisers in his Department have (i) had sight of drafts of select committee reports, in whole or in part, or (ii) been informed of conclusions of select committee reports prior to their publication by the select committees. [75669]

The Prime Minister: I refer the right hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire) on 1 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *531*. There have been no instances of members of Select Committees giving me drafts of Select Committee reports, or of parts of reports including their conclusions, before publication. Nor to the best of my knowledge have there been any occasions on which members of Select Committees have given such material to civil servants or special advisers in my Office. This excludes embargoed copies issued under House of Commons Standing Order 116.

WALES

Air Miles

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many Air Miles have been earned by him and each of his Ministers; and how he proposes to use them. [73335]

Mr. Michael: None.

Fish and Shellfish Cultivation

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what meetings have been held by officials of his Department with Mr. Richard J. Slaski, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food's independent assessor on fish and shellfish cultivation; and if he will make a statement. [73607]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: None.

Mr. Slaski was appointed, by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in August 1998, as one of two Assessors for the forthcoming Review of Research and Development on Fish and Shellfish Cultivation and Health in England and Wales. He was selected from a number of candidates on the basis of his knowledge of the aquaculture industry and his experience in carrying out similar reviews for other Governments. His remit was to consult widely within the industry and academia and to produce a report that identified constraints to the further development of the industry, identified gaps in the current R&D programme and proposed priorities for R&D for the next five years. That report along with another which focuses on health matters, will form the basis for discussion as part of the Review; Welsh Office officials will be involved in those discussions.

National Assembly

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what preliminary work his Department has undertaken on the establishment of cross-cutting committees on *(a)* equal opportunities and *(b)* Europe, in the National Assembly. [73776]

Mr. Michael: The draft standing orders prepared by the Commissioners provide for Assembly committees for each of these matters. Following consultation on the Commissioners' report, I expect to make the standing orders in final form later this month.

Schizophrenia

Sir Alastair Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many current occupants of National Health Service hospital and unit beds in Wales have a main diagnosis of schizophrenia psychoses; and what these occupied beds represent as a percentage of *(a)* mental and *(b)* all beds in Wales. [74268]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: It is not possible to say how many current occupants of National Health Service hospital and unit beds in Wales have a main diagnosis of schizophrenia psychoses. However, it is estimated that, in 1998, 10.2 per cent. of in-patients treated in the specialty of mental illness and 0.3 per cent. of patients treated in all specialties had a main diagnosis of schizophrenia psychoses.

Following the transfer of functions, this issue will be a matter for the National Assembly.

Sir Alastair Goodlad: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) how many people discharged from mental illness hospitals in Wales in the last year after a main diagnosis of schizophrenia psychoses, having been proved vulnerable boarders subsequently became voluntary boarders; [74273]

(2) how many patients with a primary diagnosis of schizophrenia psychoses were discharged from mental illness hospitals in Wales in the last year; and how many were admitted for a hospital stay more than once during the year. [74390]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: In 1998 there were 1,713 deaths and discharges from Welsh NHS trusts where the patient had a main diagnosis of schizophrenia psychoses. It is not known centrally how many of these, having been proved vulnerable boarders, subsequently became voluntary boarders. Reliable estimates of the number of people who were admitted for a hospital stay more than once during the year are not available centrally.

Following the transfer of functions, this issue will be a matter for the National Assembly.

Health Care (Flintshire)

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what recent measures he has initiated to ensure enhanced health care for Flintshire people; and if he will make a statement. [74184]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: The provision of health care is a high priority and I am pleased to be able to report a number of significant developments for the people of Flintshire.

The new North East Wales NHS Trust (to be established on 1 April) will integrate community health and acute services for the people of Flintshire. This will allow clinicians in both sectors to collaborate in providing a seamless service from the time a patient is referred to

the time they recover. I expect this to be of particular benefit to the elderly and other vulnerable groups whose care often extends across both sectors.

The introduction of Local Health Groups (LHGs) will bring significant benefits in terms of inclusive local decision making on commissioning of health services responsive to local need, and developing the role of primary care. Flintshire LHG is on course to be operational as a sub committee of the Health Authority from 1 April.

Since May 1996, three new NHS dental practices have been opened as a direct result of grant aid, totalling £100,000, from the Welsh Office dental initiative. Grant aid is still available to assist the Health Authority to attract new dentists to 2 further areas within Flintshire.

£193k of Winter Pressure money funded a joint NHS/Social Services rapid response team covering the whole of Flintshire. Such joint working will be facilitated by the composition of LHGs and introduction of shared planning arrangements, notably Health Improvement Programmes.

Following the transfer of functions, this will be a matter for the National Assembly.

Task Forces

Dr. Tony Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish a list of (1) task forces and (2) policy reviews established by his Department since May 1997 which *(a)* had external members recruited by way of public advertisement, and details of any person so appointed and *(b)* engaged in public consultation exercises, and the form that these took. [74460]

Mr. Michael: I will write to my hon. Friend as soon as possible and place a copy of my reply in the Library of the House.

Ministerial Visits (Primary Schools)

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the primary schools in the Cardiff, South and Penarth constituency he has visited in the last four months; and what plans he has for further visits to primary schools in that constituency. [74637]

Mr. Michael: During the last four months I have visited Evenlode Primary School and Grangetown Infants School in the constituency of Cardiff, South and Penarth.

Dental Services

Jackie Ballard: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list for Wales by health authority *(a)* the number of dentists with an NHS list and *(b)* the average number of patients on each NHS list for each year since financial year 1995–96. [74258]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: The information is given in the following table.

	1995–96	*1996–97*	*1997–98*
Number of dentists in Wales treating at least some NHS patients [1]			
North Wales	170	185	198
Dyfed Powys	128	133	136
Morgannwg	158	161	158
Bro Taf	198	201	205
Gwent	149	167	167
Wales	803	847	864
Patients on each NHS list [2]			
North Wales	1,848	1,752	1,660
Dyfed Powys	1,729	1,674	1,539
Morgannwg	1,946	1,956	1,915
Bro Taf	1,857	1,678	1,667
Gwent	1,811	1,645	1,633
Wales	1,927	1,825	1,764

[1] Principal dentists as at 31 March except for 1995–96 when data relate to 30 June 1996

[2] Average number of registrations per principal dentists at 31 March. Includes patients seen by assistants and vocational trainees working on contracts held by principals.

Following the transfer of functions, this issue will be a matter for the National Assembly.

Links Staff Newspaper

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what have been the production costs of the Links document in each year of its publication. [74633]

Mr. Michael: Production costs for Links—The Welsh Office staff newspaper:

1997–98: £23,102

1998–99: £31,020 to date.

Following the transfer of functions, this issue will be a matter for the National Assembly.

Hospital Beds

Mr. Livsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many *(a)* acute, *(b)* geriatric, *(c)* mental illness, *(d)* learning disability and *(e)* maternity beds there were in each health authority in Wales in each year since 1994–95. [74374]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: The information is given in the following table.

Average daily available beds in NHS hospitals [1]

	Acute [2]	*Geriatric*	*Mental Illness* [3]	*Learning disability*	*Maternity* [4]	*Total*
North Wales						
1994–95	1,865	779	469	189	212	3,514
1995–96	1,843	718	431	162	163	3,316
1996–97	1,872	695	396	140	161	3,264
1997–98	1,842	681	395	133	151	3,202

Average daily available beds in NHS hospitals [1]

	Acute [2]	*Geriatric*	*Mental Illness* [3]	*Learning disability*	*Maternity* [4]	*Total*
Dyfed Powys						
1994–95	1,173	562	532	181	119	2,566
1995–96	1,189	532	476	165	119	2,481
1996–97	1,207	484	430	146	121	2,387
1997–98	1,217	473	421	112	117	2,339
Morgannwg						
1994–95	1,753	479	844	303	141	3,520
1995–96	1,797	374	711	236	132	3,250
1996–97	1,849	342	670	213	130	3,204
1997–98	1,815	309	645	201	114	3,084
Bro Taf						
1994–95	2,404	892	823	228	195	4,540
1995–96	2,400	867	769	214	174	4,424
1996–97	2,449	748	749	180	164	4,289
1997–98	2,603	551	756	137	162	4,209
Gwent						
1994–95	1,331	633	490	119	121	2,694
1995–96	1,211	582	444	121	122	2,480
1996–97	1,243	583	404	90	120	2,439
1997–98	1,343	424	383	90	123	2,361
Wales						
1994–95	8,524	3,345	3,157	1,020	788	16,834
1995–96	8,439	3,073	2,831	899	711	15,951
1996–97	8,619	2,852	2,648	768	696	15,583
1997–98	8,820	2,438	2,599	673	665	15,194

[1] The average daily number of staffed beds in which in-patients are being or could be treated without any change in facilities or staff being made
[2] All specialities excluding geriatric, mental illness, learning disability and maternity
[3] Adult mental illness, child & adolescent psychiatry, forensic psychiatry and old age psychiatry
[4] Obstetrics and GP maternity

Following the transfer of functions, this issue will be a matter for the National assembly.

Nurses

Mr. Livsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many whole-time equivalent *(a)* bank, *(b)* agency and *(c)* contract nurses were employed and at what cost, by each health authority in Wales in each of the last 10 years. [74375]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: The information requested is not collected routinely. However, a survey carried out by the Nurse Executives of NHS trusts in Wales estimated that there were 665 whole-time equivalent bank nurses and 173 whole-time equivalent agency nurses used between July 1997 and July 1998 in Wales. Information on costs is not available.

Following the transfer of functions, this issue will be a matter for the National Assembly.

Hospitals (Service Changes)

Mr. Livsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the hospitals, by health authority region in Wales, that have consulted the local community health council on service reconfiguration in the last 10 years; and how many beds have been *(a)* gained and *(b)* lost under these reconfigurations. [74376]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: This information is not held centrally. Responsibility for consulting local Community Health Councils on substantial service changes lies with health authorities. Such proposals are only referred to my right hon. Friend for decision if, following formal public consultation, they cannot be agreed with the Community Health Council. At present, one such referral has been made and is under consideration.

Following the transfer of functions, these issues will be a matter for the National Assembly for Wales.

Health Authority Appointments

Mr. Livsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many appointments for each health authority in Wales he has *(a)* made personally and *(b)* been consulted on since 1 May 1997; and if he will list for those appointments the political affiliations of the successful candidates. [74377]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: None. The Secretary of State's predecessor made the following appointments to health authorities in Wales during 1998.

Health authorities	*Appointments*
Bro Taf	1 Chair and 3 non-executive member appointments
Dyfed Powys	1 Chair and 2 non-executive member appointments
Iechyd Morgannwg	1 Chair and 3 non-executive member appointments
Gwent	1 Chair and 4 non-executive member appointments
North Wales	1 Chair and 3 non-executive member appointments

Dyfed Powys Health Authority and the North Wales Health Authority are currently both carrying a non-executive director vacancy.

Of those mentioned, only one non-executive member has carried out any significant political activity in the last five years, being a Labour member of a local authority in the area of the health authority concerned.

Following the transfer of functions, this issue will be a matter for the National Assembly.

Health Authority Budgets

Mr. Livsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the estimated surplus or deficit of each health authority in Wales in 1998–99. [74378]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: The estimated surplus/(deficit) that health authorities and their Trusts will be incurring in 1998–99 is as follows:

Health authority area	*£ million*
Bro Taf	(5)
Dyfed Powys	(13)
Gwent	—
Iechyd Morgannwg	1
North Wales	(1)
Wales	(18)

Note:
These forecasts are based on health bodies' best estimates of their income and expenditure position, and are subject to audit adjustment. The final position will be reported in their 1998–99 annual accounts, which will be available in audited form at the end of July 1999.

Following the transfer of functions, this issue will become a matter for the National Assembly.

NHS Pay

Mr. Livsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the average pay of chief executives of NHS trusts for each of the last 10 years; if he will list the pay of the five highest-paid chief executives of NHS trusts in Wales; what is the average pay for Grade D nurses; and which are the five NHS trusts in Wales that have the lowest pay awards for Grade D nurses. [74379]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: The first NHS trust was established in Wales on 1 April 1992 and the information requested is as follows.

The average pay of Chief Executives of NHS trusts is:

	£ 000
1992–93	73
1993–94	64
1994–95	62
1995–96	65
1996–97	67
1997–98	72

The highest paid Chief Executives in 1997–98 received:

	£ 000
Glan Hafren	103
UHW	96
North Glamorgan	88
Llandough	87
Bridgend	86

The salary scale for a Grade D nurse ranges from £12,855 to £14,705. Nurses can earn more than their basic pay, due to enhancements for working nights, weekends and bank holidays.

Taking all these factors into account, the average earnings of a Grade D nurse in Great Britain averaged across all 5 incremental points are estimated at £16,400 at December 1998 rates. Information is not held centrally on pay awards for nurses on Trust terms and conditions of service.

Following the transfer of functions, this issue will be a matter for the National Assembly.

Cancelled Operations

Mr. Livsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will place in the Library figures for *(a)* each health authority, *(b)* each region and *(c)* Wales as a whole, of the number of operations cancelled on the day of, or the day after, admission to a hospital, and the numbers of those patients not readmitted within a month, by quarter for the last two years. [74380]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: Information on the number of operations cancelled on the day of, or the day after, admission to a hospital is not collected centrally. Data are collected on the numbers of patients who were not re-admitted within a month of a cancelled operation, by NHS Trust, and these are shown in the following table.

Patients not re-admitted within one month of having an operation cancelled

	Quarter ending							
NHS Trust	*March 1997*	*June 1997*	*September 1997*	*December 1997*	*March 1998*	*June 1998*	*September 1998*	*December 1998*
Bridgend and District	8	—	1	—	—	—	—	—
Cardiff Community Health Care	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Carmarthen and District	12	12	11	9	8	21	18	12
Ceredigion and Mid Wales	1	3	—	1	—	3	—	—
Clwydian Community Care	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
East Glamorgan	194	—	—	—	4	4	10	4
Glan Clwyd Hospital	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Glan Hafren	8	3	12	5	11	13	15	4
Glan-y-Mor	10	5	—	1	—	—	—	2
Gwent Community Health	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Gwynedd Community Health	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Gwynedd Hospitals	—	—	—	—	—	2	2	3
Llandough Hospital and Community	—	—	—	—	5	1	—	—
Llanelli Dinefwr	—	3	—	—	8	2	3	1
Morriston Hospital	5	—	—	—	1	—	6	6

Patients not re-admitted within one month of having an operation cancelled

NHS Trust	Quarter ending March 1997	June 1997	September 1997	December 1997	March 1998	June 1998	September 1998	December 1998
Nevill Hall and District	2	—	7	21	8	1	2	—
North Glamorgan	1	—	—	2	2	—	2	—
Pembrokeshire and Derwen	2	—	1	—	—	—	—	—
Powys Health Care	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Rhondda Health Care	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Swansea	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
University Dental Hospital	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
University Hospital of Wales	170	44	83	51	113	108	151	25
Healthcare Velindre	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Wrexham Maelor Hospital	—	—	12	4	18	22	7	14
Wales	413	70	127	94	178	177	216	71

Following the transfer of functions, this issue will be a matter for the National Assembly.

Hospital Reviews

Mr. Livsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list by health authority in Wales the number of hospitals whose future is currently under review. [74381]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: Responsibility for reviewing and subsequently consulting upon substantial service changes lies with health authorities. Proposals to change the functions of a hospital or an individual service are referred to my right hon. Friend for decision only if, following formal public consultation, they cannot be agreed with the local community Health Council. At present, one such referral has been made and is under consideration.

Following the transfer of functions, this issue will be a matter for the National Assembly.

Waiting Lists

Mr. Livsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will estimate *(a)* the number of people in each health authority region in Wales currently waiting for an appointment with a consultant following a referral by a general practitioner and *(b)* the length of time which those people (i) have already waited and (ii) are expected to wait. [74382]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: The numbers of people in each health authority area in Wales waiting for an appointment with a consultant at 31 December 1998, and the numbers waiting over six months, were published in the statistical release "NHS Wales Hospital Waiting Lists: December 1998" (SDR 7/99), a copy of which has been placed in the Library of the House. Data are not collected centrally on the expected length of wait, which will depend on individual circumstances. However, information on the routine outpatient wait for hospital consultants in Wales is published in the bulletin "Hospital Waiting Times" produced by the Welsh Health Common Services Authority, a copy of which will be placed in the Library of the House as soon as possible.

Following the transfer of functions, this issue will be a matter for the National Assembly.

Mr. Livsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list for each health authority region the waiting time for new entrants to the waiting list for *(a)* ear, nose and throat, *(b)* trauma and orthopaedic, *(c)* general surgery, *(d)* ophthalmology and *(e)* gynaecology consultants. [74383]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: The waiting times for new entrants to the lists to see NHS consultants will depend on individual circumstances. The proportions of patients seen within three months and six months of referral to consultants in these specialties in Welsh hospitals during the period 1 January 1998 to 31 March 1998 were published in "The Patient's Charter NHS Wales Performance Tables 1998", a copy of which has been placed in the Library of the House.

Following the transfer of functions, this issue will be a matter for the National Assembly.

CABINET OFFICE

GM Foods

Mr. Baker: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office by what means he proposes to quantify *(a)* the benefits and *(b)* the risks that might flow from the genetic modification of (i) crops and (ii) food. [74863]

Dr. Jack Cunningham *[holding answer 5 March 1999]:* The Government receive advice on these issues from their independent expert committees, including the Advisory Committee on Releases to the Environment and the Advisory Committee on Novel Foods and Processes.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Chevening House

Mr. Soames: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) for what purposes Chevening House has been used by Her Majesty's Government, other than for Foreign and Commonwealth Office business, since 1 May 1997; [72965]

(2) what discussions concerning genetically modified foods and crops have taken place at Chevening since 1 May 1997. [73515]

Mr. Robin Cook *[holding answers 25 and 26 February 1999]:* Chevening House is available to members of Her Majesty's Government, senior officials and others for meetings and entertainment, with my permission.

As far as we are aware, no discussions about genetically modified food have taken place at Chevening.

Former Yugoslavia

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress has been made in the investigation of the massacres in autumn 1998 at Gornje Obrinje and Vucitrn; what estimate has been made of the number of victims; and what steps have been taken to bring the perpetrators before the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia. [75137]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: HMG have been informed by the Tribunal that its investigations into the massacres at Gornje Orbinje and Vucitrn are ongoing but are being seriously hampered by the lack of cooperation and access from the Yugoslav authorities. HMG continue actively to support the work of the ICTY, including financing an additional courtroom which has helped speed up trial procedures and contributing more than £1.2 million to the Tribunal's Exhumations 1998 Programme.

Common Foreign and Security Policy

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 25 February 1999, *Official Report*, columns *438–39*, if he will place in the Library copies of the reports of the Common Foreign and Security Policy working groups since 1 May 1997. [75081]

Ms Quin: The Government are committed to ensuring more effective parliamentary scrutiny of, and greater openness in European Union business, including the European Union's Common Foreign and Security Policy. We introduced last year procedures for the parliamentary scrutiny of all Common Foreign and Security Policy Common Positions and Joint Actions, and other politically important documents. The Government do not, however, have discretion to disclose unilaterally documents which reveal the negotiating positions of individual European Union member states. They do not, therefore, propose to place the reports of Working Group discussion in the Library of the House.

Mr. Bruce George: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to the answer to the right hon. Member for Penrith and The Border (Mr. Maclean) of 25 February 1999, *Official Report*, columns *438–39*, in what form the outcome of the deliberations of the Common Foreign and Security Policy working groups are made available to Parliament. [74569]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 8 March 1999]:* I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave the right hon. Member for Penrith and the Border (Mr. Maclean) today, *Official Report*, column *179*.

Prime Minister (Articles)

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what advice his Department has given to the Prime Minister's Office on the (i) style, (ii) substance and (iii) target audience of articles in the Prime Minister's name to be published in foreign newspapers and journals. [75048]

Mr. Fatchett: The FCO offers the Prime Minister's Office informal advice on the style, substance, and target audience of articles in the Prime Minister's name whenever this is requested.

Taiwan

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with the United States about the military threats to Taiwan by the People's Republic of China [75080]

Mr. Fatchett: Following the US Secretary of State's recent visit to Peking, my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary discussed China, including cross-straits relations with Taiwan, with Mrs. Albright on 6 March.

Croatia

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the current human rights situation in Croatia. [75229]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: While improvements have been made, much remains to be done. In particular, the most recent OSCE report on Croatia has underlined a continuing lack of progress in bringing domestic legislation, eg on protection for minorities and press freedom, into line with Council of Europe and UN human rights instruments.

Among the areas which still require government attention are:

Constitutional amendments to remove the restrictions of certain rights which are currently enjoyed by citizens rather than individuals;

Restoration of certain suspended provisions contained in the 1991 Constitutional Law on Human Rights, providing for the protection of political representation and social and cultural rights of minorities (applying above all to the Serb minority following Operations Flash and Storm in 1995);

Croatia is a party to the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees but no domestic legislation has yet been introduced to implement its principles, leaving Albanian asylum-seekers from Kosovo, for example, with treatment inconsistent with these principles;

Equal application of the Law on Citizenship;

Adoption of democratic standards regarding freedom of the media, information and expression, and public service broadcasting;

Reform of electoral legislation in order to comply with the OSCE Copenhagen Document (Articles 7 and 8) and other international standards.

We and our European partners take every opportunity to remind the Croatians that fulfilment of its international obligations is a necessary precursor to a closer relationship with Europe.

Turkey

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions have been held by British Embassy officials in Turkey with *(a)* Kurdish and *(b)* human rights groups; and if he will make a statement. [74871]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 8 March 1999]:* British Embassy officials in Ankara regularly meet representatives of Kurdish groups, including representatives of the

People's Democracy Party (HADEP). Our officials are also in constant contact with representatives of various human rights organisations in Turkey, including the Human Rights Association and the Human Rights Foundation.

Human Rights

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what funding was made available to his Department's Human Rights Fund in 1998; and what it will be in 1999. [75714]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: £5 million was allocated to the Human Rights Project Fund in FY 1998–99. We plan to maintain the current funding allocation in real terms for the next financial year, and will keep this funding under review to ensure that it remains at an appropriate level.

UNSCOM

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the USA about the recall of UNSCOM's Director of Operations, Colonel James Moore, to Washington. [75215]

Mr. Tony Lloyd *[holding answer 8 March 1999]:* None.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will set up an inquiry into misuse for intelligence purposes of the disarmament agency set up after the Gulf War to eliminate Iraq's chemical and biological weapons. [75214]

Mr. Tony Lloyd *[holding answer 8 March 1999]:* The UK government have repeatedly made it clear that all information exchanges between the UK and UNSCOM, and all activities by UK nationals assigned to UNSCOM, have been strictly in pursuit of UNSCOM's mandate to dismantle Iraq's Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) capability. The US has made similar statements. UNSCOM Executive Chairman Richard Butler has said that he has always insisted on all UNSCOM activity being carried out strictly in pursuit of its disarmament mandate, not to benefit any individual member state.

Uganda

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what warnings of a threat to British nationals in Uganda his Department received prior to 1 March. [75486]

Mr. Tony Lloyd *[holding answer 8 March 1999]:* This Department has received no warnings of threats to British nationals in Uganda from Rwandan Interahamwe rebels prior to 1 March 1999. FCO travel advice of 19 February did, however, draw attention to periodic rebel activity in the Uganda/Congo/Rwanda border areas around the Kisoro district, and mentioned that, although the situation was currently peaceful, it could change quickly.

There have in the past been a number of threats to UK interests in Uganda from other sources, including the Lord's Resistance Army and the Alliance of Democratic Forces.

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the reported killings of 15 Rwandan militiamen by Ugandan forces. [75770]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: We are aware of reports originating in Uganda of the killing of a number of Rwandan militiamen by Ugandan and Rwandan Government forces operating in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Given the difficulty in obtaining reliable information from this remote area, we are unable to confirm the reports.

A three man UK Police Team arrived in Kampala on Friday 5 March to assist the Ugandan authorities in their investigation into the murders of the four British tourists in the Bwindi National Park. We expect the Government of Uganda's follow up to this incident and the investigation to take full account of international human rights standards.

Kosovo

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the level of involvement of Islamic terrorist organisations in Kosovo. [75562]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: We are aware of press reporting about contacts between Islamic terrorist organisations and the Kosovo Liberation Army (UCK), but we have no evidence of systematic involvement.

Mr. Howard: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the recent detention of OSCE monitors in Kosovo by Serbian forces and the rules of engagement for the extraction force in such circumstances. [75796]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: OSCE verifiers were detained by Yugoslav customs authorities during 25 and 26 February. This was a breach of the agreement setting up the OSCE Kosovo Verification Mission and official protests were made by the OSCE to the FRY authorities.

The problem was resolved by peaceful negotiation. In the event of an emergency, an extraction force is available. For security reasons, the rules of engagement remain confidential.

Ireland (Treaties)

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he expects treaties with the Irish Government establishing (i) British-Irish Council, (ii) British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference, (iii) North/South Ministerial Council and (vi) implementation bodies to be signed. [76010]

Ms Quin: The treaties were signed on 8 March 1998 in Dublin. Copies of the Treaties are available from the vote office and have been placed in the Libraries of the Houses of Parliament. The Treaties will be published and laid in the normal way.

Sri Lanka

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Government of Sri Lanka calling for UNHCR observers to be present at the exhumations of bodies at the mass grave in Chemmani on 5 March. [75513]

Mr. Fatchett: We are deeply concerned about reports that several hundred bodies of people who "disappeared" in army custody in 1996–97 may be in a mass grave at

Chemmani in Jaffna. Our High Commissioner in Colombo has pressed on numerous occasions for a prompt and thorough investigation. I raised the issue when I visited Colombo on 10 November.

While we have called for an impartial investigation, we have not specifically suggested that UNHCR observers be present. A preliminary examination was held on 5 March to establish whether the site had been tampered with. We hope that the investigation will now proceed without further delay.

South Africa

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will assess the impact on the South African elections of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's rejection of the ANC leaders' application for a group amnesty for acts committed by ANC members. [75769]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: It is not for the UK Government to assess the impact of a ruling of a constitutional body in another country, such as South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). The TRC's ruling on the ANC leaders' application for a group amnesty is a legal matter for the applicants concerned.

Khartoum

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Sudanese Government concerning the attacks on Christian students at the University of Khartoum on 6 and 7 February. [75802]

Mr. Fatchett: We have followed up the reports that we have received of these attacks with the concerned authorities, including the University of Khartoum.

Israel

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will be supporting Israel's request to the EU for support for the desalination plant in Gaza. [75800]

Mr. Fatchett: Water is an issue to be resolved in the final status negotiations. We support the Wye Agreement which provides for the immediate resumption of final status negotiations. We also support an equitable division of water which will take into account the concerns of all parties including other countries in the region. The proposed desalination plant has to be considered in the context of the final status negotiations.

Oman (Ministerial Visit)

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about the visit by the Minister of State to Oman. [75773]

Mr. Fatchett: I visited Oman on 2–4 March for discussions on regional and bilateral issues with His Majesty Sultan Qaboos and senior Omani Ministers. The visit enabled me to reaffirm the importance the United Kingdom places on existing political and commercial relations with Oman, and on the security of the Gulf region as a whole. Oman is one of our oldest friends in a region of key interest to the United Kingdom. We are keen to maintain the long-standing ties which exist between our two countries.

Falklands

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if his Department has asked the Chilean Government to state its reasons for recommending to Lan Chile that it ceases flights between Santiago and the Falklands; and what other options for air links in the region his Department has been exploring for the Falklands. [75807]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: The Chilean Government have stated publicly that their action with Lan Chile was in response to my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary's decision to issue an Authority to Proceed in respect of the Spanish extradition request for Senator Pinochet. We have made it clear that we do no believe any such measures are justified. While we hope that Lan Chile will continue to fly to the Falklands, we are considering other options with the Falkland Islands Government, including flights to other countries, improved surface travel, and the possibility of the Falkland Islands Government leasing their own aircraft.

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he made to the Chilean Government when the Presidents of Argentina and Chile signed the joint declaration ratifying Chile's support for Argentina's claim of sovereignty over the Falkland Islands on 15 December. [75805]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: None. Our position on the Falkland Islands has been made clear to the Government of Chile repeatedly in recent years.

Ascension Islands

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to charge the United States for the use of the Ascension Islands. [75757]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: We currently have no plans to charge the United States for the use of Ascension Island. The United States Base on Ascension is provided free from rent and charges under the terms of the Agreement between the UK and US Governments Concerning the Extension of the Bahamas Long Range Proving Ground by the Establishment of Additional Sites in Ascension Island signed in 1956, as amended.

Wideawake Airfield, which forms part of the US Base, is a vital link in the RAF airbridge to the Falkland Islands. We are currently preparing for talks with the US Government to allow the use of Wideawake by civil charter flights. If these negotiations are successful, this will improve access to both Ascension and St. Helena, some 700 miles away.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Housing Benefit (Wandsworth)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what discussions he has had with the London

Borough of Wandsworth on the payment of housing benefit claims to residents; and if he will make a statement. [74296]

Angela Eagle: Following a large volume of complaints and work backlogs, the London Borough of Wandsworth approved new arrangements for the management of its benefits administration from 27 November 1998. The Authority has kept the Department informed of developments. Most of the problems experienced last year have been resolved and the Department has received assurances that the remaining issues are being addressed.

Pensioners (Benefits)

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what information is provided by his Department's Family Revenues Survey about the proportion of pensioners aged 80 years or over living in multiple benefit unit households relative to that of all people over pensionable age. [75221]

Mr. Timms: According to the 1996–97 Family Resources Survey (GB) 21 per cent. of pensioners aged 80 years or over were living in multiple benefit unit households compared with 19 per cent. of other people over pensionable age.

Notes:

1. Estimates are subject to sampling error and to variability in non response.
2. Percentages are rounded to nearest integer.

National Insurance Contributions

Mrs. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assessment he has made of the Social Security Advisory Committee's report and recommendations on the draft regulations to bring non-cash vouchers into line with the treatment of cash earnings for National Insurance contribution purposes; and if he will make a statement. [76089]

Mr. Timms: We have considered the Social Security Advisory Committee's report and their recommendations carefully. We are grateful to the Committee, and those interested parties who responded to the consultation exercises, for their consideration of the draft regulations and their comments on them.

We have noted the Committee's view that it is right to close any loophole which allows an employer to avoid National Insurance liability and their general support for the principle of closer alignment of tax and NICs arrangements. However, the Committee are not convinced that our proposals for non-cash vouchers meet these criteria. In particular, they suggest that we defer implementation to assess the longer term implications or, alternatively, that we increase substantially the disregard for luncheon vouchers.

We do not believe, in the light of the extensive consultation already undertaken, there would be anything to be gained by delaying the proposal beyond April 1999. It would perpetuate the unfairness of the current arrangements whereby employees who receive part of their pay in non-cash vouchers are not liable for NICs on that part, whilst other employees, who do not receive vouchers, are liable for NICs on the whole of their salary.

To increase the disregard for luncheon vouchers above the long-standing 15 pence a day level for tax would undermine the aims of closer alignment and the need to ensure fairness with those paid in cash.

In addition to these proposals, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced in last year's Budget a number of changes to the structure of the National Insurance scheme. These changes will be introduced in April 1999. The employee entry fee will be abolished, so that all employees, who pay contributions, will pay £1.32 per week less NICs. This will more than offset the increase in NICs paid by most employees on luncheon vouchers, which are the most common form of non-cash voucher.

We will therefore table shortly the Social Security (Contributions) Amendment Regulations 1999. The regulations will bring non-cash vouchers into line with the treatment of cash earnings for National Insurance Contribution purposes. A copy of the Committee's report and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State's reply will be published with the regulations. The regulations will come into force from 6 April 1999.

National Insurance Reductions

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate for each constituency in Staffordshire the number of people who will benefit from the reduction in national insurance scheduled for April 1999; and if he will make a statement. [75658]

Mr. Timms: The information is not available by Parliamentary constituency. However, throughout Great Britain, some 20 million people, 90 per cent. of all employees, will pay an average of nearly £70 a year less in National Insurance contributions as a result of the abolition of the employee entry fee in April 1999.

Source:

Autumn 1998 Labour Force Survey.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease

Mr. Jack: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer of 22 February 1999, *Official Report*, columns *190–91*, concerning nv CJD, at what level of risk it ceases to be possible to specify the statistical risk of dying from nv CJD as a result of eating beef-on-the-bone products. [73784]

Mr. Rooker: There is no scientific proof that BSE can be transmitted to man by beef, but this is seen by SEAC as the most likely explanation, and all our control measures are based on the assumption that it is. In those circumstances, before it will be possible to calculate with any degree of certainty the risk to an individual as a result of eating beef on the bone, we need the answers to a number of key scientific questions:

how much infectivity is needed to cause disease in humans;

whether repeated exposure to small amounts of infectivity over a period of time can cause disease or whether a single dose is sufficient to result in disease;

how susceptible man is to BSE compared with, for example, cattle or mice;

whether there are factors such as genetic susceptibility, or the physiology of the human gut, that might affect susceptibility or incubation period in humans compared with other species.

It is clearly not possible to conduct direct experiments to test these factors. As the BSE epidemic wanes, any risk declines along with the number of infected animals, but it is not possible to specify the statistical risk for an individual of dying from nvCJD as a result of eating beef on the bone products. In such uncertain circumstances we need to be very cautious about any decision to relax public health protection in this area.

Bovine Tuberculosis

Mr. Gray: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the current incidence of tuberculosis in badgers. [74689]

Mr. Rooker: We do not have information on the current incidence of TB in badgers across GB.

Badger carcases from various sources have been examined by MAFF since 1974. These include carcases from badger removal operations carried out under the interim strategy between 1982 and 1997, taken from areas of high TB incidence in cattle herds, where badgers were thought to be implicated in the spread of bovine TB to cattle. There were also carcases examined following road traffic accidents.

Summarised are the results of the badger carcases examined by the Ministry and the percentage found positive for TB following laboratory culture. As these badgers were collected from limited areas of the country they are not representative of the incidence of TB in the badger population as a whole.

Year	*Total badger carcases examined*	*Percentage of which found positive for TB*
1975	100	24.0
1976	203	15.8
1977	184	15.3
1978	221	9.0
1979	489	10.2
1980	513	8.9
1981	260	9.2
1982	691	11.0
1983	995	13.7
1984	1,265	14.3
1985	1,120	13.3
1986	785	16.1
1987	733	12.7
1988	778	27.2
1989	727	16.8
1990	810	19.4
1991	990	16.3
1992	1,054	20.0
1993	1,093	27.4
1994	1,683	22.9
1995	1,509	28.1
1996	1,911	25.2
1997	2,447	27.9

Source:
CVL(E) Wildlife Unit Badger Database

MAFF is now removing badgers only in trial areas and the Independent Scientific Group overseeing the culling trial will need time to assess the results as they become available. The results will give an indication of the level of TB in badgers but initially only in those areas where the trial takes place.

The National Road Traffic Accident Survey ended in 1991. The Krebs Report recommended a limited reintroduction of the survey as it would give a good indication of the disease in the badgers sampled. We are considering how to take this forward.

Mr. Gray: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement about progress in the implementation of the Krebs report. [74688]

Mr. Rooker: The strategy I announced last August is designed to provide an effective science-based approach to controlling TB in cattle. It was based on the recommendations published in the Krebs Report. Progress on implementation is as follows:

to minimise the risk to humans and investigate potential links with human health. Quarterly meetings with the Department of Health and other public health interests have been established.

the development of a vaccine. The Krebs report recognised that this is possibly the best long term solution which could take 10 to 15 years. There is not necessarily any guarantee of success. However, I fully support this development and MAFF will be spending more than £1.3 million on it per year.

research initiative to improve our understanding of the disease and how it spreads. The MAFF research programme had been revised on line with Krebs' recommendations and the budget has been increased from £1.7 million to £3.1 million in 1999–2000. We will shortly announce details of the research projects being funded from 1999 for the next three years. We are looking at factors such as the diagnostic skin test, the possible use of blood tests and the reliability of laboratory culture to see if we can identify improvement in testing and diagnosis to enable us to detect the disease more quickly. In addition, we propose to introduce a new epidemiological questionnaire to gather information on a full range of factors which might affect the spread of TB. This includes wildlife, but also husbandry practices, nutrition and the local terrain and climate. The questionnaire was piloted last autumn and points arising from the pilot study are currently under consideration. It will shortly be made publicly available.

the Government should work with the farming industry to improve husbandry methods to minimise contact between cattle and badgers. We are reviewing advice provided to farmers on husbandry and disease control. The epidemiological survey referred to above will enable us to identify best husbandry practice.

a randomised culling trial designed to test the effectiveness of different strategies and to provide unambiguous evidence of the role of badgers in cattle TB. Three badger treatment strategies will be compared in 30 areas grouped into 10 triplets. The first two triplets have been identified: one in Devon/Cornwall and the other in Gloucester/Herefordshire. Badger culling has been carried out in the pro-active areas of the Devon Cornwall triplet. We had hoped to have both the Pro-active culled before the closed season, but the terrain in the Gloucestershire triplet proved to be difficult and it will not be possible to complete the pro-active cull here until after the closed season. However, additional funding has been made available and more staff are being recruited to deal with the increased workload for the coming year. The remaining triplets will be identified by the Independent Scientific Group using scientific criteria and will be located in areas of high TB risk.

Farmers

Mr. Gray: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what percentage of farmers he expects to leave agricultural production in the next five years. [74693]

Mr. Rooker: Figures on the number of farmers leaving or coming into agriculture are not available. However, the number of farmers has been declining overall by 0.5 to 1 per cent. a year. Whether there will be any significant changes in the trend may also depend on the final conclusions on reform of the CAP and the impact of any implementing provisions, on which we are consulting the industry at present.

Mr. Gray: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement about methods for the eradication of bovine tuberculosis. [74690]

Mr. Rooker: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to my hon. Friend, the Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew) on 4 March 1999, *Official Report,* column *911.*

Meat (Labelling)

Mr. Gray: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement about the labelling of country of origin of meat sold in Britain. [74694]

Mr. Rooker: Rules on the labelling of food products are harmonised by EC legislation. Generally, the place (but not necessarily the country) of origin of any food must be given if omitting it could mislead the purchaser about the true place of origin of that food. The place of origin may be taken as the place in which the food last underwent a substantial change.

More specifically, the Beef Labelling Scheme requires that any beef labelled with country of origin information must derive from animals born, reared and slaughtered in that country. National origin labelling of beef is expected to become compulsory from the year 2000. The labels on pre-packaged poultrymeat must give an indication of its country of origin when it is imported from outside the Community and we are currently taking steps to require this information on labels, tickets or notices near where unpackaged poultry is offered for sale.

Separately, in November last year, members of the British Retail Consortium gave a voluntary undertaking not to sell imported fresh meat, processed or packaged in the UK, under a British label. This is a welcome commitment, for UK producers and consumers alike.

Food Labelling Regulations

Mr. Paice: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what consultations he has had with local authorities about the proposed enforcement of food labelling regulations by the Food Standards Agency. [75190]

Mr. Rooker *[holding answer 8 March 1999]:* Under the Food Standards Agency food law enforcement will generally continue to be carried out at the local level. It is proposed, however, that the Agency will assume new responsibilities for monitoring and setting standards for local authority enforcement. The Government have maintained regular contact with local authorities over all enforcement matters, including the enforcement of labelling regulations and the future responsibilities of the Agency in this important area.

Genetically Modified Food

Mr. Paice: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list which foods or food ingredients produced from genetically modified crops are available in the UK and have been labelled in accordance with the EC Novel Foods and Novel Food Ingredients Regulations. [75191]

Mr. Rooker *[holding answer 8 March 1999]:* Genetically modified (GM) tomato paste and foods containing GM soya and GM maize are currently available in the UK.

The EC Novel Foods and Novel Food Ingredients Regulation (258/97) came into force in May 1997.

Foods containing GM soya and maize, which were approved for marketing prior to this, are required to be labelled under EC Regulation 1139/98. The GM tomato paste has been clearly labelled on a voluntary basis by the manufacturer since its launch in February 1996.

Mr. Baker: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what progress has been made in establishing a de minimis threshold for the presence of genetically modified material in food, below which labelling would not be necessary. [75103]

Mr. Rooker *[holding answer 8 March 1999]:* The European Commission has undertaken to come forward with proposals on this issue by the end of March. We will continue to press the European Commission to adhere to this timetable.

Mr. Baker: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what percentage of farm animal feed presently on sale contains genetically modified material. [75107]

Mr. Rooker *[holding answer 8 March 1999]:* Farm animal feed made only from UK grown crops does not contain any genetically modified (GM) material, because none of the GM plants granted marketing consents under Council Directive 90/220 have been grown in the UK on a commercial scale. Imported materials, in particular maize, soya and their by-products, will contain a proportion of material derived from GM plants. However, in the absence of crop segregation and specific labelling requirements, it is not possible to determine the precise extent of this.

Rabies

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what research projects his Department has commissioned *(a)* to anticipate and *(b)* to facilitate speedy and effective implementation of the changes in rabies control he expects to follow from the report of the Advisory Group on Quarantine; if this research specifically includes critical path planning; and what are the expected times for completion of each of these projects. [74794]

Mr. Rooker *[holding answer 8 March 1999]:* The Government are considering the outcome of the consultation on the report of the Advisory Group on Quarantine (AGQ), which recommended changes to the quarantine system. A dedicated team has been established in this Department which is able to call upon the services of a wider multi-disciplinary group of experts. They will employ recognised project management techniques which will include critical path analysis. The team has received project management training.

Projects commissioned by the team to date are as follows:

A further study of the risk associated with animals imported from the USA and Canada. This is expected to be completed in April.

A proficiency test programme for laboratories carrying out blood tests. The earliest that a laboratory might be authorised would be autumn 1999.

Consideration of the efficacy and security of microchip identification. A seminar was held in the Ministry's premises at Tolworth, Surrey, on 1 February. Work on animal identification is expected to be completed in a few months.

Preparation of a list of zoonotic infections and infestations found in cats and dogs in the EU/EEA Member States and rabies free islands which are not found in the UK.

Initial design work for potential port facilities.

A programme of work to identify an ELISA test for rabies that might replace the existing virus neutralisation test.

The advice of the Advisory Committee on Dangerous Pathogens (ACDP) has been obtained on the implications of the AGQ recommendations. A workshop is planned to be held by the ACDP on 12 April to consider this matter further.

The Office International des Epizooties and the World Health Organisation have been requested to consider the designation of specified methods for a prescribed blood test(s). It is hoped that this will be concluded in May.

Furthermore, the Chief Veterinary Officer wrote to counterparts in other EU Member States in November 1998 to ask them to confirm that they would be able to provide certification of cats and dogs to the standard recommended by the AGQ. Governments of islands that it is believed could be classified as rabies free are also being contacted. The replies are being evaluated. Work is also underway on designing an appropriate form of certificate for British cats and dogs taken out of the UK with the intention of their being re-imported.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what were the principal project areas in which his Department commissioned research on rabies over the last 15 years; and what were the approximate costs incurred in respect of each of these projects. [74793]

Mr. Rooker *[holding answer 8 March 1999]:* Details of research on rabies between 1991 and 1999 together with the annual budget for each project is as follows:

1991–92

Rabies: Differentiation of strains using monoclonal antibodies—£21,000

Development of alternative diagnostic systems for rabies: neuroblastoma culture—£37,000

Development of rapid diagnostic tests for rabies: PCR—£31,000

1992–93

Rabies: Differentiation of strains using monoclonal antibodies—£21,000

Development of alternative diagnostic systems for rabies: neuroblastoma culture—£37,000

Development of rapid diagnostic tests for rabies: PCR—£31,000

Biology and control of mammalian vectors of rabies—£184,000

1993–94

Development of rapid diagnostic tests for rabies: PCR—£78,000

Biology and control of mammalian vectors of rabies—£129,000

Development of ELISA methods for rabies diagnosis capable of dealing with samples received in the event of a UK outbreak—£64,000

1994–95

Biology and control of mammalian vectors of rabies—£162,000

Development of an optimisation of rapid PCR methods for the diagnosis or rabies—£132,000

Development of rabies contingency programmes—£50,000

1995–96

Biology and control of mammalian vectors of rabies—£183,000

Development of an optimisation of rapid PCR methods for the diagnosis of rabies—£135,379

Expression of rabies glycoprotein in baculovirus for use in a rapid diagnosis kit for antibody level determination—£116,778

1996–97

Development of an optimisation of rapid PCR methods for the diagnosis of rabies—£146,528

Expression of rabies glycoprotein in baculovirus for use in a rapid diagnosis kit for antibody level determination—£119,113

Differentiation of strains of rabies and rabies-related viruses using automated sequence analyses—£101,315

Biology and control of mammalian vectors of rabies—£186,044

1997–98

Expression of rabies glycoprotein in baculovirus for use in a rapid diagnosis kit for antibody level determination—£85,370

Differentiation of strains of rabies and rabies-related viruses using automated sequence analyses—£72,190

Biology and control of mammalian vectors of rabies—£189,097

Development of rapid PCR-based systems for the detection and differentiation of rabies and rabies-related viruses—£116,516

Rabies defence measures in the Channel Tunnel—foxes and DNA fingerprinting—£5,645

1998–99

Differentiation of strains of rabies and rabies-related viruses using automated sequence analyses—£101,143

Biology and control of mammalian vectors of rabies—£189,097

Development of rapid PCR-based systems for the detection and differentiation of rabies and rabies-related viruses—£156,797

Molecular detection techniques to investigate aspects of the pathogenesis of rabies—£133,757.

Information on rabies research between 1984 and 1991 is not available in this format.

During the 1980's MAFF research on rabies concentrated on answering the hypothetical question "If rabies entered the UK, where did it come from and what measures were needed to be taken to control/eradicate it". Research centred upon the collection of rabies viruses from all areas of the world where rabies was endemic and the production and use of monoclonal antibodies with which these viruses could be identified.

Subsidiary work included vaccine potency testing for the European Pharmocopoeia, research in mince into the potential use of inactivated oral vaccines, and the development of a serological test to measure the neutralizing antibody levels in animal sera.

Meat Hygiene

Mr. Paice: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for South Derbyshire (Mr. Todd) of 22 February 1999, *Official Report*, column *184*, on meat hygiene, if he will place a copy of his letter to the hon. Member for South Derbyshire in the Library. [75189]

Mr. Rooker *[holding answer 8 March 1999]:* The exercise to collate and analyse information on the level of hygiene inspection charges levied on individual meat plants in other Member States is not yet complete.

Once the exercise is complete, I will write to those hon. Members who have asked questions on this subject and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Mr. Paice: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many inspections have been carried out in the UK by the EU Commission's Food and Veterinary Office in each of the last 12 months as part of its enforcement of the Meat Hygiene Directive. [75192]

Mr. Rooker *[holding answer 8 March 1999]:* In the last 12 months the European Commission's Food and Veterinary Office carried out two inspections in the UK on controls in fresh (red) meat establishments under Directive 64/433/EEC in June and September 1998.

Date-based Export Scheme

Mr. Paice: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the reasons given by fresh meat wholesalers and abattoir owners for their reluctance to apply for the date-based export scheme; and what steps he is taking to address those difficulties. [75193]

Mr. Rooker *[holding answer 8 March 1999]:* The main concerns expressed about the Date-based Export Scheme (DBES) by trade organisations representing abattoirs are the requirement to dedicate plants to export eligible animals and meat, and the availability of eligible animals. A small number of plants have, however, expressed interest.

I have placed in the Library of the House a copy of the response issued by the Department to comments made on the consultation on our implementation of the DBES, together with a summary of those comments. Our response document recognises the difficulties of complying with the DBES conditions and that the requirement for dedication is particularly onerous. However, this requirement and the rules on eligibility of animals are set down in the EC Commission Decision. I do not believe that we could have negotiated a more liberal scheme, or that Member States would be ready to consider any changes in the near future.

Cattle Health Scheme

Mr. Blizzard: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the future of the Cattle Health Scheme. [76120]

Mr. Rooker: During the last UK Presidency of the EU Council, agreement was reached on changes to animal health trade rules. The new rules allow the UK to apply for official freedom from enzootic bovine leukosis for Great Britain, and we intend to do so. This will benefit farmers, and will reduce public expenditure.

The Cattle Health Scheme attests herds as being individually free of enzootic bovine leukosis, so will not be needed once GB freedom is achieved. We will continue to run the Scheme for the time being and review its future in September. Officials are writing to all members of the Scheme to let them know the position.

Abattoir Inspection Charges

Mr. Blizzard: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what has been the response to his Department's consultation on the proposal to charge industry for the costs of enforcing controls on specified risk material; and if he will make a statement. [76121]

Mr. Rooker: We received 26 responses to the consultation document and we have also received other correspondence relating to these proposals. Almost all argued that the proposed charges should not be levied at a time when the livestock industry is still in great financial difficulties. Some argued that the charges would discriminate against small abattoirs in rural areas.

I and my colleagues in Scotland and Wales have carefully considered these responses but concluded that, in the light of the Government's overall priorities, we should proceed as planned. I therefore yesterday laid the necessary Regulations before Parliament. A number of consultees commented that the charge should be based on throughput rather than an hourly rate. I recognise the benefits that this could bring to small, low throughput abattoirs and have therefore asked my officials to consider the feasibility of altering the basis of the SRM charge so as to lessen the severe impact on small, low throughput abattoirs. Any change would require a further consultation exercise and amending legislation.

Copies of the responses to the consultation are available for public inspection at the main MAFF library in London.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Chamber Business

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the President of the Council how much time in the last session of Parliament was devoted in the Chamber to *(a)* Scottish, *(b)* Welsh, *(c)* Northern Ireland, *(d)* European Union, *(e)* Commonwealth and other foreign and *(f)* other business. [75539]

Mrs. Beckett: Any figures given cannot be entirely objective, as it is not always clear in what category particular debates belong. Where this is unclear the figures have been included in the "other" category. Taking this into account, the figures are as follows: *(a)* 121 hours 50 minutes, *(b)* 96 hours 47 minutes, *(c)* 110 hours 25 minutes, *(d)* 124 hours 14 minutes, *(e)* 104 hours 16 minutes and *(f)* 1560 hours 4 minutes.

These figures do not take account of the occasions on which matters relating to territorial, European Union or foreign affairs were debated at the same times as matters relating to the United Kingdom as a whole. Questions relating to Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs have all been included in category *(c)*, even though some of them may in fact have related to category *(d)*. All time taken on the Floor of the House last Session has been included in the above figures.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Select Committee Reports

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he or his Ministers have received any advance copy, draft or briefing upon the contents of any report of the Culture, Media and Sport Committee prior to its due publication date and time; and if he will make a statement. [75775]

Mr. Chris Smith: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to the hon. Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire) on 1 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *531*. There have no instances of members of select committees giving me or my Ministerial colleagues drafts of select committee reports, or of parts of reports including their conclusions, before publication. Nor, to the best of my knowledge, have there been any occasions on which members of select committees have given such material to civil servants or special advisers in my Department. This excludes embargoed copies of reports issued under House of Commons Standing Order 116.

Board of English Heritage

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what are the names, qualifications and experience of the members of the Board of English Heritage; and how many of them, and which, have a disability. [74557]

Mr. Alan Howarth: The Commissioners of English Heritage are as listed, together with their qualifications and experience. None has divulged any information regarding disability.

English Heritage Commissioners

Chairman: Sir Jocelyn Stevens CVO: Term of office: 1/4/97—31/3/2000

Chairman of English Heritage since 1992. From 1955, background in journalism and newspaper publishing; Rector and Vice Provost of Royal College of Art 1984–92. Deputy Chairman of the Independent Television Commission 1991–96.

Professor Richard Morris: Term of office: 16/7/96—15/7/99

Director of the Council for British Archaeology since 1991; previously a lecturer in archaeology at York University.

Loyd Grossman: Term of office: 16/9/97—15/9/2000

Broadcaster and journalist. Chairman of The Campaign for Museums. Commissioner of the Museums and Galleries Commission since 1996.

Sue Underwood: Term of office: 16/9/97—15/9/2000

Director of the North of England Museums Service since 1990; previously its Deputy Director.

The right hon. the Lord Faringdon: Term of office: 16/9/98—31/3/2000

Chairman of the Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England (RCHME) since October 1994. Chairman of Witan Investments Co plc since 1980.

Candida Lycett Green: Term of office: 9/6/98—8/6/2001

Writer and broadcaster, specialising in architecture matters. Members of the Friends of Friendless Churches.

Professor Eric Fernie: Term of office: 9/6/98—8/6/2001

Director of Courtauld Institute since 1995; previously Professor of Fine Art at Edinburgh University. RCHME Commissioner since 1997.

Lady Elizabeth Gass DL: Term of office: 9/6/98—8/6/2001

Lord Lieutenant of Somerset since 1999 and a member of National Trust Wessex Regional Committee since 1994.

Andrew Fane: Term of office: 9/6/98—8/6/2001

Former councillor of Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea and a member of the National Trust East Anglia Regional Committee.

Kirsty McLeod: Term of office: 9/7/98—8/7/2001

Publishing Editor and journalist.

HRH The Duke of Gloucester KG GCVO: Term of office: 1/10/98—30/9/2001

Qualified architect. Also Trustee of the British Museum.

Bridget Cherry: Term of office: 1/10/98—30/9/2001

Editor, Pevsner's *Buildings of England* since 1983, and *Buildings of Scotland, Ireland and Wales* since 1991. Trustee of the Sir John Soane's Museum since 1994.

Amanda Arrowsmith: Term of office: 16/9/98—30/9/2001

RCHME Commissioner since 1994 and Local Authority Archivist. County Director of Libraries and Heritage, Suffolk County Council since 1990. President of the Society of Archivists.

Philip Davis: Term of office: 14/1/99—17/1/2002

Councillor (Labour) of Telford and Wrekin Council since 1979. Founder Chair, UK Local Authorities World Heritage Sites Forum since 1994.

HEALTH

East Anglian Ambulance NHS Trust

Mrs. Brinton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) when he expects to conclude his appraisal of the inquiry into the East Anglian Ambulance NHS Trust; [72303]

(2) if the results of his appraisal of the inquiry into the East Anglian Ambulance NHS Trust will be made public. [72304]

Mr. Denham: The report of the inquiry into the East Anglian Ambulance NHS Trust was published on 2 March. Copies of the report are in the Library.

Primary Care Group Boards

Mr. Hesford: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what requirements there are for members of primary care group boards to register outside interests. [72600]

Mr. Denham: Primary care group board members are required to disclose relevant interests and enter them in the Health Authority's register of interests in accordance with the Health Authority's standing orders and standing financial instructions.

Trainee Doctors (Monitoring)

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what arrangements exist for monitoring the continuing personal suitability of trainee doctors for their future rule throughout the full period of their training. [72307]

Mr. Denham: The responsibility for the health and conduct of medical students lies with the individual university medical schools and the General Medical Council has issued guidance on this topic. The GMC has a further responsibility to ensure that doctors who qualify continue to be fit to practise. Supervision of postgraduate training lies with the Specialist Training Authority of the Medical Royal Colleges and the Joint Committee on Postgraduate Training for General Practice.

Dental Services

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients were registered with (i) NHS and (ii) other dentists in *(a)* 1985, *(b)* 1990, *(c)* 1995 and *(d)* the last year for which figures are available. [72652]

Mr. Denham: The average number of patients registered with General Dental Service (National Health Service) dentists in England for the year 1995 is 27.1 million. For the year 1998, the average is 24.1 million. The figures are averages of the end of month registration numbers. The two figures are not comparable because the registration period was changed for new registrations from September 1996.

Formal registration of patients was introduced on 1 October 1990, so figures for the years 1985 and 1990 are not available. Dentists who do not have NHS patients are not obliged to provide the Department with details of their patients and therefore we do not collect this information.

Intensive Care

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the availability of intensive care in the United Kingdom. [72664]

Mr. Denham: There are about 1,500 adult and 250 paediatric intensive-care beds in England providing one-to-one nursing for critically ill patients. The health services in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are matters for my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Scotland, for Wales and for Northern Ireland.

Pathology Recruitment

Ms Keeble: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures have been taken by his Department to attract graduates into careers as NHS biomedical scientists in pathology. [73101]

Mr. Denham: The Department has published a career leaflet entitled 'A career in the NHS for graduates in biomedical science', which is made available to all university and local careers offices.

Ms Keeble: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment his Department has made of recruitment in the NHS for biomedical scientists in pathology. [73100]

Mr. Denham: Biomedical Scientists in pathology are recruited into the National Health Service in response to local need and accurate national statistics are not held. The National Advisory Group for Scientists and Technicians has been constituted to provide a national co-ordination mechanism for local work-force planning and education commissioning for the scientific and technical staff groups. It has met once with the relevant professional bodies, including that representing Biomedical Scientists, and has established a sub-group to develop data capture methods to obtain local work-force planning information.

Ms Keeble: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the starting salary for a graduate working in the NHS as a biomedical scientist in pathology. [73099]

Mr. Denham: 'Biomedical Scientist' is another title for Medical Laboratory Scientific Officer.

I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Erith and Thamesmead (Mr. Austin), on 16 February 1999, *Official Report*, columns *727–28*.

Ambulance Staff

Dr. Tony Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to review the pay structure of ambulance staff. [73109]

Mr. Denham: We published "Agenda for Change"—our proposals for modernising the National Health Service pay system for all NHS staff—on 15 February. We are opening talks with NHS professional and staff organisations on the basis of this agenda.

Doctors' Training

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what consultations he has had with *(a)* nurses and *(b)* other healthcare practitioners on joint training for new doctors. [73755]

Mr. Denham: Individual university medical schools determine their own undergraduate medical curricula in the light of the recommendations from the General Medical Council's Education Committee, which has the statutory responsibility to determine the extent of knowledge and skill required for the granting of primary medical qualifications in the United Kingdom. The Committee's most recent recommendations were published in the 1993 report "Tomorrow's Doctors", which pointed out that during the undergraduate years, doctors should begin to develop an understanding of the roles, skill and responsibilities of the various caring professions and a capacity for teamwork. Medical schools are currently introducing new curricula in line with the recommendations of "Tomorrow's Doctors".

Mepitel Dressings

Mr. Bruce George: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what studies are being undertaken to assess the efficacy and value of mepitel dressings for treating skin conditions; and when he expects to receive the results of the studies; [74450]

(2) if he will add mepitel dressings to the drug tariff to allow for prescribing in the community; [74452]

(3) what assessments his Department has undertaken of the efficacy and value of mepitel dressings in treating patients with (i) epidermolysis bullosa and (ii) other skin conditions. [74451]

Mr. Denham: Listings of appliances in Part IX of the Drug Tariff are made only in response to, and after consideration of, applications from the manufacturers. We regard all matters concerning such applications to be confidential unless the company chooses to reveal them. We would expect companies to provide any evidence needed to support their application.

Continence Services

Dr. Stoate: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if the Government will respond formally to the report of the working party on the review of continence services; [74551]

(2) when he expects to receive the report of the working party on continence services; [74542]

(3) if he will publish the report of the review on continence services prior to making any decisions on its recommendations; [74541]

(4) what is the timescale for implementation of the recommendations of the review of continence services. [74543]

Mr. Hutton: The purpose of the review of continence service policy is to produce updated guidance for health authorities, primary care groups and National Health Service trusts on NHS continence services. We expect to see proposals for the guidance, including its implementation, in time for publication in spring 1999.

NHS Bureaucracy

Mr. Syms: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress is being made against the Government's target of saving £100 million from bureaucracy in the NHS. [74739]

Mr. Denham: On 22 May 1997, we announced plans to reduce National Health Service management costs by £100 million (£84 million in England) in 1997–98 and "The new NHS" White Paper announced that, over the five years from 1997–98, £1 billion which would otherwise have been spent on management and administration would be freed up for patient care. Details of reductions achieved in 1997–98 will be published shortly.

Private Nursing Services

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when Ministers in his Department last met representatives of *(a)* private nursing services and *(b)* those responsible for private sector care and nursing homes. [74537]

Mr. Hutton: Ministers regularly meet representatives of these groups in a variety of forums to discuss matters of mutual interest.

Chemical Allergies

Mr. Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research his Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated into health problems (i) caused by chemical allergies and (ii) associated with the use of fire-retardant chemicals. [74959]

Ms Jowell: The Department's policy research programme and the National Health Service research and development programmes are supporting a range of research on allergies and will continue to do so. Details of these projects can be found on the National Research Register, a copy of which is available in the Library on CD-Rom. The Department undertakes reviews of the health hazards of a wide range of specific chemicals and data on the potential allergenicity of a chemical would be evaluated as part of the review.

During the inquiry by the Expert Group to Investigate Cot Death Theories (Toxic Gas Hypothesis), the Department commissioned research to a total cost of about £400,000 to investigate the hypothesis that antimony—or phosphorus—containing compounds used as fire retardants in PVC and other cot mattresses are a cause of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome. The Expert Group concluded in its Final Report, published in May 1998, that there was no reason to believe that chemicals used as fire retardants in cot mattress materials pose any health risk to infants.

Mr. Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many people have died in each of the last five years as a result of *(a)* a chemical allergy and *(b)* an allergic reaction to fire-retardant chemicals; [74955]

(2) what estimate he has made of the number of people who have *(a)* a chemical allergy and *(b)* an allergic reaction to fire-retardant chemicals. [74957]

Ms Jowell: The information requested is not available.

Mr. Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the annual cost to the NHS of treating chemical allergies. [74958]

Ms Jowell: Information is not available centrally on the costs to the National Health Service of individual medical conditions.

HIV

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to announce the allocations to health authorities for their *(a)* HIV treatment and care budgets and *(b)* HIV prevention work for the next financial year. [75131]

Ms Jowell: We are currently considering options on these budgets in the light both of the work undertaken by the HIV/AIDS Stocktake Group and the forthcoming HIV/AIDS Strategy. We will announce decisions on these issues shortly.

Nurses' Pay

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will estimate the average pay for Grade D nurses; and if he will list the five NHS trusts that have the lowest pay for Grade D nurses for the year 1998–99. [75026]

Mr. Denham: Average earnings of grade D nurses are estimated at £16,400, as at December 1998. The minimum point of the national grade D scale is set at £12,855, however, this will rise by 12 per cent. to £14,400 from 1 April. Information on earnings for individual trusts is held centrally only for the sample of 170 trusts used in the Department of Health earnings survey.

Patient Discharges

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will estimate *(a)* by health authority, *(b)* by region and *(c)* nationally the number of patients staying past their original discharge date in NHS beds before moving to social service beds; and if he will estimate the cost to the NHS of this delayed discharge. [75040]

Mr. Hutton: The specific information requested is not collected centrally. Information is collected quarterly on the total number of patients aged 75 and over ready for discharge, but still occupying an acute bed in hospital (excluding those under the care of a psychiatric consultant) because of the following principal reasons: assessment completed but awaiting local authority funding, or, care plan agreed but patient awaiting placement in a non National Health Service-funded nursing home or residential care home. This information for the quarter ending December 1998 has been placed in the Library.

Information on the cost of delayed discharges is not reported. Nor is expenditure information available in sufficient detail to be able to estimate, with any accuracy, the cost of the delayed discharge to the NHS.

Chief Executives (Pay)

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the average pay for chief executives of NHS trusts for each of the last 10 years; and if he will list the pay of the five highest paid chief executives of NHS trusts for the year 1998–99. [75025]

Mr. Denham: The remuneration of chief executives of National Health Service trusts in England has been separately identified in trusts' annual reports since the 1994–95 financial year. 1998–1999 information will be available this August, when trusts have published their annual reports. Information on the average pay for Chief Executives' posts for the years 1994–95 to 1997–98 is as follows.

NHS Trusts (England)—Remuneration of Chief Executives

Average remuneration

	Basic salary	*Total remuneration*
1994–95	60,341	65,844
1995–96	64,237	69,757
1996–97	66,918	72,417
1997–98	71,527	76,621

Notes:

1. Information relating to the remuneration of NHS Trust Chief Executives was not collected centrally before 1994–95.
2. Total Remuneration comprises: basic salary, benefits, and performance related bonuses.
3. Remuneration relates to total remuneration of all office holders during year.
4. Average values are based on the number of NHS Trusts in each year; i.e. 1994–95 419, 1995–96 433, 1996–97 429, 1997–98 425.
5. In the years 1994–95, 1995–96 and 1997–98 reported figures were identified as both "Remuneration as Director" and as "Other Remuneration". To ensure consistency these figures have been aggregated as above.
6. Information for 1998–99 will be available in August 1999.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State wrote to NHS trusts and health authorities on 29 January 1998, stating that in-year pay rises of managerial staff should not exceed 2.7 per cent. in 1998–99. On 1 February 1999, the NHS Executive Chief Executive wrote to trust chief executives indicating that

"the Government does not expect to see senior managers being awarded increases out of line with the rest of the public service"

in 1999–2000.

Health Authority Budgets

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the surplus or deficit of each health authority in 1998–99. [75035]

Mr. Denham: The information requested will be placed in the Library.

Service Reconfiguration

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list by region the hospitals which have in the last 10 years consulted their local community health council on service reconfiguration; and how many beds have been gained or lost following each of these reconfigurations. [75037]

Mr. Denham: In line with the practice of previous administrations, this information is not collected centrally.

Registered Homes Act 1984

Mr. Quinn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will bring forward a proposal under the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994 to amend the Registered Homes Act 1984 as recommended by the Better Regulation Task Force in its report on long-term care. [74961]

Mr. Hutton: No. Proposals for reforming the current regulatory system for social services are contained in our White Paper "Modernising Social Services".

Telecommunications Masts

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received about the public health implications of the siting and use of telecommunications masts. [74973]

Ms Jowell: The expansion of the mobile phone network has been accompanied by inquiries to the Department, mainly from members of the public, about the alleged public health implications of mobile phone base stations. Representations have also been made by the mobile phone communications companies. A consultation document on "Land Use Planning and Electromagnetic Fields", was issued in December jointly with the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions. Responses were requested by 19 February and are currently being considered.

Digital Signals

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the non-thermal effects of digital signals. [74974]

Ms Jowell: The Government obtain advice on restricting human exposure to electromagnetic fields from the National Radiological Protection Board (NRPB) who have published guidelines which apply to both digital and analogue signals. For radio frequencies, these are based on well-established thermal effects. Both the NRPB and

the International Commission on Non-Ionizing Radiation Protection agree that there is no clear evidence of adverse non-thermal health effects from either digital or analogue signals to which the public are normally exposed. Thus, the alleged non-thermal health effects cannot provide a basis for setting exposure restrictions, however they are the subject of current research.

Worcestershire (Grants)

Mr. Lock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the grants to be provided by his Department to Worcestershire County Council in 1999–2000; and if he will state the amount and purpose of each grant. [75250]

Mr. Hutton: The table shows the grants being made available for Worcestershire County Council for 1999–2000.

£

Description	*Amount*
Training Support Programme (main programme)	[1]267,657
Mental Health Grant (core and partnership programmes)	[2]768,085
Promoting Independence: Prevention Grant	[3]183,872
Promoting Independence: Partnership Grant	[3]2,315,000
Children's Social Services Grant	[3]494,000

[1] This represents allocations of 81 per cent. of the total grant. Local Authorities, including Worcestershire, will be required to bid for the remaining 19 per cent.
[2] This represents allocations of 79 per cent. of the total grant. The remainder will be bid for and allocated later.
[3] Subject to Parliament's approval

The allocations for the following grants have not yet been determined: AIDS/HIV Support Grant, Asylum-Seekers' Special Grant and Promoting Independence: Carers' Grant. Local Authorities will also be able to bid for the Alcohol and Drug Misusers Grant.

Norvic Clinic, Norwich

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 3 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *820*, on Norvic Clinic, when he expects to receive the report on the death of a patient in the clinic. [75522]

Mr. Hutton: The Coroner's Inquest into the death of a patient who died at the Norvic Clinic was opened in November 1998 and immediately adjourned pending a report by the Home Office Pathologist as to the cause of death. The Coroner's Office has not yet set a date for the Inquest to be reconvened.

Military District Hospitals

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which health authorities are *(a)* paid and *(b)* compensated by the Ministry of Defence in respect of military district hospital units at *(a)* Derriford, *(b)* Frimley and *(c)* Peterborough; and how much such payments were in each year for which figures are available. [75210]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 8 March 1999]:* It is assumed the hon. Member is referring to Ministry of Defence Hospital Units (MDHUs). These are integrated into National Health Service hospitals and the Defence Medical Services provide medical, nursing and other staffing. There are no direct financial transactions between the Ministry of Defence and health authorities in respect of Ministry of Defence Hospital Units.

Those National Health Service trusts which host MDHUs are paid for the treatment of military personnel, abated to reflect the contribution of military personnel to the treatment of civilians.

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the total capital expenditure for setting up military district hospital units; and from which Departmental budget this was paid. [75211]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 8 March 1999]:* It is assumed that the question refers to Ministry of Defence Hospital Units (MDHUs).

The Ministry of Defence contributes to the capital cost of establishing MDHUs. The amount they contribute is negotiated on a scheme by scheme basis. The Ministry of Defence contributed a total of £7.2 million to the capital cost of establishing MDHUs at Plymouth Hospitals National Health Service Trust, Frimley Park Hospital NHS Trust, and Peterborough Hospitals NHS Trust. The total capital expenditure spent on setting up the MDHUs is a local matter for the NHS trusts concerned. The information is not held centrally.

NHS Pension Scheme

Mr. Dobbin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the report by the Government Actuary on the investigation of the National Health Service pension scheme in England and Wales 1989 to 1994. [76011]

Mr. Denham: I have accepted the report and today placed copies in the Library.

The report concludes that it would be prudent to increase the rate of contribution required from employers to meet the scheme's future liabilities. The current rate is 4 per cent. of pensionable pay. The Government Actuary is content with our proposal that the rate should increase to 5 per cent. from 1 April 2000, with a further increase to 7 per cent. from 1 April 2001. Funding for these increases has been included in the Department's comprehensive spending review settlement.

The cost of index-linking National Health Service pensions is currently met by the Exchequer. As the report notes, I have agreed with the Chief Secretary that, in principle, the Scheme should assume its Pensions Increase liabilities from 1 April 1994 under a financial restructuring. Our officials are discussing the basis of such changes and I will inform the House when final agreement is reached. In the meantime, the Government Actuary considers that the proposed increases in employer contribution rates are consistent with the nature of the changes likely to be required under the restructuring.

Residential Allowance

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to conclude his review of the Residential Allowance. [75736]

Mr. Hutton: We are examining the possible impact on costs and service patterns of transferring the Residential Allowance to local authorities, and hope to consult local government and independent providers on detailed proposals as soon as we have formed a view on that.

National Carers Strategy

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to the oral statement of 8 February 1999, *Official Report*, column 27, concerning the national carers strategy, when the London Borough of Sutton will receive the £496,000. [75745]

Mr. Hutton: The new special grant for carers runs from 1999–2000 until 2001–02. The allocation will be paid to local authorities as part of their overall revenue allocation. Details of the allocation for 1999–2000 will be published shortly in a special grant report, which is subject to Parliamentary approval. It will show an allocation for Sutton of £71,327. This represents Sutton's share of the first year's grant of £20 million.

Long-term Care

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his oral statement of 1 March 1999, *Official Report*, columns 741–43, concerning the royal commission on long-term care, if he will set out the timetable he plans to follow for the public debate on the recommendations; and if he will make a statement. [75749]

Mr. Hutton: As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State outlined in his statement to Parliament, the royal commission has produced a very detailed report, in which the commissioners themselves call for an informed debate on their recommendations. We expect that debate, which has already begun, to be an on-going one and to inform decisions we take on the commission's recommendations.

Select Committee Reports

Mr. Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he or his Ministers have received any advance copy, draft or briefing upon the contents of any report of the Health Committee prior to its due publication date and time; and if he will make a statement. [75774]

Mr. Dobson: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to the hon. Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire) on 1 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *531*. There have been no instances of members of Select Committees giving me, or my ministerial colleagues, drafts of Select Committee reports, or of parts of reports including their conclusions, before publication. Nor to the best of my knowledge have there been any occasions on which members of Select Committees have given such material to civil servants or special advisers in my Department. This excludes embargoed copies of reports issued under House of Commons Standing Order 116.

NHS Orthodontists

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the average waiting time for *(a)* an initial appointment with and *(b)* treatment by an NHS orthodontist. [74906]

Mr. Denham: Most orthodontic treatment is undertaken in general dental practice and information is not held centrally on waiting times for such treatment. Provisional figures for 1997–98 show that the average waiting time in the orthodontic specialty for those treated in National Health Service hospitals in England was 72.3 days for the 2,266 elective admissions in that year. In addition, the following data was collected from NHS trusts in England for the quarter ended 31 December 1998 on the time waited for first outpatient appointments with an NHS consultant orthodontist following general practitioner written referral.

GP written referrals	*Percentage*
Within 4 weeks	13
Within 13 weeks	50
Within 26 weeks	80

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 10 March 1999

DEFENCE

Electronic Range Simulators (London)

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the future of electronic range simulators in London. [71662]

Mr. Doug Henderson: There are currently three electronic range simulators in Greater London; these are located in Wellington Barracks in Central London, Cavalry Barracks in Hounslow, and at RAF Uxbridge. In addition, the simulator at RAF St. Mawgan in Cornwall will move to RAF Northolt in September this year.

Defence Agencies

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many people are currently employed in the Army Base Storage and Distribution Agency; and what the figure was at the time of its establishment. [72806]

Mr. Doug Henderson *[holding answer 24 February 1999]:* This is a matter for the Chief Executive of the Army Base Storage and Distribution Agency. I have asked the Chief Executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Brigadier P. D. Foxton to Mr. Mike Hancock, dated 10 March 1999:

I refer to your question to the Secretary of State for Defence about the staff currently employed within the Army Base Storage and Distribution Agency (ABSDA) and when the Agency was established. As Chief Executive of ABSDA I am replying as this falls within my area of responsibility.

The numbers of staff currently employed within ABSDA are 3,666 civilians and 376 military. When the Agency was established in April 1995 the figures were 5,800 civilians and 600 military.

Ministry of Defence Police

Mr. Soames: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what changes he proposes in his Department's police manpower over the next five years. [73133]

Mr. Doug Henderson *[holding answer 25 February 1999]:* The policing needs of the Department are kept under review at all times. Certain options are currently being studied, and announcements will be made at the appropriate time. Police numbers will not, however, be reduced below the level needed to fulfil long-term commitments.

Army Technical Support Centre

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which targets the Army Technical Support Centre did not meet in 1997–98; and what monitoring he has undertaken for those targets in 1998–99. [72817]

Mr. Doug Henderson *[holding answer 25 February 1999]:* This is a matter for the Chief Executive of the Army Technical Support Centre. I have asked the Chief Executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Brigadier A. D. Ball to Mr. Mike Hancock, dated 10 March 1999:

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about the Key Target achievement for 1997–98 for the Army Technical Support Agency (ATSA), as this matter falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of the ATSA.

As reported in the Agency's Annual Report and Accounts, ATSA did not achieve 2 out of its 9 key Targets set for 1997–98. These were:

Key Target 1: Influence equipment design by attaining an involvement of 80% of MoD(PE) ILS projects wherein ATSA's contribution is equal or greater than one half man-year of effort.

Key Target 9: Respond to 100% of Equipment Failure Reports (or equivalent) submissions within 14 calendar days of receipt.

These Key Targets were both new for that year and were untested for achievability when set. They subsequently proved unreasonable within the Agency's operating resource constraints. The Agency's actual achievement and the business impact for each target was analysed by the Agency's Owner, the Director General of Equipment Support (Army) (DGES(A)). Despite non-achievement, the customers remained satisfied with the Agency's performance in both areas over the year. Both targets were more precisely defined and agreed by the Owner and customers so as to meet more effectively their needs through the following year.

Performance against the subsequent Key Targets for 1998–99 is monitored by the Chief Executive and the Executive Management Board of the Agency on a monthly basis. This performance is reported quarterly to the Agency's Owner and annually to Ministers through publication of the Next Steps Report and the Agency's Annual Report and Accounts. Key Target achievement is also considered by the National Audit Office during the annual submission of the Accounts for external audit.

As at 26th February 1999, the Agency is on target to achieve these redefined Key Targets for 1998–99.

I hope that you find this information helpful.

Dr. Asaf Durakovic

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what plans he has to introduce testing for British Gulf War veterans using protocols recommended by Dr. Asaf Durakovic; [74716]

(2) what discussions his Department has held with Dr. Asaf Durakovic; and if he will make a statement. [74715]

Mr. Doug Henderson: Dr. Asaf Durakovic is Clinical Professor of Nuclear Medicine at Georgetown University, Washington DC. He discussed his current work in general terms with MOD officials at a meeting last month, when he explained that, in conjunction with others, he is carrying out a study into uranium levels amongst veterans of the 1990–91 Gulf conflict, in which a small number of UK Gulf veterans are participating. Our understanding is that Dr. Durakovic and his colleagues plan to publish their findings later this year: hence we look forward to seeing full details of the methodology they are using and the results obtained in due course.

MOD continues to advise UK Gulf veterans who are concerned that their health has been adversely affected by service during the Gulf conflict, including by possible exposure to depleted uranium (DU), that they are entitled to seek a referral to the Gulf veterans' Medical Assessment Programme (MAP) for a full medical assessment. Any tests

which are considered clinically appropriate by the examining MAP physician, including those to detect the presence of uranium, will be arranged.

Auxiliary Oiler Contract

Mr. Davidson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if the Auxiliary Oiler contract is *(a)* on schedule and *(b)* proceeding to budget; and if he will make a statement; [75125]

(2) what *(a)* detailed and *(b)* major changes his Department has sought to make to the design of the ships under the Auxiliary Oiler contract; what was the cost to his Department of such changes and what measures have been taken to ensure that costs do not increase on the contract; and if he will make a statement; [75123]

(3) what stage the work on the Auxiliary Oiler contract has reached for *(a)* the first and *(b)* the second ship; and if he will make a statement. [75124]

Mr. Spellar: Progress continues on the design, material procurement and construction of the two ships. Construction of the central section of the first ship, comprising four major blocks, is nearing completion. For the second ship, fabrication of units for the first major block has recently started. A small number of detailed design changes have been agreed, costing the MOD around £0.5 million, mostly related to "Spend to Save" programmes to achieve reduction in through life operating costs. None of these changes affects the delivery schedule and the project remains within budget. The prime contractor is currently reviewing its overall work programme. The outcome of this review will be discussed with MOD officials shortly. It is not possible to state at this stage the extent to which this might result in delay to the deliver of the ships, although some slippage is anticipated.

Training Cycle

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) in what ways he will reduce the burden of training on individual army units in the training cycle; [75275]

(2) what plans he has to achieve a more balanced operational and training cycle for the United Kingdom's deployable divisions in the UK and in Germany. [75273]

Mr. Doug Henderson: As part of the Strategic Defence Review, we plan to introduce by 2001 a new formation readiness cycle in which each deployable brigade will carry out a three year cycle with formation-level training, commitments and other tasks. This new cycle will enable units to achieve required readiness states and to balance training requirements with operational commitments. It will be made possible by the reorganisation of army formations, including creation of a new mechanised brigade, into a more balanced force structure of two deployable divisions, one armoured and one mechanised, and will as a result help to reduce overstretch and the burden of training on individual units in the cycle.

Vectra Technologies

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what role Vectra Technologies has at the RN base Clyde; and what experience that organisation has in work on nuclear submarines. [75248]

Mr. Spellar: Vectra Technologies supply specialist safety, engineering and project management services. It is an approved Defence contractor, providing the Royal HM Naval Base Clyde with expert consultancy support in the production of safety cases for nuclear support services, in the development of nuclear safety management systems, and on management system audits.

Vectra Technologies has current experience in working for the MOD on nuclear submarines at HM Naval Base Devonport, where they have a contract for the deep cleaning of reactor compartments and for the provision of Health Physics Monitors. The company also provided Health Physics Supervisors and Monitors at the HM Naval Base Clyde between November 1992 and June 1997.

Kosovo

Mr. Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what further preparations are being made for a possible NATO force in Kosovo. [75693]

Mr. George Robertson: NATO remains ready to lead an international force in Kosovo to help implement an interim political agreement. Should such a force be required, it must be ready to go into Kosovo as quickly as possible after an agreement. This means that we must have forces ready in the region.

The Government announced on 22 February 1999, *Official Report*, column 3, the deployment of some 2,225 personnel of 4 Armoured Brigade Headquarters and the Lead Armoured Battle Group to Greece and Macedonia, and enablers for the headquarters of Allied Command Europe Rapid Reaction Corps (HQ ARRC). On 26 February, the Government announced the deployment of the majority of the remaining equipment and personnel of 4 Armoured Brigade Headquarters and the Lead Armoured Battle Group. Additional engineering and support assets are also being deployed to provide necessary engineering infrastructure support: their deployment was planned as part of the overall force, but has been brought forward to cover a longer than anticipated stay in Macedonia. NATO has now decided to deploy advance elements of the HQ ARRC to manage the build up of NATO forces in Macedonia. The UK is the framework nation for this headquarters.

Together with national support elements and the British contribution to HQ ARRC, I expect the total number of British personnel in Greece and Macedonia by mid-March to be some 4,800. This figure is consistent with the overall British contribution of some 8,000 which I announced to the House on 11 February 1999, *Official Report*, columns 565–66. It is a substantial number, and clearly signals our resolution to support the efforts of the international community.

Falkland Islands

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps his Department takes to ensure the compatibility of equipment held by the Falkland Islands defence force and that held by British troops stationed on the islands. [75641]

Mr. Doug Henderson: The Falkland Islands Defence Force, FIDF, is raised and funded independently by the Falkland Islands Government. We encourage the FIDF to

purchase compatible equipment but are not in a position to require that they do so. The compatibility of forces is fostered by combined UK/FIDF exercises.

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will review the decision to reduce Tristar flights to the Falklands. [75640]

Mr. Doug Henderson: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave on 9 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *120*, to my hon. Friend the Member for Chorley (Mr. Hoyle).

Royal Fleet Auxiliary

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what gapping of *(a)* officers and *(b)* other crew exists on each Royal Fleet Auxiliary vessel. [75556]

Mr. Doug Henderson: The following billets on RFA ships were gapped as at 5 March 1999.

	Gapped billets	
RFA vessel	*(a) Officers*	*(b) Other crew*
Argus	—	1
Bayleaf	2	2
Fort George	—	3
Fort Grange	1	—
Oakleaf	1	—
Olna	—	2
Olwen	5	4

The total gapped billets are therefore 21. This figure is subject to change on a daily basis.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the total number of deck officers employed by the Royal Fleet Auxiliary; and what is the planned complement. [75555]

Mr. Doug Henderson: The total number of seagoing Deck Officers currently employed by the Royal Fleet Auxiliary is 212. The planned seagoing complement, which includes a margin for leave and training, is 229. A further 22 Deck Officers are in complemented billets ashore.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Regional Television

Dr. George Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) what assessment he has made of the prospects for removing regional anomalies in television coverage following the introduction of digital terrestrial television services; [75464]

(2) if he will make a statement on Her Majesty's Government's policy on communities receiving appropriate regional television broadcasting; [75463]

(3) what estimate he has made of the cost of *(a)* using digital terrestrial television transmitters to remove regional anomalies in analogue broadcasting and *(b)* using digital capacity to simulcast different regional variations from a single transmitter in order to remove these anomalies. [75462]

Janet Anderson: Responsibility for the delivery of analogue and digital terrestrial television (DTT) services rests with the BBC and Independent Television Commission. The ITC recently received an encouraging report of a study it commissioned into the prospects for increasing DTT coverage. The ITC will soon commence planning for the next phase of DTT transmitter in conjunction with the BBC. The prime objective of this work is further to extend DTT coverage. The Government have made it clear to the ITC and BBC that delivery of regional services is an important element to consider in development of the digital transmission network. The studies are, at this stage, designed to look at general principles and will not focus on the costs of employing digital transmissions to remove regional anomalies.

London Tourist Board

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what was the total funding his Department gave to the London Tourist Board in *(a)* 1995, *(b)* 1996, *(c)* 1997, and *(d)* 1998. [75278]

Janet Anderson: The Government do not provide funding directly to the London Tourist Board. It does, however, directly fund the English Tourist Board which has for many years provided funding to the LTB and other regional tourist boards to complement the ETB's role in delivering national and regional programmes for tourism. Also, since 1996–97, a proportion of the Government's grant-in-aid to the BTA has been earmarked to help fund the LTB's Focus London campaign, which promotes London overseas as a major tourist destination and as the gateway to Britain. The funding that the LTB has received from the ETB and the BTA is as follows:

£

	ETB	*BTA*
1995–96	791,153	—
1996–97	546,110	650,000
1997–98	489,828	923,000
1998–99	447,310	1,500,000

Airport Capacity

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what discussions have taken place between his Department and the Department for the Environment, Transport and the Regions about incoming passenger and airport capacity in England. [75424]

Janet Anderson *[holding answer 8 March 1999]:* Discussions took place at official level last year on incoming passenger forecasts. My Department's new Tourism Strategy, "Tomorrow's Tourism", makes explicit reference to the Government's work on preparing a UK airports policy looking some 30 years ahead which will reflect our policies on sustainable development and integrated transport. My Department and DETR will maintain close liaison during the preparation of this document.

Tourism Strategy

Miss Geraldine Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, pursuant to his strategy for tourism, "Tomorrow's Tourism", what initiatives the

Government are taking to widen access to tourism for the 40 per cent. of the population who do not take a long holiday. [75697]

Janet Anderson: "Tomorrow's Tourism" makes it clear that, if we are to widen access to tourism, we must first find out from those who do not take holidays what prevents them from doing so. Research into this is currently being carried out by the English Tourist Board. This will help to identify the market potential as well as any special needs which are not currently being met, and the level of training needed, to make sure that tourism businesses are able to cater for all customers.

Select Committee Reports

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if *(a)* he, *(b)* civil servants in his Department or *(c)* special advisers in his Department have (i) had sight of drafts of select committee reports, in whole or in part, or (ii) been informed of conclusions of select committee reports prior to their publication by the select committees. [75877]

Mr. Chris Smith: I refer the right hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for East Surrey (Mr. Ainsworth) on 9 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *195*.

PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

Select Committee Reports

Mr. Maclean: To ask the President of the Council if *(a)* she, *(b)* civil servants in her Department or *(c)* special advisers in her Department have (i) had sight of drafts of select committee reports, in whole or in part, or (ii) been informed of conclusions of select committee reports prior to their publication by the select committees. [75872]

Mrs. Beckett: I refer the right hon. Member to the answer given by the Prime Minister to the hon. Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire) on 1 March 1999, *Official Report*, column 531. There have been no instances of members of departmental select committees giving me or the Parliamentary Secretary drafts of select committee reports, or of parts of reports including their conclusions, before publication. Nor, to the best of my knowledge, have there been any occasions on which members of departmental select committees have given such material to civil servants or special advisers in my Department. This excludes embargoed copies of reports issued under House of Commons Standing Orders.

However, as chair of the Modernisation Committee, I am responsible for drawing up its draft reports and these are also seen by my immediate advisers, that is, members of my private office and one or two officials who advise me on parliamentary matters and one of my special advisers. As a member of the House of Commons Commission, I also see some of the papers of the Domestic Committees; these are also seen by my immediate advisers.

As chair of the Cabinet Committee on future legislation, I have also been consulted about the possibility of legislation to enact the recommendations of the Joint Committee on Parliamentary Privilege.

Millennium Compliance

Miss McIntosh: To ask the President of the Council when she will publish the Government's recent quarterly report on millennium computer compliance; and if she will arrange to meet transport providers to ensure that insurance cover is available for travel on 1 January 2000. [75679]

Mrs. Beckett: I will be announcing the results of the latest quarterly review shortly.

Responsibility for the transport and insurance industries rests with the Department of the Environment, Transport and Regions and Treasury respectively. I therefore have no plans to meet transport providers, nor have such providers sought a meeting.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Education Business Partnerships

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) what support *(a)* TECs and *(b)* his Department give to education business partnerships; [75616]

(2) what plans he has for education business partnerships to be supported in the future by *(a)* TECs and *(b)* his Department. [75617]

Mr. Blunkett: My Department supports a range of programmes which promote education business links—principally, work experience for pupils mentoring programmes and teacher placements to industry. Support for these programmes in the year ahead, made available through Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs), will be £13.5 million. My Department also provides £145,000 support per year to the National Education Business Partnership Network.

The support that we make available to Education Business Partnerships through TECs has been an important element in the TEC Review which has been under way. I am today announcing some changes to the operation of TECs, arising from the first phase of the TEC Review. These will strengthen partnership and accountability, improve the quality of work-based training and streamline contracting arrangements.

In the light of the TEC Review, the responses we have received to the "Learning Age" Green Paper, the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) Quinquennial Review report—which has been published today and copies of which have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses—and the setting-up of the new local learning partnerships, I propose now to undertake a wider assessment of how we can best meet the learning and skills challenge. We shall also take into account the forthcoming Moser Report on basic skills, the University for Industry Corporate Plan, the further report of the Skills Task Force and the Social Exclusion Unit report on disaffected 16 to 18-year-olds.

Drawing on the TEC Review, we will want to examine the local and national arrangements relating to the delivery of lifelong learning, work-force development and skills, excluding higher education. This will include consideration of new opportunities for business involvement in meeting the skills challenge.

I have today written inviting all those concerned with this key part of the learning and skills agenda to contribute to this process, following which I intend to publish specific proposals in the summer. I will, of course, work closely with my right hon. Friends the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry—as he takes forward his proposal to establish the new Small Business Service—and the Deputy Prime Minister on the role of Regional Development Agencies.

Our aim is to ensure that we have the skills required for the new century in which knowledge, application and our capacity to learn will be crucial both to individual employability and economic success. As we set out in the "Learning Age" Green Paper, our goals are to increase the number of people engaged in learning; promote excellence and quality in its delivery; ensure coherent provision of further education and work-based training; provide support for all young people in making the transition from school to further learning or employment; involve employers in the promotion of lifelong learning; ensure that provision best meets the economy's needs for skills, creativity and innovation; make the most effective use of resources; and meet our National Learning Targets.

School Transport

Mr. Sawford: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will review the current statutory three-mile requirement for the provision of free school transport. [74820]

Mr. Charles Clarke: The School Travel Advisory Group, formed with the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, the Department of Health and other interested parties, together with officials in my Department, is already considering the legislation governing home-to-school transport, including the three-mile walking distance, and will offer advice in due course.

Education Budgets

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what in the last five years for which information is available was the expenditure per pupil in full-time education in the *(a)* whole education budget, *(b)* general schools budget, *(c)* potential budget and *(d)* aggregate schools budget. [74977]

Ms Estelle Morris: The following table gives, for schools in England for the financial years 1994–95 to 1998–99 inclusive, the averages of the *(a)* General Schools Budget, *(b)* Potential Schools Budget and *(c)* Aggregated Schools Budget, per pupil. Information on the whole education budget, per pupil, is not held centrally.

LEA-Maintained schools in England
Average per pupil

£

	ASB	*PSB*	*GSB*
1998–99	1,893	2,090	2,563
1997–98	1,839	2,028	2,471
1996–97	1,814	2,005	2,453
1995–96	1,752	1,948	2,398
1994–95	1,730	1,990	2,399

IT Initiatives

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how much money has been made available for information technology initiatives since May 1997 for *(a)* initial teacher training and *(b)* schools. [75021]

Mr. Charles Clarke: In respect of initial teacher training (ITT), the Teacher Training Agency has allocated just over £6 million for measures to improve the use of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) across the curriculum. This includes £1 million to support implementation of Qualified Teacher Status standards and the ITT National Curriculum for primary English and mathematics. During this period, support for £666 million of ICT-related initiatives in schools in England has been announced as part of a £1 billion programme to implement the National Grid for Learning.

Higher Education (Durham)

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was the amount of funding per student in higher education in Durham in the last five years. [74976]

Mr. Mudie: The following tables show, for each of the last five years, public funding per student at the University of Durham from recurrent grant from the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) and tuition fees paid from public funds.

Consistent data for the five years concerned are not available. For the years 1994–95 to 1996–97, the figures are based on data from the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) and the unit of funding is in respect of full-time undergraduate and postgraduate students combined. For 1997–98 to 1998–99, the figures are based on data from the HEFCE and the unit of funding is in respect of full-time undergraduate students.

Table 1

Academic year	*Public funds* [1] *(£ million)*	*Students* [2] *(Thousand)*	*Funding per student (£)*
1994–95	40.7	7.9	5,150
1995–96	42.4	8.0	5,300
1996–97	44.0	8.4	5,240

[1] HESA 'Resources of Higher Education Institutions', published in June 1996, June 1997 and May 1998

[2] HESA 'Students in Higher Education Institution', published May 1996, July 1997 and June 1998

Table 2

Academic year	*Public funds* [1] *(£ million)*	*Students* [2] *(Thousand)*	*Funding per student (£)*
1997–98	42.4	7.9	5,370
1998–99	45.1	8.1	5,570

[1] HEFCE recurrent funding circulars in February 1997 and March 1998

[2] Student numbers are those within the University's maximum aggregate student number (MaSN)—predominantly full-time undergraduate students

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many mature students entered higher education in Durham in each year since 1995. [74978]

Mr. Mudie: The information is given in the following table.

Mature [1] entrants to higher education courses at the University of Durham

Year	*Mature entrants [2]*
1995–96	1,860
1996–97	1,310
1997–98	1,470

[1] Mature students are defined as postgraduates aged 25 and over and undergraduates aged 21 and over.
[2] The numbers are census counts of enrolments, as at 1 December, onto the first year of both full-time and part-time undergraduate and postgraduate HE courses.
Note:
Provisional higher education entrant figures for 1998–99 will be available in April 1999.

Classroom Assistants

Mr. Syms: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what progress the Government have made against their target of *(a)* placing 20,000 classroom assistants in schools by 2001–02 and *(b)* placing 2,000 more classroom assistants in schools by April 1999. [74737]

Ms Estelle Morris: As part of the National Literacy Strategy, we have allocated £22 million to the Additional Literacy Support programme in 1999–2000. This will fund the deployment of about 2,000 full-time (or equivalent) classroom assistants. This is the first step in meeting our overall figure of an additional 20,000 full-time posts (or equivalent) by 2002. Further funding will be made available to create these additional posts in the years 2000–2001 and 2001–2002.

Local Government Expenditure (Schools)

Mr. Syms: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how much of the allocation to local government in England earmarked for schools in July 1997 was received by schools. [74734]

Ms Estelle Morris: Of the unhypothecated £1,017 million education SSA increase for 1998–99, which derived from the July 1997 announcement, £916 million has been reflected in LEAs General Schools Budgets (excluding capital items and including Annual Maintenance Grant for comparability).

FE Colleges

Ms Kelly: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many pay awards have been made by further education colleges for *(a)* 1997–98, *(b)* 1998–99 and *(c)* 1999–2000 in the categories *(a)* 0 per cent., *(b)* greater than 0 per cent. but less than 1 per cent., *(c)* greater than 1 per cent. but less than 2 per cent., *(d)* greater than 2 per cent. but less than 4 per cent., *(e)* greater than 4 per cent. but less than 6 per cent. and *(f)* 6 per cent. or more. [74970]

Mr. Mudie: This information is not held centrally.

Ms Kelly: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many colleges of further education are in financial health category (i) A, (ii) B and (iii) C in *(a)* the North West and *(b)* England. [74969]

Mr. Mudie: The following table shows the categories of colleges' financial health:

	North West	*England*
A	32 (51%)	204 (47%)
B	26 (41%)	146 (34%)
C	5 (8%)	85 (19%)
Total	63	435

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment on how many occasions he has met representatives of BT to discuss internet connections to further education colleges. [75447]

Mr. Mudie: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has met the BT Chairman for discussion on a range of issues. Other Ministers have also had contact with representatives of the company. These meetings have typically covered a range of issues, rather than specifically relating to internet connections to FE colleges.

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) what is the average *(a)* capital and *(b)* running cost per link to the internet for further education colleges; and if he will list the range of such costs; [75444]

(2) what steps he is taking to monitor the terms under which free connections to the internet for further education colleges are being made; and if he will make a statement; [75445]

(3) *(a)* how many and *(b)* what percentage of further education colleges have been connected to the internet free of installation charge to date. [75448]

Mr. Mudie: Information relating specifically to the terms and arrangements for FE colleges access to the internet is not held centrally.

Discretionary Rate Relief

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what estimate his Department has made of the total cost up to the end of the current financial year to schools of the removal of discretionary rate relief. [74722]

Ms Estelle Morris: None. There has been no change in the position that local authorities do not have the power to grant discretionary rate relief to schools of which they are themselves the ultimate occupier. Education authorities are responsible for ensuring that their own schools are in a position to meet their financial obligations.

Special Educational Needs

Mr. Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what percentage of youngsters currently attending special schools will be sent to mainstream schools as a result of the Programme of Action for meeting special educational needs. [74815]

Ms Estelle Morris: We are not setting targets for the number of pupils with special educational needs that will in future be accommodated in mainstream schools. We have made it clear to local education authorities that, in line with their duties under the Education Act 1996 to arrange suitable provision for pupils with special educational needs, they should continue to give due weight to the views of parents—both where parents wish their children to attend special schools and where they wish them to attend mainstream schools. We expect that in future increasing numbers of mainstream schools will be able to offer high-quality provision to pupils with special educational needs.

Mr. Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many representations he has received from parents of pupils attending special schools in Essex in respect of the Programme of Action for meeting special educational needs; and how many parents supported the policy of inclusion within mainstream schools. [74813]

Ms Estelle Morris: Responses from parents both to the Green Paper "Excellence for all" and the subsequent Programme of Action were not recorded on a territorial basis.

Mr. Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what representations he has received from Essex Local Education Authority in respect of the Programme of Action for meeting special educational needs; and what proposals he has received from Essex LEA to shut special schools. [74812]

Ms Estelle Morris: We have received no representations from Essex LEA in respect of the Programme of Action. Essex has made no formal proposal to the Department to close a special school.

Youth Community Action Plan

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is his Department's policy concerning Article 1.3 of the amended proposals establishing a community action plan for youth (COM(98)695–98/0197(COD) as regards the development of a European education area; and what is his voting position thereon. [75082]

Mr. Mudie: The UK, with a number of other EU Member States, takes the view that the basis of the concept of a European education area in European Community law is doubtful. We would therefore oppose the use of this formulation on Community legislation.

Literacy Summer Schools

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many literacy summer schools have been established since 1 May 1997; how many children have attended; and what proportion of all school children they represent. [74773]

Ms Estelle Morris: Since 1 May 1997, the Government have made available funding to establish 607 literacy summer schools, catering for over 18,000 pupils. This summer, the literacy summer schools programme will run in over 900 schools with 27,000 pupils in attendance. This represents nearly 5 per cent. of the overall Year 6 cohort of pupils attending primary schools in England.

Advanced Skills Teachers

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many advanced skills teachers are currently in post. [74783]

Ms Estelle Morris: The number of teachers who had been appointed to Advanced Skills Teacher posts by 22 February 1999 was 112.

Parent Governors

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many parent governors of schools there were in each of the last 10 years. [74767]

Ms Estelle Morris: This information is not collected by the Department.

Teacher Training

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list the actions he has taken to improve teacher training; indicating the cost involved; and if he will make a statement. [74784]

Ms Estelle Morris: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has set new requirements to improve initial teacher training (ITT). These represent a major step change in the expectations and requirements of new teachers and include:

(a) new high standards for the award of Qualified Teacher Status introduced for all trainees graduating from May 1998. These ensure that all new teachers have the necessary knowledge, understanding and skills to do their job effectively;

(b) national curricula in primary English and mathematics and the effective use of information and communication technology (ICT) in subject teaching for all trainees introduced from September 1998;

(c) national curricula in secondary English and mathematics and science for all phases will come into force in September 1999;

(d) an induction year was introduced by the Teaching and Higher Education 1998 Act. This will give all new teachers, from September 1999, structured support and training to consolidate and extend the skills they gained in initial training. Teachers who fall short of the standards will not be able to be confirmed as members of the profession.

The Teacher Training Agency (TTA) has been asked to support the introduction of the new requirements and has been funded to undertake a range of measures, which include:

(a) development of exemplification materials to assist in the implementation of the national curriculum for ICT in all subjects and phases, to ensure accurate assessment of trainees against the standards (including video and CD ROM formats) and the requirements in the standards concerned with teaching pupils from ethnic minority groups;

(b) assisting providers to improve the quality of their provision. The Agency is in the process of producing material to assist providers in auditing trainees' subject knowledge in English and mathematics and to improve the partnerships between higher education institutions and schools;

(c) mounting conferences for providers to brief them on the new requirements and to assist all new providers in developing course proposals;

(d) visiting all ITT providers with unsatisfactory or borderline Ofsted report grades and assists them to develop a programme for improvement;

(e) assisting in the development of trainees ICT skills through the provision of intensive two day ICT courses for all those trainees who have to follow the new curriculum need additional help.

To support the implementation of the new curriculum for the use of ICT across the curricula the TTA to date has awarded ITT providers with additional funding totalling just over £6 million. A further £1 million was awarded for the implementation of the primary English and maths curricula. Other costs of developing the national curricula and exemplification materials fall within TTA's budget and are not disaggregated.

Our Green Paper on the modernisation of the teaching profession, "Teachers: meeting the challenge of change", published in December, sets out major new proposals to strengthen teacher training further as part of modernising the profession.

We are also giving priority to skilling serving teachers and have backed this with some £500 million in the Standards Fund this year, the majority of which supports in-service training.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Sudan

8. **Mr. P[illegible]r:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the programme of British assistance to Sudan. [73836]

Clare Short: We were a major donor in the 1998 crisis. There will be substantial humanitarian needs in Sudan this year and we are prepared to continue to help. The UN World Food Programme (WFP) currently holds enough food stocks until at least early summer. I am therefore authorising an initial pledge for 1999 of £4 million for humanitarian assistance which will be available to international NGOs and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). We shall monitor the situation closely in the coming months and, as needs become clearer, we shall respond further as required. We shall continue our dialogue with the UN on improving the effectiveness and efficiency of Operation Lifeline Sudan and will press for progress on the peace process which remains crucial to resolving Sudan's long term problems.

Chernobyl

10. **Helen Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what aid her Department is currently providing to assist victims of the Chernobyl disaster. [73838]

Mr. Foulkes: We provide assistance in response to the Chernobyl disaster through the European Community and through DFID's bilateral aid programme. In total, the Government have provided over £20 million since 1997. The bulk of our support has been for the re-building of the sarcophagus, but we also give modest direct support to Chernobyl charities, especially those helping children.

Debt Relief

12. **Mr. Burstow:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps her Department is taking to promote debt relief initiatives for highly indebted poor countries; and if she will make a statement. [73842]

Clare Short: The Chancellor and I have recently proposed faster and deeper debt relief for poor countries. We are working for agreement to cancel $50 billion of debt, and for the money saved from debt repayments to be used to reduce poverty. We are contributing to the review of the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative. The review is examining how the initiative needs to be redesigned, to ensure that the countries can escape from the burden of debt which prevents them from tackling poverty effectively.

Palestinian Authority

13. **Mrs. Ellman:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the effectiveness of aid in contributing to the development of *(a)* economic opportunity and *(b)* civil society in the Palestinian Authority. [73843]

Mr. Foulkes: Assistance from donors, including the Department for International Development, has been crucial in attempting to foster development in the West Bank and Gaza, although the weakness of the peace process and reduction in opportunities to work in Israel have led to a growth in poverty. We are working to help the Palestinian Authority to build a legal and institutional framework in which the private sector and civil society can flourish. But greater transparency and accountability are required, and economic opportunity remains constrained by severely restricted access to outside markets.

Tanzania

14. **Mrs. Gilroy:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what discussions she held on development during her visit to Tanzania in 1998. [73844]

Clare Short: I visited Tanzania, one of the poorest countries in the world, in August 1998. I discussed a range of development issues with the President, government and opposition politicians, and private sector and civil society representatives. I outlined Britain's policy for international development, which matches closely with Tanzania's own poverty eradication strategy. We discussed the urgent need to tackle corruption and to reform the health and education sectors.

British Council

16. **Mrs. Virginia Bottomley:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development when she last met the chairman of the British Council to discuss collaboration on development projects. [73846]

Clare Short: I met Baroness Kennedy, the Chairperson of the British Council, on 26 January. We agreed that, although the Council and my Department have different objectives, there is room for collaboration on some activities.

Good Governance

17. **Mr. Hammond:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the linkage of good Government criteria to the provision of aid by her Department. [73847]

Clare Short: Good governance, which brings effective, equitable and transparent administration and which works to secure all human rights for all, is essential for sustainable development. It is not an optional extra. We support the reduction of poverty and this includes effective and accountable government.

Kosovo and Montenegro

18. **Mr. Coaker:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what is the current humanitarian situation in Kosovo and Montenegro; and if she will make a statement. [73848]

Clare Short: There has been a continuation of violence in Kosovo, leading to continuing displacement of civilians. In recent weeks, an estimated 9,000 people have been driven from their homes. Fighting north of Pristina has also prevented the return of 15,000 people displaced from around 17 villages.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, (UNHCR) in consultation with NGO partners, believe the number of displaced people inside Kosovo stands at about 210,000, while there are an estimated 25,000 displaced in Montenegro.

UNHCR report that assistance has continued almost uninterrupted throughout the month of February despite the violence and severe weather, and that they have succeeded in gaining access to those newly displaced, (except where fighting is actually occurring). UNHCR has coordinated and led three multi-agency convoys every day, six days per week. DFID continue to keep in close touch with the main humanitarian agencies.

Bananas (Windward Isles)

19. **Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the implementation of the banana recovery plan in the Windward Isles. [73849]

Clare Short: With the Department for International Development's (DFID) active support, the European Commission have committed substantial funds, including STABEX, together with a technical assistance team, to support the Windward Islands banana industry Production Recovery Plan. However, more still needs to be done by the industry—in terms of restructuring, the planning and management of production, and the implementation of the certified grower programme—in order to establish itself on a commercially viable basis. Both DFID and the Commission continue to encourage and support this essential process.

Labour Standards (Developing Countries)

20. **Dr. Tony Wright:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment she has made of the role of company codes of conduct in protecting labour standards in developing countries. [73850]

Clare Short: Codes of conduct have considerable potential as a tool for protecting labour rights in developing countries. Last year, my department produced a widely circulated report entitled "A review of UK company codes of conduct". The report contained an analysis of the content of UK company's voluntary codes and showed that codes of conduct are being used by a small, but growing, number of UK companies which source their products from overseas. The best of these codes included specific references to the International Labour Office's (ILO) core labour conventions. There is less consensus on the best means of monitoring the effectiveness of codes. We are working to find ways of implementing and monitoring codes in order to assist UK companies work with their suppliers to improve the conditions of workers in poorer countries. My Department is also supporting the Ethical Trading Initiative whose members—companies, development NGOs and Trades Unions—are piloting best practice through monitoring the ETI code of conduct.

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what support the Government are giving to initiatives to raise public awareness in developing countries on codes of conduct on labour standards. [75234]

Clare Short: The Department for International Development has supported the following initiatives to assist in raising awareness of codes of conduct on labour standards in developing countries:

The Ethical Trading Initiative (ETI) which provides practical support to efforts to develop codes of conduct and promote positive engagement between UK importers and their developing country suppliers to improve workers conditions (£530,400 over 3 years).

ETI is currently carrying out three pilot projects in the horticulture industry in Zimbabwe; the wine industry in South Africa and the clothing industry in China. The pilot projects are designed to identify ways that companies can improve labour standards amongst their suppliers by addressing the ETI code of conduct. This involves building capacity locally to ensure that there is an understanding of how the ETI code of conduct works.

ETI has also conducted a consultation exercise of developing country based NGOs for their views on codes of conduct (£25,000).

Support to a British based NGO—Women Working World wide—to carry out work in Asia (Bangladesh, Philippines, Indonesia, India and Sri Lanka) and Central America (Nicaragua, Honduras, Dominican Republic and Guatemala) to inform women workers about company's codes of conduct as a part of a workers' awareness and education campaign. (£44,000).

GDP–Aid Ratio

21. **Rev. Martin Smyth:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development when she estimates that the internationally agreed target for a proportion of gross domestic product to be spent on humanitarian aid will be reached by the United Kingdom. [73851]

Clare Short: As we pledged, we have reversed the decline in development spending which continued throughout the life of the previous administration. The oda/GNP ratio for 1997 was 0.26 per cent. The Comprehensive Spending Review announced a significant increase of £1.6 billion in development spending which will increase the oda/GNP ratio to an estimated 0.30 per cent. by 2001. We have not set a target date for reaching 0.7 per cent.

Lomé Agreement

22. **Mr. Hope:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what discussions she has had with EU and ACP ministers on the successor to the current Lomé agreement. [73852]

Clare Short: I met Commissioner Pinheiro and ACP and EU Ministers in Dakar on 8–9 February for the first substantive Ministerial discussion of successor arrangements to the Lomé Convention. The meeting made good progress. There was a consensus on the main objectives of the next Convention and, although the ACP were not ready to accept the inclusion of good governance as a new essential element, they agreed to work on reaching a common definition of the concept. There was a large measure of agreement on development strategies, providing support for private sector development and the need to rationalise the existing instruments and improve aid management procedures. Progress was more limited on the future of support for short term fluctuations in earnings from basic products. The EU proposed updated, more flexible and more effective arrangements for helping countries where economic and wider reforms were jeopardised from such fluctuations, but the ACP continue to favour the retention of current arrangements. I participated in the discussion on trade and economic co-operation, the area of greatest divergence between the ACP and EU positions. I put the case for alternatives to the Commission's favoured regional free trade option. This was taken up by the ACP and reflected in the final report.

St. Helena

23. **Mrs. Ann Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what plans she has to visit the Island of St. Helena to discuss ways of improving the standard of living of islanders. [73853]

Clare Short: I have no plans to visit St. Helena. The framework for the island's development over the period 1997/98–1999/2000, and the level and scope of HMG development assistance, is set out in the Country Policy Plan agreed by HMG and the St. Helena Government in 1997. A new CPP, for the period 2000/01–2003/04, is scheduled to be agreed by the end of 1999.

Caribbean

24. **Mr. Lansley:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what plans she has to review the assistance programme for Caribbean states. [73854]

Clare Short: Documents outlining our strategies for the next three years will be published in the course of this year and early next year. The strategies are being prepared in consultation with a wide variety of local and other stakeholders.

Zimbabwe

25. **Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on aid to Zimbabwe. [73855]

Clare Short: A Country Strategy Paper for Zimbabwe will be published shortly. The strategy will focus on reducing poverty in Zimbabwe in line with the objectives of the White Paper "Eliminating World Poverty". Copies—like all our Country Strategies—will be placed in the Library of the House.

Conflict Reduction

26. **Jackie Ballard:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on her Department's conflict-reduction strategy. [73856]

Clare Short: My Department's conflict reduction strategy is set out in our Policy Statement on Conflict Reduction and Humanitarian Assistance. A copy is available in the Library of the House.

Private Investment

27. **Mr. Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the contribution made by private investment in supporting overseas aid projects. [73857]

Clare Short: Private investment can bring substantial economic benefits to developing countries; partnership with business can therefore support development assistance projects overseas, and help promote the achievement of the International Development Goals. We have established a new Business Partnership Unit in the Department and have instituted new arrangements to consult the private sector when drawing up our country strategies.

Humanitarian Emergencies

28. **Mr. Jim Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps her Department is taking to improve the effectiveness of its response to humanitarian emergencies; and if she will make a statement. [73858]

Clare Short: We have recently published a Policy Statement outlining our strategies for conflict reduction and humanitarian assistance. Copies have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Following a disaster, most lives are saved by immediate local effort. We are giving priority to building up the disaster response capacity of communities and institutions in disaster-prone poor countries. We also look first to agencies that are well established in the country and have the local knowledge and expertise to deliver assistance most quickly and effectively. It is important that we not only save lives and relieve suffering following a humanitarian crisis but also reduce risks and vulnerability to future crises. Therefore, we are assisting disaster-prone countries to include risk reduction, disaster management and mitigation in their development planning process and supporting community initiatives to reduce their vulnerability to risks. This includes analysing common hazards and their impact on poor people, and assessing the effect of recurrent crises on achieving the targets of sustainable international development.

Much of my Department's humanitarian response is channelled through the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, the United Nations humanitarian agencies and non-governmental organisations. We are working closely with these agencies to strengthen international systems for dealing with humanitarian crises, particularly to improve response capacity and accountability, and the development of common standards for technical performance and reporting. We are also

promoting better co-ordination within the European Union, especially through the European Community Humanitarian Office.

Debt Targets

Mr. Cash: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the target set of reducing the debts of the poorest countries by £50 billion. [73920]

Clare Short: The Government are committed to the international development targets, which include halving the proportion of people living in absolute poverty by 2015. For the poorest, most indebted countries, who are similarly committed to poverty eradication, faster and deeper debt relief is required to enable them to invest sufficient resources in poverty reduction programmes to meet these targets. The Chancellor of the Exchequer and I have therefore challenged the international community to increase debt relief and increase aid flows to poor countries. Our objective over the coming months is to get agreement to cancel $50 billion of debt and to increase development assistance to $60 billion by the year 2000.

Ethical Trading

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what action the Government are taking to raise public awareness of ethically and fairly traded products. [75233]

Clare Short: Both I and my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State have spoken at a number of public events aimed at raising awareness of ethical and fair trade. DFID also supports the Ethical Trading Initiative, whose work includes promoting positive engagement between UK importers and developing country suppliers. We are also supporting, through our development awareness funding, a range of activities which are designed to raise public awareness in this area.

Select Committee Reports

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if *(a)* she, *(b)* civil servants in her Department or *(c)* special advisers in her Department have (i) had sight of drafts of select committee reports, in whole or in part, or (ii) been informed of conclusions of select committee reports prior to their publication by the select committees. [75880]

Clare Short: I refer the right hon. Member to the answer given by the Prime Minister to the hon. Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire) on 1 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *531*. There have been no instances of members of select committees giving me, or my ministerial colleagues, drafts or select committee reports, or of parts of reports including their conclusions, before publication. Nor, to the best of my knowledge have there been any occasions on which members of select committees have given such material to civil servants or special advisers in my Department. This excludes embargoed copies of reports issued under House of Commons Standing Orders.

Colombia (Sniffer Dogs)

Mr. Alan Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what discussions she has had with colleagues at the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food regarding the immunisation of sniffer dogs sent by her Department to assist in rescue work in Colombia. [75230]

Clare Short: My Department did not send any dogs to Colombia following the recent earthquake and therefore there have been no discussions with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food about immunisation.

Biotechnology Companies

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list the biotechnology companies which have placed staff *(a)* on secondment and *(b)* on placement within her Department since 1 May 1997. [74843]

Clare Short *[holding answer 5 March 1999]:* No biotechnology companies have placed staff *(a)* on secondment or *(b)* on placement within my Department since 1 May 1997.

PHARE Programme

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development when she last met her colleagues from other member states of the European Union to discuss matters relating to the PHARE Programme. [73840]

Mr. Foulkes: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State regularly meets with colleagues at the Development Council, the last of which was held on 30 November 1998. PHARE was not specifically on the agenda. She has regular informal contact with her counterparts regarding a range of issues including the PHARE programme.

PRIME MINISTER

Single Currency

Q14. **Mr. Sayeed:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will publish a White Paper setting out the constitutional, economic and political implications of the UK joining the European single currency. [73873]

The Prime Minister: The Government's policy on the single currency was set out by the Chancellor of the Exchequer in his statement to the House of Commons on 27 October 1997, *Official Report*, columns 583–88.

Secondary School Funding

Q19. **Mr. Fabricant:** To ask the Prime Minister what is the central Government funding per pupil at secondary schools in *(a)* Staffordshire and *(b)* Hertfordshire in 1999–2000; and if he will make a statement. [73878]

The Prime Minister: The secondary standard spending assessment per pupil allocation for 1999–2000 is £2,759 for Staffordshire and £3,023 for Hertfordshire.

We inherited the current system for calculating Standard Spending Assessments from the previous Government. The Government will be carrying out research over the next few years as part of a review of the way different Local Education Authorities are funded.

The aim of this review will be to secure a fairer way of allocating resources from central Government to local authorities.

Engagements

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Wednesday 10 March. [73871]

The Prime Minister: This morning I had meetings with Ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House I will have further such meetings later today.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Turkey

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last visited Turkey; and if he will list the people he met on his visit. [74623]

Ms Quin: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State last visited Turkey on 19 May 1998. During his visit he met the President of the Turkish Republic, Mr. Suleyman Demirel, the Prime Minister, Mr. Mesut Yilmaz, the Foreign Minister, Mr. Ismail Cem, and the President of the Human Rights Association, Mr. Akin Birdal, who was recovering in hospital.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has for discussions with the Turkish Government about forthcoming elections in Turkey; and if he will encourage Turkey to invite foreign election observers to witness the elections; and if he will make a statement. [74632]

Ms Quin: Our Embassy in Ankara is closely following the forthcoming elections in Turkey.

On the question of election monitoring, we encourage all OSCE (Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe) Participating States to acknowledge their standing commitment to election observation as expressed in the OSCE Copenhagen Document of 1990.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Government of Turkey on proceedings against Abdullah Öcalan; and if he will make a statement. [74627]

Ms Quin: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Edmonton (Mr. Love) on 3 March 1999, *Official Report*, column 797.

Dubai

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what response he has had from the Government of Dubai to his note verbale of 10 November 1998. [74625]

Mr. Fatchett: The Government of Dubai have not replied to our Note Verbale of 10 November 1998 requesting Mr. Atkinson's release on the basis of the decision of the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention. His trial concluded on 13 December 1998 and he was convicted and sentenced to imprisonment.

European Communities Budget

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will place copies of the audits of budget line A-3021 of the European Communities in the Library; and if he will list the sponsors and referees who supported the successful applicants for that budget line. [75079]

Ms Quin: The Report on Beneficiaries of Community Grants 1997 was placed in the Library last year. The 1998 Report will be placed in the Library when it is published.

Decisions on spending under this budget line are made by the Commission alone.

EU Fifth Framework Programme

Dr. Starkey: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if there has been a change in the view of EU partners on Israel's participation in the Fifth Framework Programme since his answer of 28 January 1999, *Official Report*, column *395*. [75181]

Ms Quin: The UK has always supported Israel's Association with the Fifth Framework Programme in principle. It became clear recently that EU partners were also moving towards a positive view, and we were able to see this agreed at the General Affairs Council on 22 February.

Dr. Starkey: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when the EU will decide on Israel's participation in the Fifth Framework Programme of research. [75165]

Ms Quin: The EU General Affairs Council on 22 February agreed to Israel's participation in the Fifth Framework Programme of Research.

Dr. Starkey: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what criteria are used by the EU to decide on the participation of non-EU member states in the Fifth Framework Programme. [75167]

Ms Quin: There are no generalised criteria. Proposals for third country association with the Fifth Framework Programme (FP5), and for project-by-project participation by researchers from third countries, are assessed on their individual merits in the context of the EU's interests.

Dr. Starkey: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs to what extent *(a)* each of the 10 Central and Eastern European countries, *(b)* Cyprus, *(c)* Israel and *(d)* Switzerland meet the criteria for participation in the Fifth Framework Programme. [75166]

Ms Quin: These countries are at various stages in the process of negotiation for full participation as countries associated with the Fifth Framework Programme (FP5). There are no generalised criteria: each case is assessed on its merits in the context of the EU's interests.

Arms Sales

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the countries to which *(a)* the British Government and *(b)* United Kingdom companies over the last five years have sold arms, the type of weapons sold and the total value of sales. [75516]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: The forthcoming Annual Report on Strategic Exports will list by country of destination the numbers of export licences issued by this Government between 2 May and 31 December 1997 in each equipment category and give details of the military equipment for which licences have been granted. It will also set out the value of defence exports to each country in 1997. This information will also be given in future reports.

As regards information on export licensing decisions taken by the previous administration, it was normal practice for such statistics to be placed periodically in the Library of the House. However, as the then Minister for Small Firms, Trade and Industry, my hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Mrs. Roche), made clear in her answer of 30 October 1997, *Official Report*, columns *870–71*, such information should be treated as indicative only. As regards information on actual defence exports in the last five years, I refer to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Defence on 31 March 1998, *Official Report*, columns *444–45*.

Falkland Islands

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the effect of the removal of the Lan Chile flight on the people of the Falklands. [75642]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: The Lan Chile link has commercial and social benefits to communities in both the Falklands and southern Chile. We would regret any action which penalised these communities. We have expressed our regret to the Chilean Government over their decision to ask Lan Chile to suspend flights to the Falklands and said we do not believe this to be justified. We hope that Lan Chile will continue to fly to the Falklands after 31 March.

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what estimate he has made of the extent of human rights violations on vessels operating in waters around the Falklands. [75639]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: Both HMG and the Falkland Islands Government (FIG) take seriously any violation of human rights on vessels fishing in Falkland Islands waters while there are clearly considerable difficulties in assessing the conditions on board such fishing vessels, every effort is made to monitor the situation. The FIG investigate all cases where complaints are made. A successful prosecution was brought against the Captain of a fishing vessel in April last year. We continue to work closely with FIG on this issue.

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action he plans to take if Lan Chile does not continue its flights to the Falklands after 31 March. [75888]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: While we hope that Lan Chile will continue to fly to the Falklands, we are considering other options with the Falkland Islands Government, including flights to other countries, improve surface travel, and the possibility of the Falkland Islands Government leasing their own aircraft.

EU Officials

Mr. Gill: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to the answer of 20 January 1999, *Official Report*, column *505*, concerning indicted EU officials, when the Minister of State, the right hon. Member for Gateshead, East and Washington, West (Ms Quin), proposes to write to the hon. Member for Ludlow. [75723]

Ms Quin: I continue to press the European Commission for the information requested by the hon. Member for Ludlow. I will write as soon as it is received.

Foreign Media Articles

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to the answer of 2 March 1999, *Official Report*, columns *684–85*, for what reason he does not hold it to be a worthwhile use of resources to record which of the Prime Minister's articles for publication by the foreign press his Department has facilitated placing. [75549]

Mr. Fatchett: The resources available to the FCO News Department and press and public affairs sections in our overseas posts are already fully committed in support of the FCO's objectives. To maintain the records proposed by the right hon. Member would therefore require the diversion of resources from other more essential activity.

Russia

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about his visit to Murmansk. [75772]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 9 March 1999]:* My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary had the opportunity, as part of his trip to Russia, to visit the Murmansk region on 3 March to see for himself the scale of one of the largest concentrations of nuclear reactors, spent fuel and waste in the world.

The sheer number of nuclear submarines awaiting decommissioning is stretching the Russian facilities to breaking point. My right hon. Friend saw for himself the "Lepse", which has been used as a storage vessel for spent nuclear fuel rods for the past twenty years and is now in a rapidly deteriorating state in Murmansk Harbour.

My right hon. Friend also met Foreign Minister Ivanov, who welcomed UK assistance in the management of Russian nuclear waste. In particular, my right hon. Friend stressed the importance we attach to Russia reaching agreement with donors on liability and taxation in the field of nuclear assistance.

Whilst at Murmansk, my right hon. Friend was pleased to be able to announce a new British programme, backed by over £3 million in additional funds, to help Russia with these problems.

We are not alone in seeking to resolve these issues. It will take a coordinated international effort and other countries are already making a contribution. The countries of Scandinavia, the United States and the European Union, amongst others, already have programmes dealing with the decommissioning of Russian nuclear submarines

and the management of spent nuclear fuel and waste. We hope to work with these other countries and with Russia in building a wider international programme of assistance.

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what discussions he has had with the Russian Prime Minister and Foreign Minister about Russian defence exports in Syria; [75799]

(2) if he will make a statement on his talks with the Russian Prime Minister and Foreign Minister. [75771]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 9 March 1999]:* My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary met Foreign Minister Ivanov in Moscow on 4 March, and had further talks with him and Prime Minister Primakov in Sochi on 5 March. The talks covered a number of current foreign policy issues, including Iraq and Kosovo, Russia's discussion with the IMF, and human rights. The Foreign Secretary emphasised the need for rapid agreement between Russia and the IMF, which he reinforced with a personal message from the Prime Minister. On Kosovo, the Foreign Secretary welcomed Russia's continuing involvement in the search for a lasting settlement. On Iraq, both sides agreed to continue working together for a common position in the Security Council. Arms exports to Syria were not specifically discussed, but the Foreign Secretary and Ivanov agreed on the need to avoid destabilising and uncontrolled arms exports. Ivanov plans to visit the UK in May.

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Russian Prime Minister about the Christian school in St. Petersburg that is under siege. [75804]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 9 March 1999]:* My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary made no representations to the Russian Prime Minister about the Christian school in St. Petersburg. Our representatives in St. Petersburg and Moscow are, however, following the situation closely as it develops.

South Africa

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to *(a)* Spain, *(b)* France, *(c)* Portugal, *(d)* Italy and *(e)* Greece about their refusal to endorse the free trade agreement with South Africa. [75768]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 9 March 1999]:* At the General Affairs Council on 22 February, which my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary and I attended, the UK pressed hard for endorsement of a Trade & Cooperation Agreement between the EU and South Africa. My hon. Friend the Prime Minister has also urged member states to support the latest deal, most recently at the informal European Council on 26 February.

Sierra Leone

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what steps were taken by *(a)* special advisers, *(b)* Ministers, *(c)* officials or *(d)* other persons on behalf of his Department to seek to obtain (i) a draft copy and (ii) the key conclusions of the Foreign Affairs Committee report on Sierra Leone; [75887]

(2) on what date and at what time he told the Permanent Secretary that he had received *(a)* the leaked draft and *(b)* the leaked key conclusions of the Foreign Affairs Committee report on Sierra Leone; [75885]

(3) if he informed the hon. Member for Dundee, West (Mr. Ross) that he had received from him the copy of the leaked draft of the Foreign Affairs Committee report on Sierra Leone. [75886]

Mr. Robin Cook: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire) on 4 March 1999, *Official Report*, columns *875–76*.

Foreign Affairs Committee

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) how many copies were made of the leaked Foreign Affairs Committee documents on *(a)* its Human Rights inquiry and *(b)* its European Union enlargement inquiry; and to whom they were circulated; [75859]

(2) what means the copies of the leaked Foreign Affairs Committee documents on *(a)* its Human Rights inquiry and *(b)* its European Union enlargement inquiry were sent to him or his Department; [75860]

(3) when *(a)* he, *(b)* his Ministers, *(c)* his officials, *(d)* his advisers and *(e)* departmental parliamentary private secretaries first had sight of the leaked Foreign Affairs Committee documents on (i) its Human Rights inquiry and (ii) its European Union enlargement inquiry; and what use he and they made of the leaked documents. [75861]

Mr. Robin Cook: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on the 4 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *876*.

ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND THE REGIONS

Genetically Modified Crops

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when proposals for a directive concerning the regulations for growing and sale of genetically modified crops were first received by his Department from the European Commission; what observations were made by his Department prior to publication of the draft directive and on what evidence these observations were based; on what dates relevant explanatory memoranda were signed by ministers and placed in the Vote Office; and if he will publish the terms of such memoranda in the *Official Report*. [72178]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 22 February 1999]:* The Directive 90/220 on the deliberate release into the environment of genetically modified organisms was negotiated in the late 1980s and adopted on 23 April 1990. The Genetically Modified Organisms (Deliberate Release) Regulations 1992 were made under the Environmental Protection Act 1990, and came into force on 1 February 1993.

The European Commission adopted a Report on the review of Directive 90/220 on 10 December 1996. Following this, the Commission published its proposal for

the amendment of Directive 90/220 in February 1998. UK Government officials participated in discussions on the draft proposal, prior to its adoption by the Commission, during meetings of the 90/220 Competent Authorities.

The Competent Authorities for Directive 90/220 submitted written comments on a Commission Working Document in Autumn 1997. These focused on, among other issues, the difficulties in implementing the current directive due to differences between Member States about interpretation and delays by the Commission. These comments were based on experience of operating the directive. The views of interested parties were actively sought throughout this process.

An Orientation Debate was held in the June 1998 Council of Environment Ministers under the British Presidency of the European Union. Negotiations were subsequently held under the Austrian Presidency and the proposal was further considered by Ministers at the December 1998 Environment Council. The German Presidency has not yet indicated its timetable for discussion of the proposal.

Explanatory Memorandum 6378/98 covering the Commission's proposal was submitted by the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions on 23 March 1998. EM 6378/98 was considered by the House of Commons European Scrutiny Committee on 29 April 1998. The committee recommended that the document was of political interest and requested further information. The Minister for the Environment responded to the points raised by the Committee in a letter dated 27 November 1997. At their meeting of 9 December 1998, the Committee recommended the proposal for debate in Standing Committee A. The debate has yet to take place, but will be held in good time before any decision is taken in the Council of Ministers.

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions which parts of *(a)* the Environmental Protection Act 1990 and *(b)* the European Directive 90/220 concerning the growing of genetically modified crops for purposes of research are administered by his Department; how many applications he has received for such cultivation and where the locations of such cultivations are publicly listed; what surveillance is undertaken by officers of his Department in respect of such activities; and what tests are applied by them in advising the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and his officials concerning applications to them for cultivation for market sales. [72177]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 22 February 1999]:* The release of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) for research purposes are governed by the Genetically Modified Organisms (Deliberate Release) Regulations 1992 (amended 1995 and 1997) which give effect to Part VI of the Environmental Protection Act 1990. Together, these Regulations implement Council Directive 90/220/EEC

"on the deliberate release into the environment of genetically modified organisms",

of which Part B refers to deliberate releases for research and development purposes. These regulations are administered by my Department, in consultation with MAFF, the Scottish Office and the Welsh Office. This is a matter for which the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh and Northern Ireland Assemblies will also be responsible after devolution.

Since the regulations came into force on 1 February 1993, 153 consents have been issued for the release of genetically modified crops. Details of these consents, including the locations at which they have been released, are on the statutory public register held in the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions.

All applications received by my Department for the release of genetically modified crops, either for research or for marketing, are copied for comment to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. The statutory Advisory Committee on Releases to the Environment which advises the Secretary of State on the safety of GMOs in the environment also advises MAFF Ministers.

The Secretary of State has delegated the inspection and enforcement powers provided under Part VI of the Environment Protection Act 1990 to the Health and Safety Commission and Executive. HSE specialist inspectors visit a proportion of release sites to ensure that the releases are being conducted in accordance to the specifications set out in the consent. Full reports of the inspections are sent to DETR.

Seahorse and Exodus Incident

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what representations his Department has received on the Seahorse and Exodus incident of March 1997; if his Department has been informed of the findings of the investigation; if he will deposit those findings in the Library; and if he will make a statement. [74440]

Dr. Reid: A collision occurred between the United Kingdom registered fishing vessel Seahorse and the Irish registered fishing vessel Exodus in Bantry Bay, Ireland in March 1997. One crew member of the Exodus died. The Marine Accidents Investigation Branch undertook an Inspector's Investigation into the incident. The Inspector's report has not been published but a copy was forwarded to the Irish Maritime Authorities. The collision took place in Irish waters and the Irish Maritime Authorities are undertaking their own investigation into the incident. Their report will be published in due course. Following the incident the master of the Seahorse was successfully prosecuted by the Irish Authorities for a breach of the International Collision Regulations.

Energy Efficiency

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment his Department has made of the cost-effectiveness of campaigns to improve the take-up of energy efficiency measures in the domestic sector. [75207]

Mr. Meale: Each of the schemes to improve take-up of energy efficiency measures in the domestic sector is monitored, performance, including cost effectiveness,

is reviewed at regular intervals and schemes are amended where that is appropriate. For example:

The performance of the Home Energy Efficiency Scheme is reviewed quarterly, and a full review of the scheme is taking place as part of the Government's review of fuel poverty policy.

Independent impact assessment of the Best Practice Programme, which covers the managed housing stock, is undertaken on an ongoing basis.

Each of the Energy Saving Trust's projects is monitored and assessed. In addition the Trust's programme of work for my Department is reviewed quarterly, and a full evaluation of the Trust's programmes is planned in the next year.

The Energy Regulator's Standards Of Performance schemes were recently reviewed by NAO.

London River Services

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) what plans he has to ensure that the introduction of new commuter services on the River Thames does not undermine established tourist operations; [75265]

(2) what representations his Department has received concerning the honouring by London River Services after 1 April 1999 of agreements and licences which the Port of London Authority entered into with boat operators; [75261]

(3) what steps his Department is taking to ensure that agreements and licences which the Port of London Authority entered into with boat operators are honoured by London River Services after 1 April. [75262]

Ms Glenda Jackson: My Department has received a number of representations from and on behalf of Catamaran Cruisers Ltd. and the Thames Passenger Services Federation about this matter. London River Services Ltd. (LRSL) has been set up to manage river services operating from the piers currently owned by the Port of London Authority and certain other new piers.

The Government support LRSL's objectives, which are to:

Provide a comprehensive network of high quality river boat services (commuter and leisure) to meet London's river travel needs, having regard to efficiency, economy and safety of operation;

Maximise passenger benefits and usage within the funds available;

Support multi-modal travel facilities;

Develop and improve the infrastructure and information services which support the river network.

In pursuing these objectives within the context of the Government's Thames 2000 initiative, we believe that opportunities will be created for improving and expanding services on the River to the potential benefit of all operators. Neither the Government nor LRS has any wish to undermine existing operators, especially those which deliver a good quality of service and which have invested in new vessels and facilities.

At the operational level, it is for LRS to determine how best to meet these objectives, having regard both to developing the market for river services and the potential impact on the sustainability of existing operators' services. I understand that LRS's proposals have generally been well received by boat operators; and that they are currently in active discussion with Catamaran Cruisers Ltd. about the latter's applications for new licences and are hopeful that an agreed solution can be reached.

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will ensure that London River Services does not sell the Thames piers in its ownership. [75263]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Whilst LT retains the right to dispose of assets that are not required for the purposes of its business, the Government believe that its subsidiary, London River Services Ltd., would not be able to fulfil the objectives it was set up to achieve—and which we fully support—without retaining ownership of the key central London piers. Other assets may be disposed of only with the Secretary of State's consent.

In due course it is intended that ownership of the piers should pass to Transport for London. One of Transport for London's main transport duties will be to implement the Mayor's integrated transport strategy. In drawing up that strategy the Mayor will be under a duty to have regard to the desirability of encouraging the use of the River Thames, in particular for the provision of passenger transport services and for the transport of freight.

Landfill

Mr. Levitt: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the statutory status of the EU Landfill of Waste Common Position Paper 49/98 with regard to United Kingdom legislation. [75344]

Mr. Meale: The EU Landfill Directive is still being discussed at European Council and is in draft form. The Common Position paper [Common Position (EC) No 49/98] is the latest official version of the draft directive. As the Directive has not yet been adopted by the European Council, and has yet to enter into force in the European Union, it has no status in UK legislation.

Public Safety Zones

Ms Moran: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he plans to issue guidance to local authorities on public safety zones. [75220]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The preparation of draft guidance is in hand. We hope to issue it for consultation in the Spring.

Rural Public Transport

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many new rural public transport routes have been created since 1997. [75501]

Ms Glenda Jackson: My Department does not collect detailed information on specific public transport routes.

We have distributed the greater part of England's share of the additional £50 million a year for rural public transport to local authorities in the form of the Rural Bus Subsidy Grant. Local authorities have used this money to let contracts for new services, either serving communities

for the first time or enhancing existing routes, in accordance with the guidance which we issued to them. Many new services are now in operation.

My Department will be gathering information from local authorities in the coming weeks to assess systematically the impact of this year's Rural Bus Subsidy Grant.

We have also approved 46 bids, totalling £11.4 million, for grant under the Rural Bus Challenge competition to promote innovative local authority bus schemes in England, as well as making £4.2 million of the new money available each year for a Rural Transport Partnership scheme to reduce rural isolation and social exclusion by supporting community-based projects which enhance access to jobs and services.

Road Accidents

Dr. Tony Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what estimate he has made of the number of road accidents caused by drivers falling asleep. [75266]

Ms Glenda Jackson: There is no national estimate of the number of accidents caused by drivers falling asleep. However, research has shown that tiredness is a principal factor in around 10 per cent. of all accidents. Accordingly, it is estimated that around 23,000–24,000 injury accidents a year result from driver fatigue.

Select Committee Reports

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he or his ministers have received any advance copy or draft or briefing on the contents of any select committee report before its due publication date and time; and if he will make a statement. [75766]

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if *(a)* he, *(b)* civil servants in his Department or *(c)* special advisers in his Department have (i) had sight of drafts of select committee reports, in whole or in part, or (ii) been informed of conclusions of select committee reports prior to their publication by the select committees. [75868]

Dr. Reid *[holding answer 9 March 1999]:* I refer the right hon. and hon. Members to the answer given by the Prime Minister to the hon. Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire) on 1 March 1999, *Official Report,* column *531.* There have been no instances of members of Select Committees giving me, or my ministerial colleagues, drafts of Select Committee reports, or of parts of reports including their conclusions, before publication. Nor, to the best of my knowledge, have there been any occasions on which members of Select Committees have given such material to civil servants or special advisers in my Department. This excludes embargoed copies of reports issued under House of Commons Standing Orders.

Millennium Compliance (Water Industry)

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what contingency plans he has for making water available in the event of the interruption of supplies caused by the millennium non-compliance of computer systems in the water industry; and if he will make a statement. [76057]

Mr. Meale: In accordance with the Security and Emergency Measures Direction issued by my Department last year, all water and sewerage companies are required to have plans in place to deal with any emergency. The new plans are required to be independently certified and must be with the Department by 1 April. Water companies expect to complete the testing and any rectification of embedded IT systems by the end of July and they will also test and, if necessary, upgrade their contingency plans. The Director-General of Water Services is monitoring the water industry's progress in ensuring that potential millennium problems are minimised and he has appointed an independent assessor to check on the completion of the rectification work by water companies and the testing of their contingency plans. The assessor's report will be published by OFWAT in the summer.

National Parks (Appointees)

Mr. Peter Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list those of his appointees currently serving on national park authorities who have military backgrounds. [75569]

Mr. Meale: We do not hold a comprehensive central record of the military service undertaken by Secretary of State appointees to the National Park Authorities; there is no specific requirement for candidates to list military service as part of the appointments process. I will undertake some inquiries and write to the hon. Member.

Housing

Ms Buck: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what action his Department is taking to follow up the proposal in his July 1998 statement on housing and regeneration policy, for a single allocation to local housing authorities for capital investment in housing; and if he will make a statement. [76017]

Ms Armstrong: In October, my Department issued a consultation paper on creating a single housing allocation for capital investment to local authorities, which followed up proposals contained in the Deputy Prime Minister's statement on housing and regeneration policy in July 1998. A single capital allocation for housing is part of the Government's agenda for modernising local government finance. It aims to give local authorities more discretion in deciding their capital programme for housing. The proposal will have some impact on distribution to authorities with high levels of capital receipts relative to need. Such authorities will be expected to make a greater contribution to capital investment in housing in their area from these resources. Authorities with greater need will receive more resources.

Most respondents to the consultation paper welcomed the main principle of our proposals. Some expressed concerns about the effect on the distribution of resources between local authorities, the possible impact on private sector renewal activity, and the timing of the change. I have given careful consideration to all these issues, but I have concluded that we should proceed as planned with the introduction of a single housing capital allocation in 2000–01. The guidance to be issued to local authorities for this year's Housing Investment Programme will cover the detailed implementation of the single pot. It will also

address concerns raised in consultation responses about the importance of taking full account of the needs of the private sector in authorities' housing strategies.

I accept that some arrangements will be necessary to facilitate the transition to a single allocation. My officials will shortly be writing to the local authority associations with details of the arrangements we propose to make.

Racing Pigeons

Mr. Canavan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he has received a report of the research which he commissioned into the predation of racing pigeons; and if he will make a statement. [75571]

Mr. Meale: My Department has received a draft final report from the contractors, which will be published as soon as possible.

Rail Freight

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what proportion of freight was transported by rail in the last year for which figures are available; and what assessment he has made of the capacity of the railways to deal with increases in demand. [75300]

Ms Glenda Jackson: In 1997, rail accounted for 7 per cent. of total tonne kilometres moved in Great Britain. The need to further develop rail freight is one of the key reasons for setting up the Strategic Rail Authority. One of the Authority's most important tasks will be to address the needs of freight as well as passengers, and the balance between the capacity demands of each.

Planning

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to *(a)* speed up and *(b)* simplify planning procedures. [75303]

Mr. Raynsford: The Government are committed to making the planning system operate more efficiently and effectively. My right hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Regions, Regeneration and Planning set out a range of measures to achieve this in the Modernising Planning Statement he published on 15 January 1998. This included proposals to improve the delivery of local plans and unitary development plans; increase the regional ownership and effectiveness of regional planning guidance; speed up the handling of planning appeals; and improve local planning performance through "Best Value".

The Government have recently published for public consultation a draft revised Planning Policy Guidance note 12 (PPG12) on improving the quality and speed of development plan preparation and a draft PPG11 on more streamlined and inclusive arrangements for regional planning guidance. Good practice guides on development briefs and the one-stop-shop approach to development-related approvals were published in April 1998 and the Department is funding a good practice guide on "Best Value" in planning being drawn up by the Planning Officers' Society. A number of other initiatives are underway, including reviews of consultation procedures for planning applications and of procedures for handling listed building consent applications, and inclusion of streamlining planning decisions for business as a theme for the first year of Beacon Councils in the prospectus issued in February 1999.

The Government issued for consultation last year proposals to improve appeal procedures and are currently considering the outcome. Proposals to streamline the handling of major infrastructure projects are being developed for consultation. The Department sets targets for the handling of planning appeals by the Planning Inspectorate. We have recently published improved, long-term targets so that, by 2001–02, the Inspectorate will be expected to decide 80 per cent. of appeals by written representations within 16 weeks; 80 per cent. of appeals by hearing within 22 weeks; and 80 per cent. of appeals by inquiry within 30 weeks.

The Department is continuing to monitor closely local authorities' performance in reaching decisions on planning applications and publishes regular Planning Performance Checklists. My right hon. Friend is currently holding a series of meetings with a selection of local authorities in each English region to discuss what more might be done to improve handling of planning applications as well as development plan preparation and to share good practice. These meetings are part of our wider commitment to work in partnership with local government to deliver a modernised planning system. We have recently agreed with the Local Government Association a Planning Concordat which sets out our shared objectives as the basis for taking our partnership forward.

Big Leaf Mahogany

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to increase international protection for big leaf mahogany; and if he will ban its import. [75301]

Mr. Meale: All populations in the Americas of Big-leaf mahogany (*Swietenia macrophylla*) are already listed on Appendix III of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) and Annex C of the EC Wildlife Trade Regulation, which implements CITES within the European Union. Imports of Big-leaf mahogany therefore require an export permit or certificate issued by the country of origin before they can enter the EU. In addition, the importer has to provide a notification form. By this close monitoring, the EU aims to ensure that international trade remains at sustainable levels.

Regeneration

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what proportion of single regeneration budget money under rounds one to four was targeted on schemes in non-conurbation localities which have areas of multiple deprivation comparable with conurbation areas; and if he will make a statement. [75308]

Mr. Meale: Support from the SRB is given to partnerships under a bidding process which includes a competitive element. Bids are judged against programme objectives and assessment criteria given in a Bidding Guidance for each round. SRB (Challenge Fund) Rounds 1 to 4 are under way with over 600 regeneration schemes

being supported. The table gives an estimate of the proportion of SRB Rounds 1–3 resources by seven groupings.

Area type	*Total SRB spend rounds 1–3 estimated £ million*	*Percentage of total SRB spend*
London Borough	822	26
Metropolitan Cities and Districts	1,289	41
Non-metropolitan Cities	313	10
Districts with industrial areas or new towns	429	14
Resort, port and retirement	126	4
Urban and rural-urban mixed	83	3
Remoter mainly rural	65	2
England	3,127	100

Note:
The estimates for rounds 1–3 are based on data from an exercise carried out by the University of Cambridge as part of their evaluation of the SRB—'The distribution of SRB CF Expenditure in relation to Local Area Needs in England' and which was published in March 1998. A similar analysis for Round 4 funding is not yet available.

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what steps he is taking to tackle the causes of social and economic decline in *(a)* conurbation localities, *(b)* non-conurbation localities and *(c)* rural areas. [75309]

Mr. Meale: Following the Comprehensive Spending Review, my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister set out details of the New Deal for Regeneration in his Housing and Regeneration Policy statement on 22 July 1998, which will receive over £3 billion over the next three years. This included a reshaped Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) with about 80 per cent. of new SRB resources targeted on the most deprived areas, based on the 1998 Index of Local Deprivation. SRB resources may contribute to schemes also supported by European funding, including Structural Funds. Also there is a new programme, the New Deal for Communities, which combats social exclusion through focused and intensive neighbourhood renewal, in the most deprived neighbourhoods.

English Partnerships promote job creation, inward investment and environmental improvement by bringing derelict, vacant and contaminated land back into productive use.

Rural areas benefit from resources directed through the SRB. The Rural Challenge Fund previously managed by the Rural Development Commission (RDC) has been incorporated into the SRB and bids covering rural areas will be eligible for SRB support. In addition, the RDC's rural regeneration programmes continue to support a variety of regeneration projects in the rural development areas designated by the RDC, as do English Partnerships and European structural funds in Objective 5b areas. The Government will be setting out their policies for rural England in a White Paper to be published later in the year.

The regional activities of English Partnerships, the administration of the SRB and the RDCs' rural regeneration programmes will transfer to new Regional Development Agencies on 1 April 1999 (from April 2000 in London).

The Government strongly support the Local Government Association's New Commitment to Regeneration initiative which is seeking a more co-ordinated and flexible approach to regeneration in 22 pathfinder areas through the preparation of comprehensive regeneration strategies for their areas.

The Government will be setting out their policies for cities and towns in an Urban White Paper to be published later this year.

Electoral Review

Mr. Linton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he proposes next to implement the periodic electoral review recommendations which he has received from the Local Government Commission for England; what is his policy for implementing future reviews; and if he will make a statement. [76016]

Ms Armstrong: Where we accept the LGC periodic electoral review recommendations our intention is to implement them as soon as practicable on a normal election day whilst ensuring that no council holds whole council elections in consecutive years.

Accordingly we are now proposing, for those district councils and county councils where final recommendations are received no later than July 2000, and where we accept them, that implementation should be on the normal election day in May 2001. For those district councils and county councils where final recommendations are received between August 2000 and July 2002 and, where we accept them, implementation should be on the normal election day in May 2003.

This means that in May 2001, the normal election day for all county councils in England, there will be additional whole council elections for certain district councils. In May 2003, the normal election day for all whole council district council elections, there will be additional elections for certain county councils.

We are not making any special proposals for implementing the Commission's reviews of London boroughs. We envisage their implementation on the next normal election day for the boroughs in May 2002, a timetable consistent with the Commission's recommendations being received between June 1999 and January 2000.

We are now consulting the Local Government Association, the National Association of Local Councils, the Association of Electoral Administrators, the Local Government Commission, the Parliamentary Boundary Commission and the main political parties on the proposals. Following this consultation we will decide how to proceed.

Airports Policy

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what is the timetable for the review of his Department's UK airports policy and implementation of resulting recommendations. [75425]

Ms Glenda Jackson: We announced in "A New Deal for Transport" (Cm 3950) that we will prepare a UK airports policy looking some 30 years ahead, and that in

doing so we will take account of the Inspector's report on the Heathrow Terminal 5 Inquiry. After the Secretary of State has received the Inspector's report, the Government will, of course, need to consider it carefully before we can come to decisions on his recommendations and can publish the new airports policy. In the meantime we are pressing ahead with preparatory studies needed for the review of airports policy.

Air Safety

Mr. Stringer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many incidents there have been in each of the last five years of objects falling from commercial airlines over the UK; and how many such falling objects have caused *(a)* personal injury and *(b)* damage to building. [75676]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The number of incidents of falling objects reported to the Civil Aviation Authority are as follows:

	Total number of incidents	*Number causing damage on ground*	*Personal injury*
1994	52	27	0
1995	41	23	0
1996	56	32	0
1997	61	29	0
1998	60	34	0

Note:
These objects include ice fragments and other miscellaneous items. Generally it is not possible to confirm the precise origin of such objects. The figures for incidents of damage on the ground include damage to items such as cars, garden furniture and patios as well as buildings.

Rail Services

Mr. Fitzpatrick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what provision he is making for the cost of rail services secured by the English Passenger Transport Executive in 1999–2000. [76409]

Ms Glenda Jackson: A special grant report has been laid before the House today for the payment of Metropolitan Railway Passenger Service Grant in 1999–2000 to English Passenger Transport Authorities (PTAs). The main purpose of the grant is to provide support to those PTAs for the local rail services provided by franchise operators and secured by the PTAs' Passenger Transport Executives under the terms of the franchise agreements with franchisees and the Director of Passenger Rail Franchising.

Ships (Inspections)

Mr. Prosser: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many ships were found to be unhygienic as a result of the inspections of ships for nuisances; and how many special notices were served under the provisions of the Public Health (Ships) Regulations 1979 in each year since 1990. [74968]

Ms Jowell: I have been asked to reply.

The Department does not keep central records on the results of tests made under the Environmental Health Act 1990 and the Public Health (Ships) Regulations 1979, which are a local inspection function. However, the Maritime and Coastguard Agency has provided figures on the number of ships detained under Merchant Shipping legislation where deficiencies have included food and hygiene items. Figures before 1994–95 are not available.

Year	*Number of ships detained where deficiencies included food and hygiene items*
1994–95	48
1995–96	63
1996–97	64
1997–98	75

WALES

Bell Pottinger Good Relations

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on his decision to award the contract for providing information about the National Assembly to Bell Pottinger Good Relations. [73005]

Mr. Michael: My Department appointed Howell Henry Chaldecott Lury following a competition arranged by the Central Office of Information on behalf of the Welsh Office. They were appointed on the basis that they gave the strongest, most effective response to the tendered campaign.

All competing Agencies were required to demonstrate that they could deal effectively with local issues and operate effectively with the Welsh Office in Cardiff. Howell Henry Chaldecott Lury invited sister company Bell Pottinger Good Relations to assist them in the competition to meet this requirement, and to provide wider expertise for the National Assembly for Wales campaign.

This appointment was ratified by the Independent Advisory Committee on Advertising.

Council Housing

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he last discussed housing problems with council housing authorities; and if he will make a statement. [74180]

Mr. Michael: As Chair of the Welsh Consultative Council on Local Government Finance, I meet local authority housing representatives on a regular basis. At the last of these meetings on 15 December housing issues were discussed.

Following the transfer of functions, this issue will be a matter for the National Assembly.

A4042 (Llanover)

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received from the pupils of Llanover Primary School concerning the speed limit on the A4042 in Llanover, near Abergavenny; what plans he has to review the speed limit on the road; and if he will make a statement. [74888]

Mr. Hain: The Headteacher of Llanover Primary School sent the former Secretary of State a selection of letters from pupils concerning the speed of traffic along the nearby A4042 in May 1998.

Since traffic generally travels at under 50 mph along this stretch of road past the village, there are no plans for a reduced speed limit as it would not essentially be self regulating.

We will however continue to keep this part of the A4042 under review and will review the speed limit if there is any significant change in the situation there.

Following the transfer of functions, this issue will be a matter for the National Assembly.

As announced in the White Paper on the future of transport, a national review is under way to develop a speed policy that takes account of the contribution of reduced speeds to environmental and social objectives as well as to road safety.

Departmental Cash Limits

Ms Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what changes he proposes to make to his voted cash limits for the current year. [76353]

Mr. Michael: Subject to the approval of the related Supplementary Estimate, I propose to increase the cash limit on class XIV, vote 2 by £4,144,000 from £851,924,000 to £856,068,000. This increase results from an addition to the education programme for the purchase of school books, as announced by the Chancellor of the Exchequer in his Budget statement on 9 March 1999, *Official Report*, columns 173–90. Schools will have until July of this year to spend their allocations of these extra resources. This increase will be met from the Reserve and will not add to the overall level of public expenditure.

NHS Trusts

Mr. John Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will announce his decisions on the amended proposals to reconfigure NHS trusts in Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan. [76399]

Mr. Michael: I have today announced my decision to establish the University Hospital of Wales and Llandough NHS Trust and the Cardiff and District Community NHS Trust to become operational on 1 April 1999. This decision follows public consultation which ended on 28 January, and supports my vision for the NHS in Wales made in my statement to the House on 3 December 1998, *Official Report*, columns 1053–66. The establishment of these two trusts is a first step towards creating a single integrated health service for Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan with acute, community and mental health services delivered through a single trust. In order to bring as much certainty as possible to the process so that staff in the new trusts know exactly where they stand, a further public consultation will start in July on the details of the process of forming the single trust and on the timing, which it is hoped will be sooner rather than later.

A copy of the press release detailing my announcement, along with a summary of all responses received by the Welsh Office on this matter during the consultation period, a copy of the report of the reconfiguration project team on local consultation and a copy of the report of independent consultants who were commissioned to undertake an evaluation of the consultation proposals, has been placed in the Library of the House.

Following the transfer of functions, this issue will be a matter for the National Assembly.

Housing Association (House Starts)

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what are the planned starts for homes to be built by housing associations in 1998–99. [75494]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: Housing associations are expected to achieve starts on up to 2,300 homes during the year, of which approximately 70% will be new build.

Following the transfer of functions, this issue will be a matter for the National Assembly.

Select Committee Reports

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if *(a)* he, *(b)* civil servants in his Department or *(c)* special advisers in his Department have (i) had sight of drafts of select committee reports, in whole or in part, or (ii) been informed of conclusions of select committee reports prior to their publication by the select committees. [75879]

Mr. Michael: I refer the right hon. Member to the answer given by the Prime Minister to the hon. Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire) on 1 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *531*. There have been no instances of members of Select Committees giving me, or my ministerial colleagues, drafts of Select Committee reports, or of parts of reports including their conclusions, before publication. Nor, to the best of my knowledge, has there been any occasion on which members of Select Committees have given such material to civil servants or special advisers in my Department. This excludes embargoed copies of reports issued under House of Commons Standing Orders.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Interpreters

Mr. Levitt: To ask the Minister of State, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will list the occasions on which cases have *(a)* collapsed and *(b)* gone to appeal on the basis of inadequate interpreter provision for defendants in each of the last two years. [75341]

Mr. Hoon: I regret that this information is not collected, and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Levitt: To ask the Minister of State, Lord Chancellor's Department what professional standards and qualifications are required of interpreters working in English courts. [75342]

Mr. Hoon: Interpreters working in English courts are not required by law to have a formal qualification or to have reached a specific professional standard. However, all agencies in the criminal justice system are parties to an agreement with the aim that, by the end of 2001, every interpreter working in courts should be selected from the National Register of Public Service Interpreters or the

Council for the Advancement of Communication with Deaf People (CACDP) National Directory of sign Language Interpreters. An inter-agency working group is monitoring progress of the agreement. Those arranging interpreters are encouraged to find an interpreter from the National Register or Directory in the first instance. Where a person cannot be found from those sources, they will look elsewhere for an interpreter of at least the same standard.

In the civil courts it is the responsibility of the plaintiff or defendant or their legal adviser to provide any foreign language interpreter. The court can refer inquiries from parties to appropriate lists. The Court Service has an agreement with the Royal National Institute for Deaf People to provide a sign language interpreter, who must be registered by the CACDP, whenever such an interpreter is required.

Mr. Levitt: To ask the Minister of State, Lord Chancellor's Department what measures exist to ensure that accused persons whose first language is not English receive a fair trial in English courts. [75340]

Mr. Hoon: Where the accused's first language is not English, and he would not otherwise understand the proceedings, the court will arrange a foreign language or sign language interpreter for him at court. The only exception is where the defendant appears in court within up to two working days of being charged, where it is for the police or other prosecuting agency to make the necessary arrangements. The interpreter's fee is paid from public funds.

Retirement Ages

Dr. Tony Wright: To ask the Minister of State, Lord Chancellor's Department how many magistrates are aged between 65 and 70 years. [75267]

Mr. Hoon: 3,767 magistrates in England and Wales (excluding the Duchy of Lancaster) are aged between 65 and 70 years.

Dr. Tony Wright: To ask the Minister of State, Lord Chancellor's Department what is the retirement age for lay members of each of the tribunals for which he has responsibility. [75268]

Mr. Hoon: Of the tribunals for which the Lord Chancellor has ministerial responsibility, only three include a lay membership. They are lay members of the Immigration Appeal Tribunal; service and medical members of the Pensions Appeal Tribunal; and surveyor members of the Lands Tribunal. Under the terms of the Judicial Pensions and Retirement Act 1993, lay members appointed to each of these tribunals on or after 31 March 1995 shall vacate office when they attain the age of 70. However, the Judicial Pensions and Retirement Act contains provisions which allows the Lord Chancellor, in exceptional circumstances, to authorise continuance in office up to the age of 75 and transitional provisions which preserve the pre-existing compulsory retirement age of the end of year of service in which they reach 72 for those already serving on 31 March 1995.

Legal Aid (Foreign Nationals)

Mr. Beith: To ask the Minister of State, Lord Chancellor's Department what percentage of the legal aid budget was spent on cases pursued by foreign nationals in courts in England and Wales in *(a)* 1989 and *(b)* in each of the last three years. [75222]

Mr. Hoon: The information requested is not available. The nationality of an applicant is not one of the qualifying factors for legal aid. Therefore, the data collected by the Legal Aid Board and the courts do not identify separately applications made for legal aid by foreign nationals.

Select Committee Reports

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Minister of State, Lord Chancellor's Department if *(a)* he, *(b)* civil servants in his Department or *(c)* special advisers in his Department have (i) had sight of drafts of select committee reports, in whole or in part, or (ii) been informed of conclusions of select committee reports prior to their publication by the select committees. [75869]

Mr. Hoon: I refer the right hon. Member to the answer given by the Prime Minister to the hon. Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire) on 1 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *531*. There have been no instances of members of Select Committees giving me, or the Lord Chancellor, drafts of Select Committee reports, or of parts of reports including their conclusions, before publication. Nor to the best of my knowledge have there been any occasions on which members of Select Committees have given such material to any civil servant or the Special Adviser in my Department. This excludes embargoed copies of reports issued under House of Commons Standing Orders.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Select Committee Reports

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if *(a)* he, *(b)* civil servants in his Department or *(c)* special advisers in his Department have (i) had sight of drafts of select committee reports, in whole or in part, or (ii) been informed of conclusions of select committee reports prior to their publication by the select committees. [75881]

Mr. Duncan Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) if *(a)* ministers, *(b)* parliamentary private secretaries, *(c)* special advisers and *(d)* civil servants have discussed the contents of the Committee's reports with any members of the Social Security Committee prior to their publication; [75841]

(2) if *(a)* ministers, *(b)* parliamentary private secretaries, *(c)* special advisers and *(d)* civil servants in his Department have received copies of any Social Security Select Committee (i) draft reports and (ii) reports prior to their publication. [75840]

Mr. Darling: I refer the right hon. and hon. Members to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to the hon. Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire) on 1 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *531*. There have been no instances of members of Select

Committees giving me, or my Ministerial colleagues, drafts of Select Committee reports, or parts of reports including their conclusions, before publication. Nor to the best of my knowledge have there been any occasions on which members of Select Committees have given such material to civil servants or special advisers in this Department. This excludes embargoed copies of reports issued under House of Commons Standing Orders.

Disability Living Allowance

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) if he will list the groups of disabled people which will automatically be exempted from the new system of periodically reviewing awards of disability living allowance; [69224]

(2) if the proposed system of periodically reviewing awards of disability living allowance announced on 28 January will include the safeguards announced on 9 February 1998 in respect of the Benefit Integrity Project. [69220]

Mr. Bayley *[pursuant to his reply, 11 February 1999, c. 381–82]:* From April 1999 a new system of periodically reviewing entitlement to Disability Living Allowance (DLA) will be introduced. We intend to incorporate the lessons already learned and to evaluate and refine the process as it develops. At the outset, not only DLA recipients whose cases were examined by the Benefit Integrity Project (BIP) will be excluded from the process, but also people in any one of the specific categories listed who were previously excluded from the action of the BIP will be excluded.

Groups to be exempt at the outset:

People receiving the higher rate of the DLA mobility component and either the highest or the middle rate of the DLA care component who are:

- Paraplegic;
- Tetraplegic;
- Quadriplegic;
- Both deaf and blind;
- Double amputees;
- Over the age of 65; or
- With an award made prior to April 1992.

People receiving the higher rate of the DLA mobility component and the highest rate of the DLA care component with:

- Cystic Fibrosis;
- Dementia;
- Haemodialysis;
- Hyperkinetic Syndrome;
- Learning difficulty[1]
- Multiple Allergy Syndrome;
- Multiple Sclerosis;
- Motor Neurone Disease;
- Neurological Disease (including Muscular Dystrophy);
- Parkinson's Disease;
- Total Parenteral Nutrition or who are Severely Mentally Impaired[2].

People treated as being terminally ill under criteria set out in Section 66(2)(a) of the Social Security Contributions and Benefits Act 1992 will also be excluded, as will anyone with a fixed period award due to end within the next three years. Safeguards developed and introduced during the lifetime of the BIP will be carried forward into the new process. This will include the changes in evidence gathering introduced on 9 February 1998; which ensured that no decision to reduce or remove entitlement to DLA is based solely on the information provided by the claimant.

[1] This category applies to people whose main disabling condition has been recorded as "mental subnormality"

[2] This category applies to people who meet the criteria set out in Section 73(3) of the Social Security Contributions and Benefits Act 1992 and Regulation 12(5)&(6) of the Social Security (Disability Living Allowance) Regulations 1991.

Pensioners

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 8 February 1999, *Official Report*, column 68, on pensioner incomes, if the information requested is now available. [75028]

Mr. Timms: The information requested is now available and is in the tables.

Pensioners receiving a means-tested benefit and not paying income tax

Thousand

	Single male pensioners	*Single female pensioners*	*Pensioner couples*	*All pensioner benefit units*
60–64	90	100	170	360
65–69	70	220	200	490
70–74	70	300	150	520
75–79	80	330	140	550
80+	100	550	130	770
Total	400	1,500	790	2,690

Pensioners not receiving a means-tested benefit and not paying income tax

Thousand

	Single male pensioners	*Single female pensioners*	*Pensioner couples*	*All pensioner benefit units*
60–64	20	20	90	130
65–69	40	70	190	290
70–74	30	130	250	400
75–79	40	130	190	360
80+	50	190	150	390
Total	170	540	870	1,580

Pensioners not receiving a means-tested benefit and paying income tax

Thousand

	Single male pensioners	*Single female pensioners*	*Pensioner couples*	*All pensioner benefit units*
60–64	110	160	910	1,180
65–69	120	220	590	930
70–74	100	240	420	760
75–79	80	190	190	450
80+	90	190	130	400
Total	490	990	2,240	3,720

Pensioners receiving a means-tested benefit and paying income tax

Thousand

	Single male pensioners	*Single female pensioners*	*Pensioner couples*	*All pensioner benefit units*
60–64	20	40	50	100
65–69	20	30	20	80
70–74	20	50	10	80
75–79	20	30	*	50
80+	20	50	10	70
Total	90	200	90	390

Notes:

1. Figures are given to the nearest 10,000 pensioner benefit units, although they are not necessarily accurate to that degree. Figures of less than 5,000 pensioners are denoted by '*'.
2. Figures may not sum to row or column totals due to rounding.
3. Figures should be treated with caution since taxpaying status is not directly measured by the Family Resources Survey, but has been imputed using a model based on policies announced up to and including the 1998 budget statement.
4. Pensioner benefit units are defined as single people and couples (married or cohabiting) where at least one partner is aged over 59. Couples are allocated to age bands according to the age of the older partner.
5. Taxpaying pensioner benefit units are defined as those where at least one individual in the benefit unit is modelled as liable to income tax.

Source:

Family Resources Survey 1996–97

Family Resources Survey

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate is provided by his Department's Family Resources Survey of the number and proportion of *(a)* local authority tenants, *(b)* other social tenants, *(c)* private renters and *(d)* owner occupiers who are families with dependent children. [75168]

Angela Eagle: The information is in the table.

Number and proportion of households with families and dependant children, by tenure type

Tenure type	*Number*	*Percentage*
Local authority tenants	1,250,000	28
Other social tenants	330,000	30
Private renters	410,000	21
Owner occupiers	3,940,000	25

Notes:

1. "Local authority tenants" were defined as those households where the landlord was either a local authority/council, a New Town development or Scottish Homes and where the property did not go with the job of anyone in the household. "Other social tenants" was defined as those households where the landlord was either a Housing Association, a co-operative or a charitable trust and where the property did not go with the job of anyone in the household. "Private renters" were defined as those households where the landlord was an employer, friend or relative of a household member, or another private landlord or organisation. "Owner occupiers" were identified as those households that were either owned outright, being bought with the help of a mortgage or loan, or were part rented and part mortgaged.
2. "Households with families and dependant children" were defined as those households where there was at least one couple or lone parent with at least one dependant child. Pensioner couples with any dependant children were also included in this definition.
3. Absolute values are rounded to the nearest ten thousand. Percentages are rounded to the nearest integer.
4. Estimates are subject to sampling error and to variability in non-response.

Source:

1996–97 Family Resources Survey (GB).

Cold Weather Payments

Mr. Caton: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the locations at which temperature readings were taken for the cold weather payments scheme in 1998–99. [75260]

Angela Eagle: 72 weather stations are being used in the scheme this winter.

A schedule of the weather stations and postcodes linked to each of them is contained in the Social Fund Cold Weather Payments (General) Amendment Regulations 1998 (SI 1998 No. 2455), a copy of which is available in the Library.

Overseas Pensioners

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what discussions he has held with other Governments about extending bilateral agreements to protect the position of UK overseas pensioners; and if he will make a statement. [75237]

Mr. Timms: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has held no discussions about extending bilateral Social Security agreements to cover uprating of UK State Pensions paid to pensioners living overseas. Bilateral agreements can be the means of providing annual increases of Retirement Pension, but that is not their primary purpose. An agreement is not strictly necessary to allow payment of pension increases, as that could be achieved through changing UK domestic legislation.

Child Benefit

Mr. Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many children will benefit from this April's increase in child benefit in *(a)* the Medway towns and *(b)* Chatham and Aylesford. [75554]

Angela Eagle: The administration of Child Benefit is a matter for the Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency, Peter Mathison. He will write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Alexis Cleveland to Mr. Jonathan Shaw, dated 9 March 1999:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked Peter Mathison to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking how many children will benefit from this April's increase in child benefit in (a) the Medway towns and (b) Chatham and Aylesford. As Mr. Mathison is away from the office on leave, I am replying.

Unfortunately the information to identify families, by region, who are receiving Child Benefit is not readily available. These figures could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

I can however, explain the new rates of Child Benefit from April 1999. They will be £14.40 for the eldest child and £9.60 for each subsequent child. The increase for the eldest child includes the extra £2.50 a week announced in the March 1998 budget, plus uprating. This is an overall increase of £3.25 for a family with two children.

I am sorry I could not be of more help on this occasion.

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many families in *(a)* the Tamworth constituency and *(b)* Staffordshire will receive the increase in child benefit. [75656]

Angela Eagle: The administration of Child Benefit is a matter for the Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency, Peter Mathison. He will write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Alexis Cleveland to Mr. Brian Jenkins, dated 9 March 1999:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked Peter Mathison to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking how many families in (a) the Tamworth constituency and (b) Staffordshire will receive the increase in child benefit. As Mr Mathison is away from the office on leave, I am replying.

Unfortunately the information to identify families, by region, who are receiving Child Benefit is not readily available. These figures could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

I can however, explain the new rates of Child Benefit from April 1999. They will be £14.40 for the eldest child and £9.60 for each subsequent child. The increase for the eldest child includes the extra £2.50 a week announced in the March 1998 budget, plus uprating. This is an overall increase of £3.25 for a family with two children.

I am sorry I could not be of more help on this occasion.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Sexual Offences

Mr. Leigh: To ask the Attorney-General what official changes in prosecution policy were made in respect of the offences of *(a)* buggery, *(b)* indecent assault on a male, *(c)* indecency between males, *(d)* rape, *(e)* indecent assault on a female, *(f)* unlawful sexual intercourse with a girl under 13 years, *(g)* unlawful sexual intercourse with a girl under 16 years, *(h)* incest and *(i)* gross indecency with a child, between 1987 and 1997. [75033]

The Attorney-General: The Crown Prosecution Service reviews and prosecutes all cases in accordance with the principles set out in the Code for Crown Prosecutors, issued under section 10 of the Prosecution of Offences Act 1985. The provisions of the Code are set out in the Director of Public Prosecution's Annual Report, copies of which are in the Library of the House. The Code, first published in 1986, was subsequently revised in 1992 and again in 1994. The 1994 edition of the Code simplifies the language of the Code; it clarifies the evidential criterion and the public interest factors in favour of a prosecution.

The general principles set out in the Code for Crown Prosecutors are supported by internal CPS guidance. The internal guidance is not presently in the public domain. In any event, tracing its development over the period covered by the question would not be practical and would involve a disproportionate cost.

SCOTLAND

Newspapers and Magazines

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his estimate of the total expenditure of his Department, agencies and related public bodies on newspapers and magazines in *(a)* 1996–97, *(b)* 1997–98, *(c)* 1998–99 and *(d)* 1999–2000; if he will list (i) the titles taken and (ii) which titles have been added and which deleted since 1 May 1997; and if he will make a statement. [69198]

Mr. Dewar *[holding answer 8 February 1999]:* My Department purchases or obtains free of charge a wide range of newspapers and periodical publications. A list of their titles and those added and deleted since 1 May 1997 has been placed in the House Library. Information about non-departmental public bodies is not held centrally. Details of the total cost for my Departments and Executive Agencies are as follows:

Departments/ageneies	£
The Scottish Office	
1996–97	220,116
1997–98	212,431
1998–99 (estimate)	210,113
1999–2000	Budget not yet set
Historic Scotland	
1996–97	5,220
1997–98	5,644
1998–99	6,000
1999–2000	6,700
Scottish Agricultural Science Agency	
1996–97	23,595
1997–98	26,264
1998–99	30,021
1999–2000	30,500
Scottish Fisheries Protection Agency	
1996–97	1,507
1997–98	1,906
1998–99	1,960
1999–2000	Budget not yet set
Scottish Prison Service	
1996–97	2,251
1997–98	2,624
1998–99	2,808
1999–2000	2,878
Student Awards Agency for Scotland	
1996–97	52
1997–98	71
1998–99	81
1999–2000	90
Scottish Office Pensions Agency	
1996–97	1,346
1997–98	1,704
1998–99	1,032
1999–2000	1,200
Fisheries Research Services	
1996–97	76,400
1997–98	79,300
1998–99	97,336
1999–2000	Budget not yet set
General Register Office for Scotland	
1996–97	975
1997–98	994
1998–99	1,009
1999–2000	1,044
National Archives of Scotland (formerly Scottish Record Office)	
1996–97	2,699
1997–98	2,371
1998–99	2,338
1999–2000	2,206
Registers of Scotland	
1996–97	Not available
1997–98	5,605
1998–99	5,524
1999–2000	5,700

Departments/agencies	£
Scottish Courts Administration	
1996–97	643
1997–98	705
1998–99	721
1999–2000	756
Scottish Court Service	
1996–97	324
1997–98	338
1998–99	411
1999–2000	411

From 1 July 1999, this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

Task Forces

Dr. Tony Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish a list of (1) task forces and (2) policy reviews established by his Department since May 1997 which *(a)* had external members recruited by way of public advertisement, and details of any person so appointed and *(b)* engaged in public consultation exercises, and the form that these took. [74472]

Mr. Dewar *[holding answer 9 March 1999]:* No members of task forces or policy reviews established since 1 May 1997 were recruited by way of public advertisement. Most task forces and reviews are short-term bodies established to give thorough consideration to important and difficult issues. External members are invited to sit on some task forces and reviews because they are able to contribute specific experience and expertise. In such cases, public advertising would be inappropriate and disproportionate. Since 1 October 1998, appointments to those task forces which qualify for classification as advisory non-departmental public bodies have come within the remit of the Commissioner for Public Appointments.

The following task forces and policy reviews are engaged in public consultation exercises.

Task forces and policy reviews	
Review of the Scottish Roads Programme	Consultation Paper:'The Appraisal of Trunk Road Investment' (published August 1998)
Review of Transport Policy	Consultation Paper: 'Regional Transport Partnerships and the National Transport Forum for Scotland' (published January 1999) Consultation Paper: 'Local Transport Strategies Preliminary Guidance' (published February 1999)
Working Group on Council Tax Collection	Consultation Paper: 'It Pays to Collect' (published November 1998)
Land Reform Policy Group	Consultation Paper: 'Identifying the Problems' (published February 1998) Consultation Paper: 'Identifying the Solutions' (published September 1998) Series of public meetings (November 1998)
Review of Sites of Special Scientific Interest in Scotland	Consultation Paper: 'People and Nature' (published September 1998)
Scottish Water Industry Review	Consultation Paper: 'Scottish Water Industry Review' (published July 1997)
Working Group on Vulnerable and Intimidated Witnesses	Consultation Paper: 'Towards a Just Conclusion' (published November 1998)
Ministerial Action Group on Standards	Consultation Paper: 'Setting Targets—Raising Standards in Schools' (published 4 March 1998)
Review of Aspects of Gaelic Broadcasting	Consultation Paper: 'A Review of Aspects of Gaelic Broadcasting' (published June 1998)
Committee on Post-School Education and Training of Young People with Special Needs	Consultation workshops (January 1999)

From 1 July 1999, this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

School Computers

Mrs. Laing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many pupils there are per computer in *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary schools in each local authority area. [74546]

Mrs. Liddell: According to the most recent Annual Survey of Listening, Viewing and Computing (ASLVC) conducted on behalf of The Scottish Office in 1998, there are 15 pupils per computer in primary schools, 49 per cent. of which are more than four years old and 6 pupils per computer in secondary schools, 54 per cent. of which are over four years old. The sampling arrangements for the ASLVC do not provide information at the local authority level. This information will be collected in future as part of the monitoring arrangements for the Excellence Fund.

From 1 July 1999, this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

Nursing Vacancies

Mrs. Laing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many NHS nursing vacancies there were at the latest available date. [74515]

Mr. Galbraith: As at 31 March 1998, there were 1,097 whole-time equivalent qualified nursing staff vacancies in the NHS in Scotland. This represents a vacancy rate of 3.5 per cent. part of which is turnover.

From 1 July 1999, this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

Internet (Schools)

Mrs. Laing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many and what percentage of schools have internet and e-mail access for pupils in each local authority area. [74531]

Mrs. Liddell: According to the most recent Annual Survey of Listening, Viewing and Computing (ASLVC) conducted on behalf of The Scottish Office in 1998, 22 per cent. of primary schools and 73 per cent. of secondary schools have some form of internet access. 39 per cent. of primary schools and 72 per cent. of secondary schools have e-mail facilities. The sampling arrangements for the ASLVC do not provide information at the local authority level. This information will be collected in future as part of the monitoring arrangements for the Excellence Fund.

From 1 July 1999, this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

Electoral Roll

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many individuals are on the electoral roll in Scotland. [75507]

Mr. McLeish: There were 4,005,720 local government electors on the electoral registers for Scotland which came into force on 16 February 1998. Local government electors are also entitled to vote in Scottish Parliament elections. There were 3,992,502 Parliamentary electors on the registers which came into force on 16 February 1998. Numbers of electors on the electoral registers published on 16 February 1999 are not yet available centrally. I will write to the hon. Member as soon as this information can be obtained.

Teachers

Mrs. Laing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what the total number of *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary school teachers in Scotland was in each year since 1992. [74510]

Mrs. Liddell: The information requested is set out in the table.

Number of full-time equivalent teachers in publicly funded primary and secondary schools in Scotland

	Primary	*Secondary*
1992–93	22,747	24,041
1993–94	22,472	24,326
1994–95	22,659	24,522
1995–96	22,550	24,593
1996–97	22,483	24,265
1997–98	22,187	23,875

As from 1 July 1999, this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

Government Expenditure

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what estimate he has made of the balance between Government expenditure spent in Scotland and Government revenues raised in Scotland in each of the last five years. [75710]

Mr. Dewar: The latest estimates of the fiscal position in Scotland were set out in Table 20 of *Government Expenditure and Revenue in Scotland 1996–1997*, published in November 1998.

Gas-fired Power Station, Gartcosh

Dr. Moonie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will announce his decision on the application submitted by PowerGen for consent under Section 36 of the Electricity Act 1989 to construct and operate a new natural gas-fired power station at Gartcosh, North Lanarkshire. [R] [76350]

Mr. Dewar: I have decided to refuse consent for PowerGen's application. This decision has been taken after careful consideration of the Report of the public inquiry into the application and all subsequent representations received (which related mainly to the Government's new energy policy), and is founded on the Reporter's recommendation that consent be refused. A copy of my decision letter will be placed in the Library of the House of Commons.

From 1 July 1999, this will be a mater for the Scottish Parliament.

Ferry Services

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish the estimated timetable for the tender and award of franchises for the passenger ferry services to Orkney and Shetland; and if he will make a statement. [75680]

Mr. Dewar: My hon. Friend the Minister with responsibility for transport in Scotland announced on 14 October 1998 the start of a competitive tendering process for a subsidy to provide lifeline ferry services to the Orkney and Shetland Islands from 2002.

A draft initial proposals document was issued on 22 December 1998 to the Islands Councils and others for comments. Comments received are currently being assessed. A shortlist of potential operators is being draw up. Those selected will be invited soon to submit initial proposals for the services. It is estimated that an award of a contract will be made before the end of 1999.

From 1 July 1999, this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

Nurses

Mr. Moore: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many whole-time equivalent *(a)* bank, *(b)* agency and *(c)* contract nurses were employed, and at what cost, by health board area in each of the last 10 years. [74990]

Mr. Galbraith *[holding answer 5 March 1999] [pursuant to his reply, 8 March 1999, c. 65–66]:* The table in the previous reply was incorrectly reproduced.

The information available for agency nursing staff is shown in the table. No cost data to match the staff numbers are available. Information for bank and contract nursing staff is not available centrally.

Agency nursing staff: average Whole Time Equivalent[1] by health board: year ending 30 September

Health board	*[2]1988*	*[2]1989*	*[2]1990*	*[2]1991*	*[2]1992*	*[2]1993*	*[2]1994*	*[2]1995*	*[2]1996*	*[2]1997*	*[2,3]1998*
Scotland[2]	238.6	187.3	317.4	255.6	249.4	301.1	195.3	382.6	459.3	455.7	500.9
Argyll & Clyde	—	1.3	0.2	1.1	0.1	4.6	11.6	39.0	39.8	57.0	68.4
Ayrshire & Arran	2.1	7.2	1.7	3.0	0.2	0.5	0.4	0.4	0.0	3.0	6.0
Borders	19.8	4.4	—	—	0.0	0.1	0.3	0.0	3.0	—	0.2
Dumfries & Galloway	—	—	—	0.4	0.4	1.3	0.1	—	—	—	—
Fife	—	—	2.3	1.3	0.6	—	3.7	0.2	1.8	6.5	2.3
Forth Valley	—	1.1	10.3	0.1	0.0	0.4	0.0	17.3	63.1	54.1	22.5
Grampian	13.0	6.1	8.0	11.9	35.3	33.6	26.5	46.2	29.4	21.8	38.3
Greater Glasgow	80.2	66.0	179.8	155.2	148.7	127.3	76.8	92.8	67.7	110.9	133.7
Highland	—	—	0.8	0.5	—	0.5	0.1	2.4	4.1	12.3	13.2
Lanarkshire	—	—	0.2	—	—	—	—	0.2	0.3	0.3	10.1
Lothian	23.5	100.4	111.2	81.0	64.0	132.8	75.8	184.0	249.0	187.8	203.8
Orkney	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	0.2	0.2
Shetland	—	0.8	2.8	0.9	—	—	—	0.0	—	—	—
Tayside	—	—	—	0.1	—	—	—	—	1.0	1.8	2.3
Western Isles	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	0.0

[1] To calculate the average, 1 W. T. E. is taken as a contribution of 37.5 hours per week x 52 = 1,950 hours per year.
[2] Data for 1997 and 1998 are based on one six month period ending 30 September. Data for 1991 to 1996 are based on two six month periods ending 31 March and 30 September. Data for 1988 to 1990 are based on two three month periods ending 31 March and 30 September.
[3] Provisional data
Note:
Rounding of individual figures may produce slight differences between the sum of constituent items and totals.
Source:
ISD(M)18

From 1 July 1999 this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

University Challenge

Ms Moran: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he is yet in a position to announce the outcome of the University Challenge competition. [76012]

Mr. Battle: One of the Government's key science policy initiatives is to encourage the commercialisation of outcomes from our excellent research base. In that connection, I am delighted to be able to announce the winners of the University Challenge Fund Competition which has been funded and operated jointly by Government, the Wellcome Trust and the Gatsby Charitable Foundation.

The successful applications are:

	£ million
University of Leeds/University of Sheffield/University of York (White Rose Consortium)	4.5
University of Manchester/UMIST	4.5
University of Bath/University of Bristol	3.75
University of Birmingham/University of Warwick	3
University of Cambridge/The Babraham Institute	3
University of Cardiff/University of Wales College of Medicine	3
Imperial College, London	3
King's College London/Queen Mary and Westfield College London	3
London Business School/King's College London/Queen Mary and Westfield College/University College London	3
University of Oxford	3
University of Strathclyde/University of Glasgow	3
University College London/Institute of Cancer Research/Cancer Research Campaign Technologies Ltd./School of Pharmacy, University of London/Imperial Cancer Research Fund/Royal Veterinary College	3
University of Edinburgh/The Moredun Foundation/The Roslin Biotechnology Centre/The UK Astronomy Technology Centre of PPARC/Edinburgh Station of the British Geological Survey	2.25
Queen's University Belfast/University of Ulster	2
University of Aberystwyth/The Institute of Grassland and Environmental Research (IGER)	1

The total value of proposed awards is £45 million. Awards are subject to the applicants' compliance with all competition requirements. For awards to consortia of institutions, the university leading the bid is listed first.

Late Payment

Mr. Alexander: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the response by business to legislation on the late payment of debt. [71477]

Mr. Wills: Late payment has a devastating impact on Britain's small businesses. This Government are determined to improve the UK's payment culture to ensure that small businesses can thrive and prosper.

The Late Payment of Commercial Debts (Interest) Act 1998 commenced on 1 November 1998 and provides small suppliers with a statutory right to claim interest on late paid bills and transfers the cost of late payment from the supplier to the late payer.

My Department is working with the Credit Management Research Group at Leeds University to monitor the legislation, although it is too early to draw conclusions about its impact. However, evidence from the recent Grant Thornton International/Business Strategies Ltd. survey has shown an improvement in the time taken by business in the UK to pay its bills. In addition, evidence from other European Countries that have introduced legislation shows that effective legislation can tackle late payment, particularly when supported by other measures.

Mortgages

Valerie Davey: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how he will make the mortgage market more transparent for the benefit of consumers. [76352]

Mr. Byers: Consumers need clear and comparable information about loan offers so they can identify the best deal. I shall be working with my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer on a package of measures to bring greater clarity, comparability and fairness to the marketing of mortgages and other types of credit.

We will shortly specify the way in which the Annual Percentage Rate (APR) for low-start and discount mortgages is calculated to require it to reflect the interest and total charges throughout the entire life of the loan. This will ensure that lenders advertise these products on a basis which will permit consumers to compare more easily the cost of one offer with another.

In the next two months, we shall also consult on proposals to limit the circumstances in which interest rates other than the APR can be shown in credit advertisements and pre-contractual information to those in which alternative interest rates give information which is of real use to consumers in choosing between products.

We are also consulting on a proposal to require warnings such as "Your home is at risk if you do not keep up repayments on a mortgage or other loan secured on it" to be shown in all pre-contractual information. This change will ensure that such warnings are included in brochures, pre-contractual letters and other documents which set out details of loan offers. If we implement this change, we shall remove the requirement for such warnings on advertisements between programmes on radio, television and cinema where they seem to be less useful for consumers.

We will shortly implement an EU Directive which requires only one formula to calculate the APR to be used throughout the European Union. This will enable consumers to make easy comparisons between different loan offers from lenders throughout Europe.

We will also extend the scope for bodies in addition to the Director General of Fair Trading to take injunctive action under the Unfair Terms in Consumer Contracts Regulations 1994. Regulators, including the Financial Services Authority, as well as consumer bodies will receive these powers.

Over the next year, we will consult on further measures to improve consumer protection.

I am concerned that the current provisions on extortionate credit in the Consumer Credit Act 1974 do not adequately safeguard vulnerable consumers against the charging of unjust interest rates. DTI has commissioned research on which we shall base proposals to improve consumer protection in this crucial area.

We will also consult on a proposal to change Regulations on the terms on which loans are settled early, and to ensure that consumers know before they take out the loan the terms on which they can settle it. We propose to replace the Rule of 78 with a simpler formula which will be fair and equitable for consumers in a range of circumstances. We also propose to require reasonable indications of the terms of early settlement to be given in pre-contractual information so that consumers have another measure with which they can compare offers.

We will also review the regulation of credit advertising with the aim of making the regulations simpler and more sharply focused on requiring informative and truthful advertising.

Finally, we shall review the practice of exempting named mortgage lenders from the requirement to make regulated agreements under the Consumer Credit Act.

British Ski Instructors

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations he has received on the ability of British ski instructors to offer ski courses in France; and if he will make a statement. [74402]

Mr. Ian McCartney: My Department has received representations from the British Association of Ski Instructors (BASI), and from individual ski instructors, about difficulties which British-qualified ski instructors have been experiencing when trying to work in France on the basis of the their British qualifications. The Government have been pursuing this matter with the French authorities over the past year. Progress has been slower than we would have wished, but BASI are now talking to representatives of French ski instructors, with the aim of developing a joint technical test. This may offer the prospect of significant progress towards resolving this issue. My Department will, however, continue to keep in close touch with BASI on developments.

World Trade Agreement (Genetically Modified Foodstuffs)

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will publish those parts of the World Trade Agreement that prevent the United Kingdom, or any member state of the European Community from restricting the import of foodstuffs from the United States of America, solely on the grounds of their genetically modified character; the date and place when the agreement was concluded; the names and status of those persons negotiating and signing that agreement on behalf of the United Kingdom; and when that part relating to the import of such foods was considered by Parliament. [73723]

Mr. Wilson: Approval of genetically modified foodstuffs for importation into the EU is governed by EU legislation, specifically the Novel Foods Regulation (258/97/EC). The principles of this Regulation adhere to the WTO Agreement on Application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures, which recognises the right of members to take measures necessary for the protection of human, animal or plant health but requires that any trade

measures are based on scientific principles and are not maintained without sufficient scientific evidence. This agreement formed part of the WTO Agreement which concluded the Uruguay round of multilateral trade negotiations on 15 December 1993. The WTO Agreement was negotiated by the European Commission in consultation with EC member states under the provisions of the EC Treaties. The Agreement was signed on behalf of the United Kingdom by Mr. Tim Sainsbury in Marrakesh on 15 April 1994. Under the Ponsonby rule, the Agreement was laid before Parliament in May 1994 and debated on 14 June 1994, *Official Report,* columns 521–601. The United Kingdom's instrument of Ratification to the WTO Agreement was deposited with the GATT Legal Adviser on 30 December 1994. For the EC, the WTO Agreement was accepted by means of a Council decision and assent given by the European Parliament. The Agreement entered into force on 1 January 1995. The main WTO Agreement was published as Treaty Series No. 57 of 1996 (Cm 3277), and the Agreement on Application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures as No. 54 of 1996 (Cm 3275). The UK's certified copy of the WTO Agreement resides in the Public Record Office.

Departmental Cash Limits

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what changes will be made to the cash limits for his Department. [76351]

Mr. Byers: Further to my answer given to the House on 11 February 1999, *Official Report,* columns *412–13,* and subject to Parliamentary approval of the necessary revised supplementary estimate, the cash limit for Class V, Vote 2—Department of Trade and Industry: Science—will be increased by £15,000,000 from £1,367,459,000 to £1,382,459,000. This net increase results from additional provision of £15,000,000 for part funding of the University Challenge Fund.

This net increase will be charged to the reserve and will not therefore add to the planned total of public expenditure.

Indonesia

Mr. Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the export credit guarantee cover given to non-military exports to Indonesia since May 1997. [74411]

Mr. Wilson: Since 1 May 1997 ECGD has issued guarantees in respect of two civil projects in Indonesia.

These were, firstly, for power station extensions being undertaken by Allen Power of the Outer Islands Diesel Generating Plant and, secondly, for Reyrolle's provision of 500 KV transmission lines between Ungaran and Klaten and of a 500–150 KV sub-station at Klaten.

Confectionery (Toys)

Ms Stuart: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) which manufacturers of confectionery containing toys have provided instructions for action to be taken in the event of ingestion of such toys or their container; [73825]

(2) if he will consult consumer, safety and medical experts on the risks to children of choking on toys placed inside confectionery and the steps necessary to prevent it. [73827]

Dr. Howells: I am not aware of any manufacturers providing medical advice on action to be taken in the event of toys being ingested. All toys supplied in the UK—no matter how they are packaged—must meet the safety requirements of the Toys (Safety) Regulations 1995 which implement harmonised European requirements. Research undertaken by DTI has established that the main causes of choking involving children under three years of age are sweets, coins and food objects—none of which is required to be accompanied by medical advice.

DTI has had the issue of choking accidents involving young children under review for some time; has considered information published in various papers; has considered various comments received; and has commissioned research on accident data collected by the Home Accident Surveillance System. However, I would of course welcome any new data or results of research that consumer organisations may be aware of.

Ms Stuart: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) which reporting category in the HASS system specifically covers choking on, or ingestion of, toys placed by manufacturers inside confectionery; [73826]

(2) which manufacturers of confectionery containing toys have asked his Department for product-specific case listings from the Home and Leisure Accident Surveillance System. [73828]

Dr. Howells: Injuries involving toys or parts of toys are recorded under category 21 of table 10 in the Home Accident Surveillance System report. Details of accidents, including case listings, can also be extracted from the database according to the accident mechanism, e.g. choking. The various ways in which HASS can be interrogated ensures that all the home accidents treated by the A&E departments of the participating hospitals can be accessed.

Data from HASS records are freely available on request to manufacturers, organisations and individuals with an interest in consumer safety. Comprehensive lists of those requesting information are not maintained.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Task Forces

Dr. Tony Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish a list of (1) task forces and (2) policy reviews established by his Department since May 1997 which *(a)* had external members recruited by way of public advertisement, and details of any person so appointed and *(b)* engaged in public consultation exercises, and the form that these took. [74461]

Mr. Straw: No task forces or policy reviews established since May 1997 have had external members

recruited by public advertisement. Most task forces and policy reviews are short-term, established to give thorough consideration to important and difficult issues. External members are invited to take part in some reviews and task forces because they are able to contribute to specific experience and expertise. In such cases, public advertising would be inappropriate and disproportionate.

Since 1 October 1998, appointments to those task forces which qualify for classification as advisory non-departmental public bodies have come within the remit of the Commissioner of Public Appointments.

Consultation exercises were associated with the following task forces and policy reviews:

Review	*Form of consultation*
Review to Consider Permanent UK-Wide Counter Terrorism Legislation	Consultation document published 17 December 1998.
Interdepartmental Review of Police Pensions	Consultation document published on 31 March 1998.
Working Party on Electoral Procedures	Concerned the sale of the electoral register and not about the Working Party's remit as a whole. News release published on 3 August 1998 invited initial responses and is being followed up by meetings and correspondence with interested parties.
Review of Family Court Welfare	A joint consultation document from the Home Office, Lord Chancellor's Department and Department of Health was published in July 1998.
Review of the Interdepartmental Working Group on Preventing Unsuitable People from Working with Children and Abuse of Trust	Written public consultation in August/September 1998, supported by seminars. Further written consultation in January/February 1999.
Review of Immigration and Asylum Appeals	Consultation paper issued on 13 July 1998.
Review on Measures on Community Safety	Consultation paper published September 1997.
Prisons-Probation Review	Consultation paper issued 6 August 1998.
Review of Anti-Social Behaviour	Consultation paper issued September 1997.
Sex Offences Review	Consultation leaflet issued on 25 January 1999.
Interdepartmental Review of Vulnerable or Intimidated Witnesses	Views invited by letter and conference. The report of the Review's Working Group was published for consultation on 10 June 1998.
Review of Arrangements for Confiscation of Criminal Assets	Report issued for consultation in November 1998.
Working Group considering a possible new offence of misuse of public office	Expected to report later in 1999 via a consultation paper.
Task Force on Youth Justice	Draft guidance on establishing youth offending teams published for consultation in February 1998.

Decision 276/1999/EC

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department to what the nineteenth recital of Decision 276/1999/EC refers; and what is his Department's policy in respect of it. [75055]

Kate Hoey: The 19th recital states that the Community action plan on promoting safer use of the internet by combating illegal and harmful content on global networks should take account of the work accomplished in the field of justice and home affairs. The Government support this proposal, which closely follows our own approach to this issue.

Europol

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans his Department has to make use of Council Act 1999/c26/01 of 3 November 1998 with regard to the supply and sharing of and access to Europol material; what data the United Kingdom have already supplied to (i) the Europol Agency and (ii) the Schengen authorities; for what reason storage is required under the Act; if Article 10.4 enables Europol to carry out intelligence assessments in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement. [75056]

Kate Hoey: The Europol Convention entered into force on 1 October 1998. Europol has not yet, however, taken up the full range of its activities. There are two outstanding sets of implementing regulations yet to be agreed and two member states have yet to notify ratification of one of the protocols to the Convention.

Once Europol is fully up and running, our law enforcement agencies will, through the National Criminal Intelligence Service (NCIS), make full use of the criminal intelligence analysis facilities Europol offers. In the meantime, information exchange takes place between the NCIS and United Kingdom liaison officers based at Europol's predecessor the Europol Drugs Unit (EDU).

Article 2 of the Europol Convention sets out the objectives of Europol and Article 3 its tasks. Article 10 and related regulations, all of which have been deposited for scrutiny, set out the circumstances in which data will be collected, processed, used and exchanged. Europol will be able to store only data that are necessary to enable it to carry out its remit. In the case of personal data, prior permission will be needed from Europol's Management Board and from Europol's Independent Data Protection Authority before such data can be collected and stored in an analysis file.

The assessment of information and intelligence relating to serious criminal activity in the United Kingdom is the responsibility of NCIS.

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the planned level of involvement of Europol in internal EU fraud investigations. [75054]

Kate Hoey: Europol's remit does not at present extend to fraud. As far as I am aware, no proposals have been made for Europol to become involved in internal European Union fraud investigations.

Local Crime and Disorder Strategies

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what procedures he has established to ensure that local crime and disorder strategies will be monitored, evaluated and audited for evidence of success; and if he will make a statement. [75247]

Mr. Boateng: The Crime and Disorder Act 1998 requires the responsible authorities—the police and local authorities—to review progress against objectives and targets set in their strategies so as to monitor effectiveness. My Department will continue to work with the Audit Commission, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and other key partners to support the local crime and disorder reduction partnerships in their vital work.

Community Orders

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage of community orders were completed successfully at the latest date for which figures are available, and what were the relevant targets of his Department. [75241]

Mr. George Howarth: The table gives provisional results from 1997, shown against targets for 1997–98. While completions will continue to be collected and published, they are no longer key performance indicators and there are no current targets.

Per cent.

	1997–98 target: to achieve the following completion rates within the framework of the enforcement requirements of National Standards	*1997 results (provisional)*
Probation order	82	85
Community service order	80	78
Supervision order	80	85
Combination order	80	79

Reconviction Rates

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what were the (i) predicted and (ii) actual reconviction rates for persons sentenced to *(a)* prison and *(b)* community orders over the last two years for which figures are available; [75240]

(2) what was the two year reconviction rate, with adjustments for pseudo-reconvictions, for *(a)* community service orders, *(b)* probation orders, *(c)* probation centre with specific activities orders, *(d)* combination orders and *(e)* imprisonment at the latest date for which figures are available. [75239]

Mr. George Howarth: The most recent available information relates to samples of offenders commencing community penalties or discharged from custody in 1994 and in the first quarter of 1995. Results of a comparison between reconviction rates for the two types of disposal were reported in paragraphs 9.25 to 9.27 in "Prison Statistics, England and Wales, 1997".

The following table contains actual and predicted reconviction rates (within two years of commencement of order or discharge from prison) that were used in this analysis:

	Community penalties[1]	*Custody*
1994		
Actual reconviction rate within two years	54	56
Predicted rate[2]	53	59
Actual-Predicted	1	−3
1995 (1st quarter)		
Actual reconviction rate within two years	56	55
Predicted rate[2]	54	58
Actual-Predicted	2	−3

[1] Probation, community service and combination orders

[2] Predicted on the basis of a prediction model applied to community penalty and custody results for a year

The differences between actual and predicted rates do not take account of effect of pseudo-reconvictions. After allowing for the influence of pseudo-reconvictions (effectively a four percentage point adjustment in favour of community penalties) the difference between reconviction rates for those commencing orders or discharged from prison in 1994 was, using unrounded percentages, 0.1 percentage points in favour of custody. This suggests there is currently no discernible difference between reconviction rates for custody and community penalties. The difference for the 1995 samples indicates a similar picture with a difference in favour of custody of one percentage point after the adjustment for predicted rates and pseudo-reconvictions had been made.

The two year reconviction rates for different types of community order and imprisonment are as follows:

	Actual reconviction rate within two years	*Rate adjusted for pseudo-reconvictions*
1994		
Community service—service order	48	41
Probation with probation centre or specified activity requirement	62	57
Other probation	58	52
Combination order	60	55
Custody	56	54
1995 (1st quarter)		
Community service—service order	51	44
Probation with probation centre or specified activity requirement	62	57
Other probation	58	52
Combination order	60	55
Custody	55	53

Community Safety

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what initiatives his Department is undertaking to ensure that other Government departments are identifying areas where they can improve community safety and reduce crime; and if he will make a statement. [75245]

Mr. Boateng: We are working with the Departments of Health and for Education and Employment to produce guidance on how the services for which they are responsible can make a constructive contribution to the work of local crime and disorder reduction partnerships. We will consider what more can be done to ensure that all Departments take account of community safety.

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the Audit Commission report Safety in Numbers, Promoting Community Safety. [75244]

Mr. Boateng: I welcome the Audit Commission report; it provides a valuable analysis of progress to date and we are studying carefully the recommendations which it contains. We have worked closely with the Audit Commission and other key partners in developing the local crime and disorder reduction partnerships. We intend to continue that co-operation so as to ensure that the initiative is effective.

Police (Civilian Staff)

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many (i) civilian staff and (ii) traffic wardens were employed in each police force area on *(a)* the last date for which figures are available and *(b)* 31 March 1997. [75246]

Mr. Boateng: The latest available information is set out in the table.

Civilian and traffic warden strength [1], by Police Force, as at 31 March 1997 and 30 September 1998

	Civilians [2]		*Traffic wardens*	
	31 March 1997	*30 September 1998*	*31 March 1997*	*30 September 1998*
Avon and Somerset	1,439	1,435	108	101
Bedfordshire	484	513	31	26
Cambridgeshire	607	572	39	37
Cheshire	735	786	34	33
City of London	347	334	0	0
Cleveland	609	585	22	24
Cumbria	451	462	21	19
Derbyshire	723	802	50	52
Devon and Cornwall	1,159	1,224	114	117
Dorset	615	691	61	46
Durham	583	551	22	21
Dyfed-Powys	322	346	20	16
Essex	1,199	1,260	136	123
Gloucestershire	435	451	33	35
Greater Manchester	2,612	2,616	208	172
Gwent	452	491	34	32
Hampshire	1,316	1,381	77	72
Hertfordshire	818	827	72	49
Humberside	718	797	60	58
Kent	1,384	1,502	58	36
Lancashire	1,126	1,242	115	109
Leicestershire	755	766	79	75
Lincolnshire	521	524	24	25
Merseyside	1,343	1,453	132	105
Metropolitan Police	13,493	12,033	1,383	1,062
Norfolk	603	641	43	42
Northamptonshire	554	608	25	24
Northumbria	1,365	1,430	112	73
North Wales	476	489	18	15
North Yorkshire	520	535	26	27
Nottinghamshire	1,003	995	68	57
South Wales	1,206	1,149	106	105
South Yorkshire	1,291	1,254	80	82
Staffordshire	763	878	37	31
Suffolk	522	595	33	33
Surrey	727	734	30	25
Sussex	1,149	1,216	140	133
Thames Valley	1,825	1,827	117	101
Warwickshire	376	403	12	9
West Mercia	942	979	38	30
West Midlands	2,739	2,605	210	204
West Yorkshire	2,234	2,281	136	123
Wiltshire	475	542	21	17
NCS	n/a	306	0	0
NCIS	n/a	265	0	0
Total strength	53,011	53,370	4,181	3,570

[1] Figures rounded to the nearest full-time equivalent

[2] Staff seconded to National Crime Squad (NCS) and National Criminal Intelligence Service (NCIS) are not separately identified but are included in the force figures

Crime (Costs)

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate his Department has made of the annual total cost of crime in each region of England and Wales, and in total in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [75338]

Mr. Boateng: No single measure of the total cost of crime currently exists for England and Wales. But within the context of the crime reduction programme, the Home Office is currently working to develop an estimate of the cost of crime, including the full costs to the victim.

Outside Consultants

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State fo the Home Department if he will list the number of times since 1 May 1997 that his Department has employed outside consultants indicating in each case *(a)* the task and *(b)* the cost of the contract. [75449]

Mr. Straw: Information on the number of times since 1 May 1997 that the Department has employed outside consultants, the tasks they undertook and the cost of each contract is not recorded centrally and could be obtained at short notice only at disproportionate cost.

However, a planned exercise will take place in April this year to gather information on the Department's use of consultants and it is expected that the data will be available during May. I will place this information in the Library when it is available, and will write to the hon. Member at the same time.

Lighter Fuel Refills

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what age limit he proposes to introduce for the purchase of lighter fuel refills; [75469]

(2) when he proposes to announce new regulations covering the sale of lighter fuel refills. [75468]

Mr. George Howarth: We are still considering the responses to the consultation paper on sales of gas lighter refills.

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what publicity he plans to produce on the dangers of lighter fuel refills; and if he will make a statement. [75470]

Ms Jowell: I have been asked to reply.

The Health Education Authority includes information on the risk of volatile substance abuse, including lighter refills, in its general publicity material and information leaflets on drugs misuse.

In addition, it is planning a publicity campaign targeted at retailers to raise awareness of the issue of volatile substance abuse. It will also inform retailers of their legal responsibilities when selling products that could be used for the purpose of volatile substance abuse.

Wheel Clampers

Ms Moran: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to regulate wheel clampers; and if he will make a statement. [75259]

Mr. Boateng: In the transport White Paper "A new deal for Transport; Better for Everyone", we announced our intention to introduce regulation of wheel clamping on private land as part of a package of statutory measures to regulate the private security industry as a whole. I intend to bring forward firm proposals for regulating the private security industry, and will be making an announcement to that effect soon.

Immigration

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to acknowledge the application of Mrs. Devi Singh-Clark for a residence visa on 16 November 1998 and to return her and her husband's passports. [75645]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: I regret that we are unable to identify the application of Mrs. Devi Singh-Clark from the details supplied by the hon. Member. If the hon. Member wishes to write to me giving Mrs. Devi Singh-Clark's date of birth and nationality and, if possible, her Home Office reference number, I will be able to provide him with the information requested.

Deaths in Custody

Mr. Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to review the procedure for disclosure in inquest cases to take account of the recommendations in the Annual Report of the Police Complaints Authority 1995–96 regarding deaths in police custody and the recommendations of the Parliamentary Ombudsman in the case of Kenneth Severin (C993/97 and A27/99). [75884]

Mr. Boateng: Guidance is shortly to be issued to Chief Officers of Police about the disclosure of documentary evidence to interested parties in advance of inquest hearings which concern deaths in police custody. The guidance advises that disclosure should be normal practice in all cases of deaths in police custody, as well as deaths arising from fatal road crashes involving the police.

The Prison Service has reviewed its practice in relation to investigations into deaths in prison custody, as a result of which it proposes to investigate any death occurring after 1 April 1999 on the basis of disclosure, before the inquest, to those whom the Coroner believes to have a proper interest in preparing for it.

Mr. Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will review whether the policy of the Prison Service in relation to disclosure of internal inquiry reports is in accordance with the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information; and if he will make a statement. [75890]

Mr. George Howarth: The Prison Service has reviewed its practice in relation to investigations into deaths in prison custody, as a result of which it proposes to investigate any death occurring on or after 1 April on the basis of disclosure, before the inquest, to those whom the Coroner believes to have a proper interest in preparing for it. This disclosure must not, of course, compromise the inquest or any criminal proceeding or infringe the legal rights of witnesses. Each case will be reviewed in accordance with the code.

Mr. Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will release to the family of the deceased the internal Prison Service inquiry report into the recent death at HMP Belmarsh of Peter Knox. [75892]

Mr. George Howarth: The report has been received by the director of dispersal prisons, who commissioned it. He will review the family's request under the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information, and in consultation with the Coroner. Members of the family have met the senior investigating officer who carried out this investigation. She has passed their specific concerns to the director.

Mr. Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions he has had with the Prisons Ombudsman regarding complaints about deaths in prison custody and the rights of a deceased person's family; and if he will make a statement. [75893]

Mr. George Howarth: The Prisons Ombudsman meets Home Office Ministers on a regular basis to discuss a range of issues. An internal Home Office review, which reported in November 1998, considered whether the Prisons Ombudsman's terms of reference should be extended to include the investigation of complaints relating to deaths in prison custody. The report recommended that a decision on this issue should be deferred until the Prison Service had established its policy on the disclosure of its internal investigation reports.

A protocol allowing pre-inquest disclosure of investigation reports to properly interested parties is to be introduced on 1 April. We intend to reconsider whether the Prisons Ombudsman's remit should include deaths in custody once the impact of this protocol has been properly assessed.

Mr. Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action he has taken or proposes to take following the publication of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration's reports (C993/97 and A27/99) on his investigation into the complaint from the family of the late Kenneth Severin. [75889]

Mr. George Howarth: The Prison Service has accepted the criticisms made by the Parliamentary Commissioner (Reports C993/97 and A27/99). In his reports, the Commissioner acknowledges the improvements in procedures which were made in the light of the three tragic deaths following restraint which occurred in 1995. Good progress has been made both locally and nationally by the Prison Service in improving control and restraint procedures, and improvements have been made at Belmarsh. I wish to acknowledge the contribution which the Parliamentary Commissioner's investigation and report has made to these.

The Prison Service has accepted the Commissioner's judgment that the internal investigation report into Mr. Severin's death should now be made available to the family.

Mr. Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action he has taken following his meeting with the hon. Members for Erith and Thamesmead and for Bristol, East (Ms Corston) on 21 July 1998 concerning the deaths of Kenneth Severin, Alton Manning and Dennis Stevens. [75891]

Mr. George Howarth: My right hon. Friend the Member for Gateshead, East and Washington, West (Ms Quin), the then Minister with responsibility for prisons and probation, met with the hon. Members for Erith and Thamesmead and for Bristol, East (Ms Corston) on 21 July 1998 to discuss their concerns about the deaths of Kenneth Severin, Alton Manning and Dennis Stevens. Since that meeting, the Prison Service has continued to work on a range of measures to improve control and restraint training, investigations into deaths in prison custody and the handling of relatives following a death.

A full review of policy on control and restraint procedures was carried out last year. A revised training syllabus for basic training is nearing completion which reinforces instructions that officers will release prisoners from restraint holds as quickly as possible. Improved monitoring and auditing of the use of force will be adopted by the introduction of a new Prison Service Order on the use of force, which is shortly to be issued.

In the autumn of last year, a Prison Service instruction was issued reinforcing standardised procedures to be adopted in investigations into deaths in custody. At the same time, a Prison Service Order was issued outlining guidance and good practice in the sensitive handling of bereaved relatives during the traumatic aftermath of a death in custody. This work will continue with moves towards greater openness in pre-inquest disclosure of information to families from 1 April this year.

Following the recent decision by the Crown Prosecution Service that no charges should be laid in connection with the death of Mr. Alton Manning at Blakenhurst in 1995, the Prison Service has commissioned an investigation as to the reinstatement or revocation of the certification of the prison custody officers involved.

The death of Mr. Dennis Stevens at Dartmoor in 1995 is under investigation by the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration following a complaint by Inquest on behalf of the family.

Stephen Lawrence Inquiry Report

Sir Norman Fowler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if *(a)* he and *(b)* his officials had seen a copy of the edition of *The Sunday Telegraph* of 21 February containing a number of paragraphs from the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry report before he sought an injunction against that paper; and if he will make a statement. [75819]

Mr. Straw: No. Neither I nor my officials had seen a copy of *The Sunday Telegraph* of 21 February before I sought an injunction against that paper. I explained the circumstances and the information available to me, which led me to seek an injunction, in my oral statement to the House on 22 February 1999, *Official Report*, columns 21–34.

Sir Norman Fowler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department at what time on 20 February he informed the Minister of State, Home Office, the hon. Member for Brent, South (Mr. Boateng), that he intended to seek an injunction against *The Sunday Telegraph*; and if he will make a statement. [75817]

Mr. Straw: The Minister of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, South (Mr. Boateng), was informed by a Private Secretary at around 8.30pm on Saturday 20 February that I intended to seek an injunction against *The Sunday Telegraph*.

Sir Norman Fowler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department at what time on 20 February he informed the Prime Minister's Office he intended to seek an injunction against *The Sunday Telegraph*; and if he will make a statement. [75816]

Mr. Straw: The Prime Minister's Office was informed around 7pm on Saturday 20 February that I intended to seek an injunction against *The Sunday Telegraph*.

Sir Norman Fowler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department at what time on 20 February he applied for an injunction against *The Sunday Telegraph*; and if he will make a statement. [75818]

Mr. Straw: The application was made by telephone by Counsel acting on my behalf between 8pm and 8.15pm on the evening of Saturday 20 February. I made an oral statement to the House on 22 February 1999, *Official Report*, columns 21–34.

Mentally Ill Offenders

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the number of offenders in each year for the last 10 years for which figures are available who have been directed under section 39 of the Mental Health Act 1983 for appropriate hospital treatment but have remained in prison. [74798]

Mr. George Howarth: The available information relates to receptions of persons into prisons in England and Wales under section 37 of the Mental Health Act 1983, and is given in the table.

Reception of persons into prisons in England and Wales under Section 37 of the Mental Health Act 1983, 1989 to 1998

Year	Number of receptions into prisons
1989	165
1990	159
1991	121
1992	[1]—
1993	148
1994	271
1995	202
1996	216
1997	196
1998[2]	192

[1] Not available
[2] Provisional

Mrs. D. J. L. Sidey

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will ensure the return to Mrs. D. J. L. Sidey of 4 Hoskings Court, Strode Road, Buckfastleigh, South Devon TQ11 0PF, before the end of March of her passports currently at Lunar House, Croydon, including her old Chinese passport No. 2041144; [75205]

(2) if he will ensure that, when Mrs. D. J. L. Sidey of 4 Hoskings Court, Strode Road, Buckfastleigh, South Devon TQ11 0PF, receives her new passport from the Immigration and Nationality Department it is endorsed with the grant of indefinite leave to remain. [75204]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Mrs. Sidey's new and expired passports were returned to her on 1 March 1999 unendorsed, as requested in the letter of 5 February 1999.

Prisoners (Drug and Alcohol Rehabilitation)

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the *(a)* nature, *(b)* content and *(c)* success rate of (i) alcoholism and (ii) drug rehabilitation programmes for prisoners. [74799]

Mr. George Howarth: The Prison Service currently provides a range of rehabilitation programmes applicable to both drug and alcohol addiction. These include Minnesota 12-step, cognitive behavioural and relapse prevention programmes, in addition to longer-term therapeutic communities.

Although the programmes vary in structure, content and delivery, they all incorporate educational and counselling group-work forms of therapy. Community drug agencies are involved in the development and delivery of all drug rehabilitation programmes and work in partnership with prison staff.

Independent evaluation of the first tranche of drug rehabilitation programmes found completion rates to be broadly comparable to those achieved in the community. The Prison Service requires all rehabilitation programmes to gain central accreditation by April 2002 and, over the next three years, will commission independent research to assess the longer-term effects of rehabilitation upon offending and drug misuse.

Prison Medical Service

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to publish the joint report with the Health Department on the Prison Medical Service. [74800]

Mr. George Howarth: Department of Health and Home Office Ministers have been considering carefully the review's findings and recommendations, in consultation with other Ministers with an interest. I anticipate the Government will be in a position to make an announcement and publish the report shortly.

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what estimate he has made of the number of prison medical officers and doctors needed by the Prison Service with a diploma in psychiatric medicine or a more advanced qualification; [74802]

(2) what estimate he has made of the number of appropriately qualified prison medical officers needed for the Service; and if he will make a statement. [74804]

Mr. George Howarth: About 230 full-time or part-time doctors currently provide primary care in Prison Service establishments. There are 25 vacancies. The most recent survey indicates that at least 20 doctors have a postgraduate qualification in psychiatric medicine.

The issues of organisation, staffing and qualifications of staff working in prison health care are among those considered by a joint Prison Service and NHS Executive Working Group. The Group's Report is currently under consideration by the Government, and it is planned to publish the Report and to make an announcement shortly.

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people have gained the Nottingham University Diploma in Prison Medicine since its inception; and what proportion of diploma holders are currently working in the Prison Service. [74803]

Mr. George Howarth: Nine prison doctors have graduated in the two-year Diploma in Prison Medicine since it started at the University of Nottingham in 1996. I was present when they all graduated in December 1998. They are all currently in the employment of the Prison Service.

Prisoners (NHS Hospitals)

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners *(a)* on remand and *(b)* sentenced are awaiting transfer to an NHS hospital. [74801]

Mr. George Howarth: On 4 March 1999, the Mental Health Unit of the Home Office, which authorises transfers to hospital exercising the warrant of the Secretary of State, had 20 cases of remand prisoners on which medical reports had been submitted by prisons recommending transfer to hospital under section 48 of the Mental Health Act 1983. On the same date, the Unit also had 18 cases of sentenced prisoners on whom medical reports had been submitted by prisons recommending transfer to hospital under section 47 of the Mental Health Act 1983.

Select Committee Reports

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if *(a)* he, *(b)* civil servants in his Department or *(c)* special advisers in his Department have (i) had sight of drafts of select committee reports, in whole or in part, or (ii) been informed of conclusions of select committee reports prior to their publication by the select committees. [75870]

Mr. Straw: Apart from the transcripts of evidence given by Ministers and officials, and embargoed copies of reports supplied in the normal way by Select Committees under House of Commons Standing Orders, there have been no instances of members of Select Committees giving me drafts of Select Committee reports, or of parts of reports including their conclusions, before publication. Nor, to the best of my knowledge, have there been any occasions on which members of Select Committees have given such material to civil servants or special advisers in my Department.

Task Forces

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what *(a)* reviews, *(b)* task forces and *(c)* advisory groups have been established by his Department since 1 May 1997; what costs they have incurred to date; and what reports they have published. [71509]

Mr. Straw *[pursuant to his reply, 25 February 1999, c. 383–88]*: I should like to update the information provided on Task Forces and Reviews, established by my Department since 1 May 1997. Some other, previous inaccuracies have also been corrected.

Review	*Actual report date*	*Anticipated report date*	*Comments*	
Review of prison drugs strategy	May 1998	—	—	—
Independent commission on Voting Systems	29 October 1998	—	—	—
Working group considering a possible new offence of misuse of public office	—	—	Expects to report later this year via a consultation paper.	—
Review of the Prison Service Quantum project	February 1999	—	—	Made recommendations to enable the Prison Service to meet its business objectives through more efficient use of IT and processes.
Review of prison investigation strategy	Reported to Ministers in Autumn 1998	—	New procedures expected to be implemented in Summer 1999.	—
Prison Service quinquennial review	—	—	Set up in August 1998 to review performance of the agency and alternative options for delivery of service. Has not yet reported.	—
Review of the operation of release of prisoners on temporary licence	—	—	Started August 1997 and is ongoing.	—
Retail crime reduction action team	—	—	Established in May 1998 to cut/reduce retail crime and develop intervention strategies which prevent the occurrence of retail crime.	—

Review	Actual report date	Anticipated report date	Comments	
Vehicle crime reduction action team	—	—	Established in September 1998 to achieve the Home Secretary's target for a 30% reduction in vehicle crime over a five-year period from September 1998.	—
Review of the TOTE	—	April 1999	To look at the scope of greater private involvement in the Horserace Totalisator Board (the TOTE).	—

Review	Actual report date	Anticipated report date	Terms of reference
Working party on electoral procedures	—	—	Established in January 1998 to review current electoral procedures.
Task Force			
Human Rights Task Force	—	—	Joint/Government/Officials/non-government organisation group announced at Commons third reading of the Human Rights Bill on 21 October 1988.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Departmental Expenditure

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what *(a)* reviews, *(b)* task forces and *(c)* advisory groups have been established by her Department since 1 May 1997; what costs they have incurred to date; and what reports they have published. [71513]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The information for the Northern Ireland Office and the Northern Ireland Departments is as follows:

Reviews/task forces/advisory groups	Costs (£)	Reports published
NIO		
Criminal Injuries Compensation Review	56,170	—
NI Drugs Strategy Review	51,945	—
Independent Commission on Policing	1,067,685	—
Review of the Criminal Justice System in NI	147,439	Consultation Paper 27 August 1998
Review of Information Services	10,998	November 1997
DED		
New Deal in NI Task Force	5,131	—
NI Skills Task Force	—	—
Review of Training Centres and Further Education Colleges	1,961	September 1998
Review of Industrial Development Support Services: NI	8,192	—
Working Group to plan for a single NI Equality Commission	2,540	Consultation paper 2 February 1999
Fundamental Review of the Economic Development Strategy in NI	144,000	—
Implementation of the EU Directive on the Internal Market in Electricity	32,000	—
Advisory Group on the NI Science Park	1,168	—
University for Industry (NI) Advisory Group	1,663	—
DENI		
Youth Service Policy Review Group	60,400	(i) Initial considerations December 1997 (ii) Youth Service Policy Review, a Consultation Report, October 1998
Working Group on the Strategic Promotion of Education for Mutual Understanding in schools	—	—
Millennium Volunteers Advisory Group	—	—
Working Party on Integrated Education	—	Towards a Culture of Tolerance: Integrating Education December 1998
Transformation Working Group	—	—
Strategic Management Group for Education Tehcnology in Schools	43,198	—
Further Education Consultative Committee	—	—
DHSS		
Review of the 1993 Strategy for the Support of the Voluntary Sector and for Community Development in NI	11,689	—
Review of the District Councils' Community Services Programme	24,000	—
The NI Strategy on Alcohol Misuse—A Policy Development Project	2,653	—

Reviews/task forces/advisory groups	Costs (£)	Reports published
Review of Ambulance Provision in NI	12,000	—
Review of Services for Acutely Ill Children	1,700	September 1998
Review of Cardiology Services in NI	3,937	—
Nursing & Midwifery Workforce Advisory Group	—	—
NI Advisory Committee on Blood Safety	—	—
DOE		
Review of the NI Transport Holding Company	10,000	Announcement in Parliament 18 September 1998
Review of Trust Ports in NI	50,000	Announcement in Parliament 12 May 1998

[1] This information is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Hospitality

Mr. Moss: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much was spent on hospitality and entertainment in each month of 1998, broken down by department. [73893]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The information for the Northern Ireland Office and the Northern Ireland Departments is as follows:

£

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
NIO	25,536	20,872	21,364	17,097	21,266	25,276	44,435	18,987	19,466	38,698	25,206	21,431
DANI	2,513	7,283	2,313	12,261	7,781	7,518	4,779	2,114	2,207	26	3,666	3,371
DED	24,734	14,526	33,241	9,271	17,970	15,731	24,988	8,851	14,275	18,269	13,493	13,102
DENI	6,277	4,462	608 cr	3,009	1,517	1,206	2,248	524	3,395	2,756	1,777	1,993
DFP	2,850	4,988	9,995	4,450	4,010	10,333	4,436	2,511	10,164	3,341	5,568	6,641
DHSS	10,117	13,830	16,720	5,337	7,080	10,890	6,058	2,944	5,869	6,444	7,101	8,786
DOE	6,911	10,965	12,974	8,350	14,563	17,898	10,717	9,125	7,415	12,675	9,104	14,910
	78,938	76,926	95,999	59,775	74,187	88,852	97,661	45,056	62,791	82,209	65,915	70,234

Note:
Figures cover both Ministerial and Departmental spend.

Paramilitary Violence

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, pursuant to her answer to the hon. Member for East Londonderry (Mr. Ross) of 4 February 1999, *Official Report*, columns *698–702*, if she will set out the circumstances of the deaths in 1998 due to the security situation. [74009]

Mr. Ingram: Of the 17 deaths attributed to loyalists: three were the Quinn children, who died as a result of a petrol bomb attack upon their home; one was a police officer, who died as a result of injuries received in a blast bomb attack; one person was murdered by Loyalist prisoners whilst on remand for terrorist offences; and the remaining twelve victims all died as a result of shooting incidents.

Of the 37 deaths attributed to Republicans, twenty-nine were as a result of the Omagh bombing and eight died as a result of shooting incidents.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) if she will list for the week ended 27 February the number of *(a)* punishment beatings and *(b)* punishment shootings which took place in Northern Ireland indicating how many in each category were committed by (i) Loyalist and (ii) Republican groups; [75270]

(2) if she will list for the week ended 27 February the number of violent incidents involving paramilitary groups which took place in Northern Ireland and indicate how many involved (i) Loyalist and (ii) Republican groups. [75269]

Mr. Ingram: The numbers of security incidents during the period 21 February-27 February are shown.

Shooting incidents: Nil

Bombing incidents: One.

The numbers of casualties as a result of paramilitary-style attacks during the period are as follows:

	Loyalist	Republican
Assaults	2	1
Shootings	0	0
Total	2	1

Notes:
1. Figures may be subject to minor amendment in the light of further information becoming available
2. The bombings cannot as yet be attributed to a grouping

Human Rights Commission

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many members of the outgoing Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights applied for membership of the new Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission; and how many were successful. [75142]

Mr. Paul Murphy: Nine members of the outgoing Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights applied for a Commissioner post in the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission and two were successful.

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what evidence on the statutory requirement regarding representatives in section 53 (3) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 was put before her relating to the list of candidates submitted to her from which to make the selection of Northern Ireland Human Rights Commissioners. [75147]

Mr. Paul Murphy: Of the 154 applicants 23 were interviewed, and the recommendations of the panel were submitted to the Secretary of State. The recommendations took into account the applicants' performance against the key criteria identified for the appointments and the requirements for the Commissioners, as a group, to be representative of the community in Northern Ireland.

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland who were the members of the interview panels for the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission; and how many names were submitted to herself. [75140]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The panel that interviewed candidates for the Chief Commissioner post was chaired by Mr. J. Pilling and that for the other Commissioners by Mr. W. Jeffrey. The other panel members in both cases were Mr. G. Loughran and Mrs. J. Eve. The panels submitted their recommendations on all of those interviewed, 8 in the case of Chief Commissioner and 23 for Commission members.

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many applications for membership of the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission were solicited by her Department; how many of these applications were successful; and how many of the members were proposed or endorsed by outside bodies. [75141]

Mr. Paul Murphy: No candidates for Commissioner posts were solicited by the Department. Five candidates were endorsed by the Irish Government; of those, two were successful. All candidates completed the same application form and all were appointed on merit.

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on what basis she determined that the members of the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission as a group are representative of the community in Northern Ireland. [75146]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The recommendations of the interview panels were submitted to the Secretary of State. These took into account the applicants' performance against the key criteria identified for the appointment and the requirement for the Commission, as a group, to be representative of the community in Northern Ireland.

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what percentage of the members of the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission recorded themselves as being or having been members of *(a)* the SDLP, *(b)* the Ulster Unionist Party and *(c)* the Democratic Unionist Party. [75143]

Mr. Paul Murphy: All applicants for the posts of Commissioners were asked to record their political activity over the past 10 years. One member was declared to have been a member of the SDLP, none of the UUP and none of the DUP.

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what percentage of the members of the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission are legally qualified. [75144]

Mr. Paul Murphy: 66 per cent. of the members of the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission hold legal qualifications.

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what percentage of *(a)* the applicants for and *(b)* those appointed to membership of the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission were recorded as *(a)* Protestants, *(b)* Roman Catholics and *(c)* neither. [75145]

Mr. Paul Murphy: Of the 154 applicants 47 per cent. were recorded as Protestant, 47 per cent. Catholic and 6 per cent. as neither. The religious background of individual candidates is established for monitoring purposes only. It is not the Government's policy to release the affiliation of each member, but we are satisfied that the Commissioners, as a group, are representative of the community in Northern Ireland.

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many application forms were issued for membership of the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission; how many were returned completed; and how many candidates were shortlisted and interviewed. [75139]

Mr. Paul Murphy: 283 forms were issued, 154 completed and returned and 23 candidates were shortlisted and interviewed.

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will make it her policy to ensure that members of the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission display in statements and external public activities the political detachment specified in the job description details provided to applicants for membership of the Commission. [75148]

Mr. Paul Murphy: An extract from the Guidance in Public Appointments in Northern Ireland was included in the information pack for all candidates; it states that

"members of public bodies should not serve as officers carrying out executive duties in any political party".

Stricter limitations apply to full-time members. This guidance is based upon Government policy.

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when the human rights commissions were established in *(a)* the Republic of Ireland and *(b)* Northern Ireland; and if she will make a statement on the implementation of the human rights section of the Belfast Agreement. [75046]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission was established on 1 March 1999. This is the central feature of the additional protections for human rights in Northern Ireland envisaged in the Belfast

Agreement. I understand that the Irish Government are preparing legislation to establish a human rights commission in the Republic of Ireland.

Belfast Agreement

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will work to ensure the implementation of the entire Belfast Agreement by all participating Governments and political parties. [75086]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The Belfast Agreement must be implemented in full. That is the Government's objective and we will work with all the parties and with the Irish Government to ensure that this objective is achieved. We are living up to all our commitments under the Agreement and it is essential that every other party does likewise.

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps the Republic of Ireland has taken, as a signatory to the Belfast Agreement, to demonstrate its respect for the different traditions in the island of Ireland since 10 April 1998; and if she will make a statement. [75042]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I understand the Irish Government have taken a number of steps to demonstrate its respect for the different traditions in the island of Ireland. The Irish Minister for Foreign Affairs has established an Interdepartmental Committee with the task of bringing forward proposals for the development of the site of the Battle of the Boyne. This will be a major project and is expected to be part of the Republic's Millennium Programme. In addition, the Irish Government contributed £150,000 towards the building of a memorial in Messines in Belgium in honour of Irish soldiers from both traditions who died in World War I.

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when the Republic of Ireland introduced the equal status legislation required under the Belfast Agreement; and if she will make a statement. [75043]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I understand that it is the intention of the Irish Government to publish an Equal Status Bill before the end of the Dáil's Easter recess.

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what progress the Republic of Ireland has made in implementing the enhanced employment equality legislation required under the Belfast Agreement; and if she will make a statement. [75044]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I understand that the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform announced on 8 March a new infrastructure for equality which will comprise an Equality Authority and an Office of Equality Investigations. In addition, I understand that he has appointed the members of the Equality Authority Designate. An Employment Equality Act was enacted last year and a target date of 1 September 1999 has been set for its complete implementation.

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when the Republic of Ireland ratified the Council of Europe Framework Convention on National Minorities; and if she will make a statement about the implementation of this section of the Belfast Agreement. [75045]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I understand the Irish Cabinet recently approved proposals for the ratification of the Council of Europe Framework Convention on National Minorities. These proposes will be debated shortly in Dáil Eireann and formal ratification will take place immediately afterwards.

Fisheries Conservancy Board

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will list the members of the Northern Ireland Fisheries Conservancy Board; on what date each was appointed; on what date each is due to retire from membership of the Board; if on the basis of attendance at board meetings, all existing members comply with the requirements of membership; and if she will make a statement. [75053]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The current members of the Fisheries Conservancy Board for Northern Ireland and their appointment and cessation dates are set out in the table. The table includes a list of vacant posts which will be filled during April 1999.

The attendance of one current member at meetings of the Board is in breach of the requirements of Schedule 2 of the Fisheries Act (NI) 1966. This matter is being pursued and an explanation has been sought from the member for his non-attendance.

Name	*Period of appointment*
Fisheries Conservancy Board—Membership of the Board	
Chairman: Dr. J. Parsons	1 May 1996–31 December 1999
Deputy Chairman: Mrs. C. M. Kennedy	1 May 1998–31 December 1999
Commercial Fishing Company Representatives	
Mr. F. G. Conlon	15 May 1996–14 May 2002
Mr. F. Tennyson	15 May 1996–14 May 2002
Sir P. Macnaghten	15 May 1996–14 May 2002
Commercial Fishermen's Representatives	
Rev. O. P. Kennedy BA, BD	15 May 1996–14 May 2002
Mr. R Shaw	15 May 1996–14 May 2002
NIAAC Representatives	
Mr. R. J. Haughey	15 May 1996–14 May 2002
Mr. J. Tisdall	15 May 1996–14 May 2002
Ulster Farmers' Union	
Mr. R. Farrell	15 May 1996–14 May 2002
Mr. Brian H. Johnston	22 June 1997–14 May 2002
Independent Anglers	
Mr. A. Hanna	15 May 1996–14 May 2002
CBI Representative Sport and Recreation Representative	
Dr. Caro-Lynne Ferris	20 April 1998–19 April 2001
Tourism Representative	
Mrs. Annie Courtney	21 April 1998–30 June 2000
District Council Representative	
Mr. Sean McGirr	12 December 1997–30 May 2001
Department of Agriculture Representative	
Mr. J. D. Houston	15 May 1996–14 May 1999
Current vacancies	
1 post vacant from 20 February 1999	
Northern Ireland Angling Advisory Council Representatives	
2 posts vacant from 20 February 1999	
Ulster Farmers' Union Representatives	
1 post vacant from 20 February 1999	
Independent Anglers	
1 post vacant from 20 February 1999	
CBI Representative	
1 post vacant from 20 February 1999	

Police Complaints

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the current staffing of *(a)* the Independent Commission for Police Complaints and *(b)* the RUC's Complaints and Discipline Department; and what is the planned staffing for the Police Ombudsman's Office. [74568]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 8 March 1999]:* The Independent Commission for Police Complaints currently has 17[1] members of staff and a full time Chairman and deputy Chairman and five part time members. The RUC's Complaints and Discipline Department has 115[2] staff. The Government's initial estimate, produced for the purpose of advertising the post of Police Ombudsman, is a staff of about 60. The precise figure is being considered in working groups which include my officials and representatives of the RUC and the Independent Commission for Police Complaints. In addition, we will be consulting the Police Ombudsman when appointed.

[1] (this includes a job share post)

[2] (this includes an ACC who covers two departments and officers temporarily seconded to assist with particular investigations)

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will make a statement on the annual financing of *(a)* the Police Ombudsman's Office, *(b)* the Complaints and Discipline Department of the RUC and *(c)* the Independent Commission for Police Complaints for the next three years. [74567]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 8 March 1999]:* The available information is as follows. The Independent Commission for Police Complaints is to be replaced by the Police Ombudsman's Office and, therefore, there is no forecast for the next three years. The current budget for the Independent Commission for Police Complaints is £883,000.

Although a figure of £3 million has been produced for the Police Ombudsman's office, this was a preliminary estimate for the advertisement of the post of Police Ombudsman. The precise budget of the Police Ombudsman has still to be determined, as have the financial implications of the changes on the Complaints and Discipline Department. (Figures for it were given in answer to my hon. Friend on 25 February 1999, *Official Report*, column *360*.) Both matters are being considered in working groups which include my officials and representatives from the RUC, the Independent Commission for Police Complaints and the Police Authority for Northern Ireland.

The Government have made it clear that they are committed to making the necessary resources available for the office of Police Ombudsman.

TREASURY

Securities Legislation

Ms Lawrence: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what changes he intends to make to the Public Offers of Securities Regulations 1995 and the Companies Act 1985 following the consultation on securities legislation announced on 20 August 1998; and if he will make a statement. [76235]

Ms Hewitt: The Treasury had today made Statutory Instruments amending the Public Offers of Securities Regulations 1995 and commencing certain repeals of provisions in the Companies Act 1985. It is intended that these changes will have effect from 10 May 1999.

Economic and Monetary Union

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the report on Information Requirements in Economic and Monetary Union, as agreed by Ecofin, with regard to its effects on the operation of statistical research in the United Kingdom; what effect the changes in Intrastat will have on the figures for imports and exports between the United Kingdom and the rest of the EU; and what the operational costs of the changes will be. [75057]

Ms Hewitt: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Director of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from John Kidgell to Mr. David Maclean, dated 10 March 1999:

In the absence of the Director of the Office for National Statistics (ONS), I have been asked to reply to your recent parliamentary question regarding the Report on Information Requirements in Economic and Monetary Union.

The ONS welcomes the recommendations in the report, which are in line with the priorities and work programmes of the UK, other Member States and the Commission/Eurostat.

The UK already produces quarterly national accounts, public finance statistics and most short-term statistics in line with the Economic and Financial Committee (EFC) recommendations. Work is in hand to meet requirements for labour market statistics.

Officials at HM Customs and Excise have provided the following information on the changes in Intrastat. The changes proposed for Instrastat would reduce the level of detail currently required on arrivals and dispatches between Member States participating in the euro-area. This would, in principle, allow the present Instrastat system to be simplified and other methods explored to arrive at a suitable output. It is not possible at this stage to say what impact such simplifications might have on the statistics of UK trade with the rest of Europe or what the cost of such changes would be. However, the proposed simplifications are intended to meet the needs of users of information at a European level—many other users, including the UK government and UK business, are likely to continue to need detailed UK trade data. The needs of these users, and of the providers of this data, will be fully taken into account when changes to Intrastat are discussed.

The ONS has in place a system of announcing in advance the release of key statistical outputs. This is in line with the EFC recommendations.

Winter Deaths

Dr. Godman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will breakdown the excess winter deaths in England and Wales for each of the last three years by socio-economic class, indicating *(a)* all ages, *(b)* those aged 60 to 70 years and *(c)* those aged 70 years and over. [75451]

Ms Hewitt: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Director of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Tim Holt to Dr. Norman A. Godman, dated 10 March 1999:

As Director of the Office for National Statistics (ONS), I have been asked to reply to your recent parliamentary question on the breakdown of excess winter deaths.

The information requested is shown in the attached table.

Excess winter deaths are defined as the difference between the number of deaths during the four winter months (December to March) and the average number of deaths during the preceding autumn (August to November) and the following summer (April to July).

Social Class of the deceased is not available for deaths to those aged over 75. However, around 75 per cent. of excess winter deaths occur in this age group. Children under 16 can be assigned to a Social Class at death on the basis of their parent(s) occupation. Deaths in this age group have been excluded. Figures are shown separately for men and women as the distribution of deaths by Social Class differs markedly; this is because occupation is poorly recorded for women at death registration.

Excess winter deaths [1], England and Wales, 1994/95–1996/97

Social Class		*Winter 1994/95*		*Winter 1995/96*		*Winter 1996/97*	
		men	*women*	*men*	*women*	*men*	*women*
Ages 16–74							
I	Professional	190	0	80	20	100	10
II	Managerial and technical occupations	820	140	1,030	370	860	460
IIInm	Skilled occupations—non-manual	230	260	340	590	490	710
IIIm	Skilled occupations—manual	1,810	180	2,130	190	1,660	280
IV	Partly skilled occupations	1,110	100	1,160	370	1,270	520
V	Unskilled occupations	400	180	520	340	600	340
	Armed forces	10	10	60	0	−20	0
	Inadequately described occupations	30	−20	30	10	−20	0
	Unoccupied	210	1,900	110	2,490	300	2,330
	Total	4,810	2,750	5,470	4,380	5,230	4,660
Ages 60–69							
I	Professional	30	−10	10	10	40	0
II	Managerial and technical occupations	250	80	400	120	430	180
IIInm	Skilled occupations—non-manual	110	70	110	160	150	270
IIIm	Skilled occupations—manual	670	60	860	90	700	120
IV	Partly skilled occupations	390	60	400	160	570	210
V	Unskilled occupations	230	60	220	160	180	160
	Armed forces	0	10	30	0	−10	0
	Inadequately described occupations	20	−20	20	10	−10	−10
	Unoccupied	50	570	30	850	70	940
	Total	1,750	870	2,090	1,550	2,120	1,880
Ages 70–74							
I	Professional	70	10	50	10	50	−10
II	Managerial and technical occupations	270	40	350	150	260	120
IIInm	Skilled occupations—non-manual	50	130	170	170	220	280
IIIm	Skilled occupations—manual	580	50	790	80	570	110
IV	Partly skilled occupations	320	50	380	140	510	160
V	Unskilled occupations	160	70	150	70	280	130
	Armed forces	10	0	10	0	10	0
	Inadequately described occupations	10	−10	20	10	−10	10
	Unoccupied	50	740	60	940	60	860
	Total	1,510	1,090	1,970	1,580	1,940	1,660

[1] As the number of excess winter deaths is a crude measure of the increase in mortality associated with winter conditions, the numbers of excess deaths have been rounded to the nearest 10.

HEALTH

District Nurses

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many district nurses were assigned to each health authority for each month in 1997 and 1998. [73479]

Mr. Denham: The information requested is not collected on a monthly basis. The table shows the numbers of district nurses in post by health authority area in England as at 30 September 1997. Information for 1998 is not yet available.

NHS hospital and community health services: total district nurses, by health authority area, in England as at 30 September 1997

Whole time equivalent

Health authority	*Number*
Total District Nurses	11,340
Avon Health Authority	190
Barking and Havering Health Authority	50
Barnet District Health Authority	70
Barnsley Health Authority	40
Bedfordshire Health Authority	110
Berkshire Health Authority	200
Bexley and Greenwich Health Authority	170
Birmingham Health Authority	360
Bradford Health Authority	100
Brent and Harrow Health Authority	60
Bromley Health Authority	50
Buckinghamshire Health Authority	140
Bury and Rochdale Health Authority	130
Calderdale and Kirklees Health Authority	110
Cambridge and Huntingdon Health Authority	70
Camden and Islington Health Authority	40
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Health Authority	60
County Durham Health Authority	70
Coventry Health Authority	50
Croydon Health Authority	50
Doncaster Health Authority	50
Dorset Health Authority	130
Dudley Health Authority	60
Ealing, Hammersmith and Fulham Health Authority	150
East and North Hertfordshire Health Authority	70
East Kent Health Authority	50
East Lancashire Health Authority	160
East London and The City Health Authority	170
East Norfolk Health Authority	130
East Riding Health Authority	100
East Surrey Health Authority	70
East Sussex, Brighton and Hove	210
Enfield and Haringey Health Authority	90
Gateshead and South Tyneside Health Authority	120
Gloucestershire Health Authority	140
Herefordshire Health Authority	50
Isle of Wight Health Authority	40
Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster	160
Kingston and Richmond Health Authority	30
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham	230
Leeds Health Authority	100
Leicestershire Health Authority	130
Lincolnshire Health Authority	130
Liverpool Health Authority	130
Manchester Health Authority	130
Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth Health Authority	200
Morecambe Bay Health Authority	120
Newcastle and North Tyneside Health Authority	120
North and East Devon Health Authority	140
North and Mid Hampshire Health Authority	110
North Cheshire Health Authority	140
North Cumbria Health Authority	80
North Derbyshire Health Authority	70
North Essex Health Authority	250
North Nottinghamshire Health Authority	60
North Staffordshire Health Authority	180
North West Anglia Health Authority	130
North West Lancashire Health Authority	110
North Yorkshire Health Authority	210
Northamptonshire Health Authority	140
Northumberland Health Authority	80
Nottingham Health Authority	240
Oxfordshire Health Authority	100
Portsmouth and South East Hampshire Health Authority	130
Redbridge and Waltham Forest Health Authority	120
Rotherham Health Authority	50
Salford and Trafford Health Authority	170
Sandwell Health Authority	60
Sefton Health Authority	20
Sheffield Health Authority	80
Shropshire Health Authority	160
Solihull Health Authority	50
Somerset Health Authority	90
South and West Devon Health Authority	130
South Cheshire Health Authority	170
South Derbyshire Health Authority	120
South Essex Health Authority	160
South Humber Health Authority	70
South Lancashire Health Authority	110
South Staffordshire Health Authority	50
Southampton and South West Hampshire Health Authority	80
St. Helens and Knowsley Health Authority	60
Stockport Health Authority	210
Suffolk Health Authority	170
Sunderland Health Authority	100
Tees Health Authority	150
Wakefield Health Authority	70
Walsall DA	90
Warwickshire Health Authority	90
West Hertfordshire Health Authority	60
West Kent Health Authority	200
West Pennine Health Authority	110
West Surrey Health Authority	150
West Sussex Health Authority	180
Wigan and Bolton Health Authority	50
Wiltshire Health Authority	140
Wirral Health Authority	70
Wolverhampton Health Authority	50
Worcester and District Health Authority	180

Notes:

Figures exclude learners and agency staff

Figures are rounded to the nearest 10

Due to roundings, totals may not equal the sum of the component parts

Source:

Department of Health Non-medical Workforce Census

Intensive Care

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many nurses were assigned to intensive care units in the NHS in each month of 1997 and 1998. [73481]

Mr. Denham: The information requested is not available centrally.

Midwives

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many qualified midwives were employed in the NHS in each of the last 20 years. [73478]

Mr. Denham: The figures requested are shown in the table.

NHS Hospital and Community Health Services
Qualified midwives, by year, from 1977 to 1997, in England
Whole time equivalents

Year	*Qualified midwives*
1977	15,183
1978	14,774
1979	15,382
1980	15,705
1981	16,272
1982	16,486
1983	17,320
1984	17,830
1985	18,430
1986	18,850
1987	19,320
1988	19,290
1989	19,420
1990	20,170
1991	19,610
1992	20,240
1993	19,510
1994	19,240
1995	18,292
1996	18,548
1997	18,310

Notes:
1. Figures are rounded to nearest ten.
2. Figures exclude learners and agency staff.
3. Data for years prior to 1982 relate to December, while those for subsequent years are staff in post on September 30.
4. The number of full-time hours was reduced from 40 to 37.5 during 1980 and the 37.5 hour week became mandatory on 31 March 1981. This means that figures for whole time equivalents before 1980 are not directly comparable with those for subsequent years.
5. Due to a change in classification in 1995 for collecting data, from pay scale to occupation code, 1995, 1996 and 1997 figures are non-comparable with earlier years.
6. From 1995, figures for qualified midwives include midwives teaching midwifery and managers in the maternity services area of work. Managers may be a nurse, midwife or health visitor who has overall responsibility for budgets, manpower or assets, or who is held accountable for a significant area of work, and who has little or no direct clinical involvement.

Source:
Department of Health Non-medical Workforce Census

Ambulances (Accidents)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people have been *(a)* injured and *(b)* killed in each year since 1990 as a result of an accident involving an ambulance answering a 999 call. [74629]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is not available centrally.

Hospital Beds

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* acute, *(b)* geriatric, *(c)* mental illness, *(d)* learning disability and *(e)* maternity beds each health authority had in each year since 1994–95. [75039]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested has been placed in the Library.

Cardiac Rehabilitation Courses

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what is the current waiting time for cardiac rehabilitation courses for each health trust; [75208]

(2) if he will list the health trusts in England which provide cardiac rehabilitation programmes for people aged *(a)* 65 to 70, *(b)* 70 to 80 and *(c)* over 80 years. [75529]

Mr. Hutton: Information is not held centrally about either the waiting times or scope of individual cardiac rehabilitation programmes. There is evidence that there is considerable variation in the service provided around the country and this is one of the areas to be addressed by the National Service Framework for coronary heart disease.

Residential and Nursing Care

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to end anomalies arising from preserved rights in the residential and nursing care sectors; and if he will make a statement. [75231]

Mr. Hutton: We are looking at this issue along with other recommendations in the report of the Royal Commission on Long-Term Care.

Smoking-related Diseases

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the number of people who suffered from smoking-related diseases in each of the last five years. [75459]

Ms Jowell: The latest figures available in "The UK Smoking Epidemic: Deaths in 1995", by the Health Education Authority, estimate that at least 121,000 people died as a result of their smoking in United Kingdom in 1995. Comparable figures are not available for earlier years.

No-smoking Areas

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will take steps to impose a legal duty on restaurants to provide non-smoking areas. [75458]

Ms Jowell: No. We gave careful thought to the legislative option, but concluded that voluntary commitments by the industry were more likely to be implemented effectively and with public support. The White Paper "Smoking Kills" includes a new charter on smoking in public places, agreed by the hospitality industry. The results will be monitored and we will consider the need for any further action in the light of progress.

Paracetamol Poisoning

Mr. Edward Davey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people were admitted to accident and emergency departments suffering from paracetamol poisoning in each year since 1996–97. [75013]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 9 March 1999]:* Available information is given in the table. Poisonings by paracetamol are not separately identified.

Number of admissions (ordinary admissions and day cases combined) via an accident and emergency department with a primary diagnosis of poisoning by 4-Aminophenol derivatives (including paracetamol).

National Health Service hospitals, England

	Poisoning by 4-Aminophenol derivates [1]
1996–97	25,874
1997–98	28,499

[1] ICD10 code T39.1 Poisoning by 4 Aminophenol derivatives.
Note:
Figures are provisional, no adjustments have been made for shortfalls in data (i.e. the data are ungrossed).
Source:
Department of Health, Hospital Episode Statistics.

Health Awareness

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to increase health awareness among men. [75304]

Ms Jowell: The Department recognises that the specific health needs of men are an important part of the overall strategy on the nation's health, and factors affecting men's health were highlighted in the recently published report of the "Independent Inquiry into Health Inequalities" led by Sir Donald Acheson.

The White Paper "Our Healthier Nation" setting out our health strategy, to be published in the Spring, will acknowledge the high levels of avoidable illness and premature death found among men, and the need for men to improve and prolong an active and healthy life. The Department will also continue to fund projects that aim to raise awareness of health issues which are specific to men.

Long-term Care

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the cost of implementing the recommendations in the report by the Royal Commission on Long Term Care for a National Care Commission. [75492]

Mr. Hutton: We are currently looking at all the recommendations made by the Royal Commission and will be drawing up costings where necessary as part of that process.

Forensic Psychiatrists

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people are currently training to be forensic psychiatrists; and what estimate has been made of the numbers needed to provide appropriate treatment for those for whom it is considered relevant. [74805]

Mr. Denham: The Departmental medical and dental work force census shows about a 100 hospital medical staff in forensic psychiatry training grades in England at 30 September 1997. The Specialty Workforce Advisory Group advises Ministers on the numbers needed in higher specialist training in forensic psychiatry so as to provide fully-trained doctors to fill consultant posts in the future. In estimating likely future requirements for higher specialist trainees, it seeks views from the National Health Service on local pressures and service developments and consults the medical profession.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list for each of the completed Private Finance Initiative projects worth over £1 million, *(a)* how long the delay was for those not completed on time, *(b)* the extent of any revisions to the contractual payments, and *(c)* how long any disputes about the quality of the work took to resolve. [75742]

Mr. Denham: No private finance initiative scheme with a capital value of greater than £10 million has yet been completed. Details of individual schemes with a capital cost of less than £10 million are not held centrally.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list by region the number, individual value and total value of Private Finance Initiative bids worth less than £1 million in each of the last five years. [75778]

Mr. Denham: Details on individual schemes with a capital cost of less than £10 million are not held centrally.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list all the projects milestones for each of the major acute sector hospital PFI schemes selected to continue towards financial close under the first prioritisation exercise, as agreed at the point of signature, indicating for each *(a)* in what respects any of these milestones have not been met, *(b)* the steps he is taking to remedy this, and *(c)* the assessment he has made of whether the completion dates for each of these projects will be met. [75776]

Mr. Denham: Of the 15 major private finance initiative schemes selected to proceed under the first prioritisation exercise, 10 have reached financial close and have signed contracts with a private sector partner. The remaining project milestone for these schemes is the completion date (when construction is completed and the facility is fully operational). These are:

Scheme	*Completion due*
Bromley	November 2002
Calderdale	May 2001
Carlisle	May 2000
Dartford and Gravesham	September 2000
Greenwich	May 2001
Norfolk and Norwich	January 2002
North Durham	November 2001
South Buckinghamshire:	
—Wycombe site	January 2000
—Amersham site	August 2000
Wellhouse	April 2002
South Manchester	February 2001

All the schemes in the table are on target to achieve their due completion date and we are not aware of any that have failed to meet significant internal project milestones.

Clinical Waste Incinerators

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list for each of the last five years the independent contractors who have made successful bids for clinical waste incinerators for NHS hospitals. [75777]

Mr. Denham: No clinical waste incinerator scheme in the National Health Service involving an independent contractor has a capital value of more than £10 million. Details on individual schemes with a capital cost of less than £10 million are not held centrally.

Children (Abuse and Neglect)

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to reduce the number of children suffering from physical abuse and neglect. [75307]

Mr. Hutton: In collaboration with colleagues across Government, I have made protecting children from abuse and neglect a key priority. We have a substantial programme of work under way to help make sure that children are protected from harm and that they are given the best possible start in life. This programme includes:

root and branch reform of the regulation system, introducing checks on the full range of children's care services, and strengthening safeguards;

an extensive range of reforms, set out in the Government's response to the Children's Safeguards Review, to improve the protection of all children living away from home;

Stronger systems for preventing unsuitable people from working with children; and

a thorough revision of the Government guidance on child protection to improve the handling of cases where children are suffering, or at risk of suffering, abuse and neglect. The new guidance will also emphasise the importance of agencies working together to help families and children under stress, to help prevent abuse and neglect taking place.

Child protection will also be improved through the three year "Quality Protects" programme to improve local authority children's services. As part of the Quality Protects programme local authorities must take action to bring their child protection services up to standard. They will be required to show how they:

carry out thorough and prompt assessments of children's needs;

have good case records;

draw up and implement child protection plans which are then reviewed regularly;

ensure that all children on the child protection register have an allocated social worker;

know what outcomes they want for children in need of protection and assess whether these are being achieved; and

have a human resource strategy which identifies the skills and knowledge needed by child protection staff.

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will estimate the number of children under the age of five years who have died following abuse or neglect in each of the last 10 years; and if he will make a statement. [75306]

Mr. Hutton: Reliable information on the number of children who die following abuse or neglect is not available. Not all such deaths will be recognised and in some cases the cause of death may be unclear or wrongly attributed. Currently, local Area Child Protection Committees are required to review cases which involve an incident leading to the death of a child where child abuse is confirmed or suspected, or a child protection issue arises which is likely to be of major public concern arises. Local authorities are required to inform the Department or the Welsh Office (as appropriate) immediately they become aware of any such case. We are improving the consistency and reliability of information provided through this route by revising the child protection guidance "Working Together Under The Children Act 1989—A guide to arrangements for inter-agency co-operation for the protection of children from abuse" and associated measures.

Select Committee Reports

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if *(a)* he, *(b)* civil servants in his Department or *(c)* special advisers in his Department have (i) had sight of drafts of select committee reports, in whole or in part, or (ii) been informed of conclusions of select committee reports prior to their publication by the select committees. [75876]

Mr. Dobson: I refer the right hon. Gentleman to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to the hon. Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire) on 1 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *531*. There have been no instances of members of Select Committees giving me, or my ministerial colleagues, drafts of Select Committee reports, or of parts of reports including their conclusions, before publication. Nor, to the best of my knowledge, have there been any occasions on which members of Select Committees have given such material to civil servants or special advisers in my department. This excludes embargoed copies of reports issued under House of Commons Standing Orders.

MMR Vaccine

Mr. Stringer: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the take-up rate has been for MMR vaccination for the last five years in *(a)* Manchester, *(b)* the North West and *(c)* England. [75674]

Ms Jowell: The information requested is given in the table.

Percentage of children immunised with measles, mumps and rubella vaccine by their second birthday, 1993–94 to 1997–98

Percentage

	1993–94	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1996–97*	*1997–98*
Manchester Health Authority	82	83	85	86	86
North West Region	90	91	91	91	91
England	91	91	92	92	91

Source:
Department of Health Statistics Division SD2B
COVER/Korner data

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Bovine Tuberculosis

Mr. Drew: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what research he intends to conduct into cattle TB during 1999–2000. [76408]

Mr. Rooker: The Krebs review concluded that there is no single solution to the problem of TB in cattle. It made a number of recommendations designed to provide a firm scientific basis for future policy. Many of the recommendations were proposals for further research, and it was these that the Government acted on first. We completely reviewed our TB research programme, and on 20 April last year published a document setting out new research requirements for the year beginning on 1 April 1999. Researchers wishing to participate were invited to submit bids by 3 July. 36 bids were received and were appraised by a panel of internal and external experts from Britain and overseas. A subsequent notice invited bids to analyse TB risk factors. Successful bidders were informed last autumn, and we have since been engaged in negotiations. We hope to sign research contracts shortly.

The new research programme will comprise 19 separate projects and will cost around £3.4 million in 1999/2000, although most of the projects will be carried forward into future years. Many of the projects are integrated into the badger culling trial and epidemiological survey, which take forward other recommendations in the Krebs report and will yield extensive information for analysis.

There are three main strands to the new programme. First, there is work to develop improved control strategies. Although we shall also spend £55,000 on examining the possibility of using bacteriophages to control *Mycobacterium bovis* in the environment, the most important work here is on vaccine development. This will be undertaken at the Institute of Animal Health and Veterinary Laboratories Agency, with a number of sub-contractors including experts in New Zealand, and will cost £1.4 million. If successful this will also lead to the development of a better test to diagnose TB in live badgers.

Although improved TB vaccines have eluded researchers for many years, recent advances in molecular biology offer new hopes for success. The genome sequencing project which we are co-funding with the Wellcome Trust is a particular example. This work will be taking place at the frontiers of scientific knowledge. It is important that the various projects contributing to the vaccine programme are taken forward together, and that full account is taken of parallel work in other countries [illegible] human medicine. We have therefore appointed Dr. Colston, the Head of Mycobacterial Research at the National Institute for Medical Research, Mill Hill, as external consultant for this programme.

Secondly, there is work to improve our understanding of herd breakdowns. We are reanalysing the information in our existing databases on TB risk factors. We shall develop new transmission models and examine a wide range of possible transmission and risk factors, including a variety of possible wildlife reservoirs of infection other than badgers. We shall be looking at better ways of detecting Mycobacterium bovis in clinical and environmental samples. We shall be developing molecular fingerprinting techniques to categorise Mycobacterium bovis strains more precisely. This work, which will cost £1.5 million in total, will be undertaken in a variety of research institutions in Great Britain, and will also draw in expertise from Northern Ireland, the Netherlands and New Zealand.

Thirdly, we need to examine the role of badgers in TB more closely. We shall be spending £475,000 on work estimating badger numbers, and understanding the role of badgers in disease transmission.

Details of the projects, contractors and costs are being placed in the Library.

Although this programme is extensive and will provide answers to many of the questions identified by the Krebs and Bourne Groups and by people who have written to us, it is not exhaustive. We shall be taking forward a project started in 1998 to use geographical information systems to provide better spatial analyses of TB risk factors, and are currently identifying gaps for new projects which we might be able to finance from next year. We are also consulting external appraisers about a project to be commissioned from the Central Science Laboratory to assess the ecological impact of badger culling.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to sequence the genome of the bacterium which causes TB in cattle; and if he will make a statement. [76407]

Mr. Rooker: I am pleased to announce that MAFF and the Wellcome Trust have recently agreed joint funding for a three-way collaboration between the Veterinary Laboratories Agency, the Sanger Centre and the Institut Pasteur in Paris to sequence the complete genome of *Mycobacterium bovis*. MAFF's contribution will be around £800,000, payable largely in the current financial year.

This is an exciting and important new development in our fight against the rising tide of TB in cattle. Determining the genetic code for the bacterium which causes cattle TB is undoubtedly the best means of catalysing vaccine research and development. The prospect that by March 2000 we will have a completely defined genome sequence of *Mycobacterium bovis*, the organism which causes TB in cattle, is very encouraging and represents a major advance.

The time is undoubtedly right for this research to be taken forward. The genome sequence of the human TB strain has already provided valuable leads for vaccine research. Unravelling the secrets of the bovine TB genome is of the highest relevance to the development of an effective cattle vaccine and a diagnostic test which will distinguish between vaccinated and infected animals.

Quarantine

Dr. Palmer: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) which operators of entry points to the United Kingdom have indicated that they would be prepared to (i) carry and (ii) check animals if the quarantine laws are reformed; [75178]

(2) how many operators of entry points to the United Kingdom currently have the necessary facilities to implement the changes to the quarantine laws recommended by Professor Kennedy; [75177]

(3) with which operators of entry points to the UK he has exchanged correspondence or had meetings to discuss reforms to the quarantine laws. [75179]

Mr. Rooker: The Government are considering the outcome of the consultation on the report of the Advisory Group on Quarantine, which recommended changes to the quarantine system.

My officials have held preliminary discussions with operators of those ports and airports in England that Professor Kennedy recommended should be eligible points of entry. These discussions have been for the purpose of identifying appropriate procedures, and determining the scale and cost of facilities that might be required for the movement of qualifying animals through entry points. These discussions have not yet been completed. Discussions have also been held with the British Ports Association and the British Airports Association. We have also corresponded with the Major Ports Group and Eurotunnel Developments Ltd.

Dr. Palmer: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many responses were received during the consultation period on Professor Kennedy's report on quarantine; and of the responses how many were *(a)* supportive of reforming the quarantine laws and *(b)* opposed to changing the law. [75175]

Mr. Rooker: During the consultation period, a total of 3,742 responses were received. Some 96 per cent. of respondents expressed overall support for the reforms to quarantine recommended by Professor Kennedy's Group, with 2 per cent. expressing opposition to the changes.

Dr. Palmer: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many responses to Professor Kennedy's report on quarantine were received from ports, airports, rail operators and other travel operators; and of those how many were *(a)* supportive of reforming the quarantine laws and *(b)* opposed to changing the law. [75176]

Mr. Rooker: Thirteen responses were received from ports, airports, rail operators and other travel operators. Seven of these responses supported the proposed changes, with the others limiting their comments to specific aspects of the proposals or making practical comments about their implementation. None expressed outright opposition to changing the law.

EU Subsidies

Dr. Marek: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what his policy is with regard to the capping of subsidies for cereals and root crops within the EU. [75014]

Mr. Rooker *[holding answer 9 March 1999]:* We are opposed to the capping of subsidies at EU level, as proposed by the European Commission, which would discriminate against UK farmers because of our different farm structure.

Genetically Modified Food

Mr. Drew: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what legal advice he has sought to ascertain whether he can introduce an import ban on food that does not meet current standards in terms of genetically modified organism regulations. [75197]

Mr. Rooker *[holding answer 9 March 1999]:* No genetically modified food (GM) may be sold in the UK unless it has been rigorously assessed for safety and is clearly labelled in accordance with the EC Novel Foods and Ingredient Regulation (258/97) or, in the case of soya and maize, EC Regulation 1139/98.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what measures he plans to take to prevent the importation of food that has not been correctly segregated and labelled under genetically modified organism regulations. [75196]

Mr. Rooker *[holding answer 9 March 1999]:* All genetically modified (GM) foods sold in the European Union must be approved for safety and labelled in accordance with EC Novel Foods and Food Ingredients Regulation (258/97), or in the case of GM soya and maize, EC Regulation 1139/98. Responsibility for the enforcement of these regulations lies with local authorities.

Mr. Gray: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement about the segregation of genetically modified food. [74692]

Mr. Rooker: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Lewes (Mr. Baker) on 27 January 1999, *Official Report,* column *302.*

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what independent research he has commissioned on the possibility of genetically modified food crops affecting other crops being grown; and if he will make a statement. [75072]

Mr. Rooker *[holding answer 8 March 1999]:* The Ministry has since 1991 funded a programme of research to assess the risks to agriculture from the release of genetically modified (GM) crops. To date, over £4.1 million has been spent on the programme and the results so far provide no evidence for possible risks to agricultural crops from the release of GM crops.

Quarantine Regulations

Mr. Wood: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food which organisations were contacted during the consultation process on changes to the quarantine regulations. [73470]

Mr. Rooker: The list of recipients of the consultation letter issued by my Department on 23 September 1998 has been place in the Library of the House. Separate consultations were held by the Secretary of State for Scotland and the Secretary of State for Wales.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 11 March 1999

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Admission Charges

Mr. Tyler: To ask the President of the Council if she will ensure that no charges are imposed for admission to the Palace of Westminster which could affect British citizens without a debate and decision on the floor of the House. [75943]

Mrs. Beckett: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer given by the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood), on behalf of the House of Commons Commission, on 3 February 1999, *Official Report*, column *625*.

Contracts

Mr. Love: To ask the Chairman of the Finance and Services Committee what assessment is made of the industrial relations record of private contractors as part of the tendering process for contracts to provide services to the House; and if he will make a statement. [75443]

Dr. Moonie: No formal assessments are made of the industrial relations records of private contractors tendering for contracts to provide services to the House. The supplier appraisal process can, however, cover such matters as recruitment procedures to avoid discrimination, training policies, quality standards and good employment practices.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

River Tigris Dam

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment he has made of the economic impact on British companies of the bidding process for dam construction on the River Tigris in Turkey. [74873]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 8 March 1999]:* The contract is the subject of continuing negotiations and, until these are complete, the actual values will not be known, but the company concerned expects that very substantial procurement of UK goods and services would take place as a result of the Ilisu hydro-electric project on the River Tigris in Turkey.

Internal Market Council

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will publish the Conclusions of the EU Presidency on Economic Reform which were debated at the EU Internal Market Council on 25 February. [75724]

Mr. Wilson: The Conclusions on Economic Reform agreed at the Internal Market Council of 25 February were published as part of a Council press release (document No. 6215/99), following the meeting. They are available on the Council's website at http://ue.eu.int/newsroom/

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will publish the Conclusions of the Internal Market Council on 25 February. [75725]

Mr. Wilson: The Conclusions of the Internal Market Council of 25 February were published as part of a Council press release (document No. 6215/99), following the meeting. They are available on the Council's website at http://ue.eu.int/newsroom/

Nuclear Waste

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will publish the conclusions of his Department's inquiry into the disappearance of weapons grade uranium in the 1960s from Dounreay; and if he will make a statement. [75942]

Mr. Battle: I refer my hon. Friend to my reply of 28 January 1999, *Official Report*, column *315*, to my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell).

Fifoots Point Power Station

Ms Kelly: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he is yet in a position to make his decision on AES Fifoots Point Ltd's application to extend the Fifoots Point coal-fired power station near Newport in South Wales. [76735]

Mr. Battle: I have today granted consent under Section 36 of the Electricity Act 1989 to AES Fifoots Point Ltd.'s application to construct a re-circulating cooling water system (the extension) at its existing power station at Fifoots Point. The decision has been taken in accordance with the policy set out in the White Paper entitled 'Conclusions of the Review of Energy Sources for Power Generation and Government response to fourth and fifth Reports of the Trade and Industry Committee' (Cm 4071).

The relevant planning authority, Newport County Borough Council, has not objected to the application.

Decisions on other applications under consideration will be announced in due course.

Copies of the Press Notice are being placed in the Library of the House.

Renewable Energy

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what discussions he has had with the regional electricity companies to encourage them to use more renewable energy; [75686]

(2) what target, in terms of the percentage of electricity provided through renewables, each of the regional electricity companies has set themselves; and what progress was made in achieving this in the last 12 months for which figures are available. [75687]

Mr. Battle: Orders placed under the Non-Fossil Fuel Obligation (NFFO) arrangements require the Regional Electricity Companies (RECs) to contract collectively for specific amounts of renewable generation.

As an illustration of the progress made to date, in calendar year 1997, NFFO projects supplied 2.63 Terra Watt hours (TWh) of electricity. In calendar year 1998, that rose to 3.29 TWh, an increase of 25 per cent.

In September last year I laid the fifth NFFO Order—NFFO-5—which followed immediately on from a consultation with the RECs. That Order is the largest to date, for a total of 261 projects with a total Declared Net Capacity (DNC) of 1177 Mega Watts (MW).

Missile Purchases

Mr. Page: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what estimate he has made of the total value of missile purchases other than Rapier which the USA has made from the United Kingdom in the past decade. [75018]

Mr. Spellar: I have been asked to reply.

I wrote to the hon. Member about this matter on 8 March 1999, in reply to his earlier question on 2 March 1999, *Official Report*, columns *659–60*, and a copy of my letter has been placed in the Library of the House.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Prison Service

Ms Moran: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what response she has made to the Fourth Report of the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee of session 1997–98 on the Prison Service in Northern Ireland. [76587]

Marjorie Mowlam: A copy of my response has, by the Committee's leave, been placed in the Library.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Pilot Projects

Yvette Cooper: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list the pilot projects instigated by his Department since 1 May 1997, indicating the area in which each pilot took, or is taking, place. [72633]

Mr. Mudie: Since 1 May 1997 the Department has instigated a number of pilot projects, a list of which has been placed in the Library.

Education Standards Agency

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list for each *(a)* metropolitan district council, *(b)* shire district council, *(c)* unitary council, *(d)* shire county council and *(e)* London borough council the sums of money they will be required to pay towards the education standards fund in the 1999–2000 financial year. [74771]

Ms Estelle Morris: The following table lists the allocations offered so far to each local education authority in England for the 1999–2000 Standards Fund programme, including the contribution to be made by each authority and by the Government if the allocations are accepted in full.

The number of individual Standards Fund grants (previously Grants for Education Support and Training) fully funded by the Government has increased from two under Grants for Education Support and Training in 1996–97 to nine so far allocated under the Standards Fund for 1999–2000. The Government's contribution has increased from £163 million to £493 million over the same period.

Local education authority and government contributions to the 1999–2000 standards fund programme

£

Local education authority	*Local education authority contribution*	*Government contribution*	*Total allocation*
Metropolitan District Councils			
Barnsley	1,693,679	2,017,821	3,711,500
Birmingham	10,645,287	13,697,682	24,342,969
Bolton	2,475,548	3,334,191	5,809,739
Bradford	7,711,438	8,545,751	16,257,189
Bury	1,301,553	1,632,455	2,934,008
Calderdale	1,908,560	2,577,892	4,486,452
Coventry	3,418,047	4,622,998	8,041,045
Doncaster	2,054,708	3,158,415	5,213,123
Dudley	3,794,501	3,974,038	7,768,539
Gateshead	1,458,458	2,065,948	3,524,406
Kirklees	4,787,464	5,426,361	10,213,825
Knowsley	1,696,731	1,946,878	3,643,609
Leeds	5,080,891	6,330,252	11,411,143
Liverpool	3,875,215	4,721,881	8,597,096
Manchester	4,965,936	7,715,765	12,681,701
Newcastle upon Tyne	2,202,880	2,473,607	4,676,487
North Tyneside	1,779,288	2,021,948	3,801,236
Oldham	2,838,916	3,807,210	6,646,126
Rochdale	2,028,574	2,775,957	4,804,531
Rotherham	2,111,205	2,927,562	5,038,767
Salford	1,698,466	2,265,888	3,964,354
Sandwell	2,456,966	3,461,104	5,918,070
Sefton	1,955,668	2,693,040	4,648,708
Sheffield	4,019,798	5,093,741	9,113,539
Solihull	1,268,203	1,521,157	2,789,360
South Tyneside	1,322,097	1,690,990	3,013,087
St. Helens	1,352,701	1,503,403	2,856,104
Stockport	2,155,969	2,677,349	4,833,318
Sunderland	2,000,180	2,387,779	4,387,959
Tameside	1,712,385	2,131,766	3,844,151
Trafford	1,540,301	1,924,019	3,464,320
Wakefield	2,430,161	3,394,134	5,824,295
Walsall	2,868,183	4,081,404	6,949,587
Wigan	2,143,429	2,556,170	4,699,599
Wirral	1,968,552	2,680,071	4,648,623
Wolverhampton	3,563,643	4,183,481	7,747,124
Unitary Councils			
Bath and North East Somerset	977,163	1,297,040	2,274,203
Blackburn and Darwen	2,636,421	3,249,350	5,885,771
Blackpool	968,923	1,083,497	2,052,420
Bournemouth	991,130	1,090,310	2,081,440
Bracknell Forest	706,985	858,431	1,565,416
Brighton and Hove	1,650,655	2,084,791	3,735,446
City of Bristol	3,327,058	3,856,719	7,183,777
Darlington	770,716	1,023,122	1,793,838
Derby	2,409,479	3,183,489	5,592,968
East Riding of Yorkshire	1,997,853	2,912,051	4,909,904
Halton	1,038,083	1,177,597	2,215,680
Hartlepool	853,725	1,097,151	1,950,876
Kingston-upon-Hull	2,025,114	2,715,039	4,740,153
Leicester	3,352,063	4,695,447	8,047,510
Luton	2,075,996	3,217,181	5,293,177
Medway Towns	2,243,367	2,596,687	4,840,054
Middlesbrough	1,503,890	2,016,652	3,520,542
Milton Keynes	1,654,769	2,133,006	3,787,775
North East Lincolnshire	1,394,708	1,658,820	3,053,528
North Lincolnshire	1,141,048	1,572,633	2,713,681
North Somerset	1,139,376	1,537,102	2,676,478

Local education authority and government contributions to the 1999–2000 standards fund programme

£

Local education authority	Local education authority contribution	Government contribution	Total allocation
Nottingham City	3,145,542	3,991,475	7,137,017
Peterborough	1,697,588	2,289,054	3,986,642
Plymouth	1,934,358	2,200,280	4,134,638
Poole	740,481	823,086	1,563,567
Portsmouth	1,441,958	1,626,648	3,068,606
Reading	1,271,888	1,443,885	2,715,773
Redcar and Cleveland	1,265,471	1,726,797	2,992,268
Rutland	318,015	351,245	669,260
Slough	1,532,655	1,751,723	3,284,378
South Gloucestershire	1,666,774	2,234,329	3,901,103
Southampton	1,527,156	1,929,567	3,456,723
Southend-on-Sea	1,039,894	1,213,607	2,253,501
Stockton-on-Tees	1,457,300	2,050,248	3,507,548
Stoke-on-Trent	2,454,097	3,031,857	5,458,954
Swindon	1,398,767	1,559,715	2,958,482
Telford and Wrekin	2,079,334	2,252,930	4,332,264
Thurrock	1,230,579	1,409,924	2,640,503
Torbay	697,978	841,965	1,539,943
Warrington	1,248,087	1,464,471	2,712,558
West Berkshire	994,330	1,355,697	2,350,027
Windsor and Maidenhead	883,786	1,182,304	2,066,090
Wokingham	871,442	1,048,480	1,919,922
Worcestershire	3,429,440	4,458,250	7,887,690
York	1,110,079	1,607,721	2,717,800
Shire County Councils			
Bedfordshire	2,967,767	4,246,714	7,214,481
Buckinghamshire	3,876,947	4,952,692	8,829,639
Cambridgeshire	3,262,482	4,146,811	7,409,293
Cheshire	3,861,467	4,680,451	8,541,918
Cornwall	3,034,320	3,656,490	6,690,810
Cumbria	4,131,116	4,672,392	8,803,508
Derbyshire	4,537,842	5,317,106	9,854,948
Devon	4,029,382	4,925,577	8,954,959
Dorset	2,062,204	2,457,669	4,519,873
Durham	4,074,378	5,480,315	9,554,693
East Sussex	2,618,153	3,971,759	6,589,912
Essex	7,754,988	8,914,779	16,669,767
Gloucestershire	3,648,730	4,450,722	8,099,452
Hampshire	6,261,935	7,967,280	14,229,215
Herefordshire	1,169,537	1,482,360	2,651,897
Hertfordshire	7,072,521	9,023,019	16,095,540
Isle of Wight	923,613	1,328,431	2,252,044
Isles of Scilly	78,904	86,751	165,655
Kent	10,158,893	11,834,439	21,993,332
Lancashire	9,012,037	11,049,830	20,061,867
Leicestershire	3,414,348	4,610,792	8,025,140
Lincolnshire	4,213,885	5,384,242	9,598,127
Norfolk	5,012,506	6,055,798	11,068,304
North Yorkshire	3,386,302	4,722,577	8,108,879
Northamptonshire	4,374,951	6,042,579	10,417,530
Northumberland	2,106,048	2,544,702	4,650,750
Nottinghamshire	4,751,984	5,580,929	10,332,913
Oxfordshire	3,887,391	4,974,369	8,861,760
Shropshire	1,839,538	2,178,510	4,018,048
Somerset	3,610,490	4,339,950	7,950,440
Staffordshire	5,647,167	7,363,883	13,011,050
Suffolk	3,652,101	4,786,964	8,439,065
Surrey	5,295,773	6,762,694	12,058,467
Warwickshire	3,745,470	5,055,382	8,800,852
West Sussex	3,697,996	5,186,266	8,884,262
Wiltshire	2,729,790	3,448,268	6,178,058
London Borough Councils			
Barking	1,900,272	2,089,860	3,990,132
Barnet	2,366,416	2,891,920	5,258,336
Bexley	1,418,228	1,821,321	3,239,549
Brent	2,666,955	3,367,994	6,034,949
Bromley	1,585,772	1,853,334	3,439,106
Camden	2,903,952	3,144,973	6,048,925
City of London	49,537	58,634	108,171
Croydon	2,751,957	3,416,323	6,168,280
Ealing	3,172,997	3,507,708	6,680,705
Enfield	2,712,542	3,391,802	6,104,344
Greenwich	3,021,145	3,375,022	6,396,167
Hackney	3,723,571	4,438,089	8,161,660
Hammersmith and Fulham	1,561,934	1,831,641	3,393,575
Haringey	2,921,447	4,431,582	7,353,029
Harrow	1,378,358	1,931,663	3,310,021
Havering	1,181,605	1,407,355	2,588,960
Hillingdon	1,859,310	2,248,609	4,107,919
Hounslow	2,167,800	3,129,166	5,296,966
Islington	2,923,391	3,081,140	6,004,531
Kensington and Chelsea	1,064,503	1,499,011	2,563,514
Kingston upon Thames	959,307	1,094,954	2,054,261
Lambeth	3,546,274	3,749,938	7,296,212
Lewisham	2,913,948	3,104,126	6,018,074
Merton	1,276,035	1,620,069	2,896,104
Newham	2,550,122	2,723,674	5,273,796
Redbridge	2,271,169	2,722,722	4,993,891
Richmond upon Thames	914,294	1,027,980	1,942,274
Southwark	2,853,458	3,093,472	5,946,930
Sutton	1,117,877	1,262,297	2,380,174
Tower Hamlets	4,871,681	7,603,711	12,475,392
Waltham Forest	2,438,859	3,336,517	5,775,376
Wandsworth	2,278,024	3,040,012	5,318,036
Westminster	1,904,441	2,664,768	4,569,209
England	391,711,239	492,566,360	884,277,599

Independent Committee on Technology in Schools

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list the reports he has received from the Independent Committee on Technology in Schools. [74791]

Mr. Charles Clarke: An independent committee chaired by Sir Dennis Stevenson was established in 1996 to examine the role that ICT should be playing in primary and secondary education. The committee published its findings in a report entitled 'Information and Communications Technology in UK Schools'.

Teachers' Pay

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list for each *(a)* metropolitan district council, *(b)* shire district council, *(c)* unitary council, *(d)* shire county council and *(e)* London borough council the amount of money they will receive to contribute towards the teachers' pay award in the 1999–2000 financial year. [74770]

Ms Estelle Morris: The Local Government Finance settlement was announced by my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister on 2 December 1998, *Official Report*, columns 883–84. It included Education Standard Spending Assessments, which increased by 5.7 per cent. overall, but it did not identify separately funding in respect of teachers' pay.

Nursery Education

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on progress in the provision of guaranteed nursery education for all four-year-olds. [74780]

Ms Hodge: Early Years Development and Childcare Plans demonstrate how, since September 1998, a free part time early education place, for three terms before compulsory school, has been available for every child whose parents want one.

Class Sizes

Mr. Syms: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list by local education authority, how much money *(a)* has been spent and *(b)* is estimated will be needed to be spent on (i) employing new teachers and (ii) building new classrooms in order for schools to ensure that no five to seven-year-olds will be in classes with more than 30 pupils. [74736]

Ms Estelle Morris: The following table sets out by local education authority the allocations of revenue funding for additional teachers and capital funding for new classrooms made for 1998–99 and 1999–2000. In total, we have made available £620 million to ensure that our pledge is delivered in full by September 2001 and in virtually all schools by September 2000.

Allocations to reduce infant class sizes

£000

LEA name	*1998–99*		*1999–2000*	
	Revenue	*Capital*	*Revenue*	*Capital*
Barking and Dagenham	—	142	46	—
Barnet	146	192	273	—
Barnsley	—	—	379	616
Bath and North East Somerset	—	140	161	178
Bedfordshire	—	744	650	1,030
Bexley	225	423	360	185
Birmingham	—	—	72	421
Blackburn	107	268	263	625
Blackpool	73	415	285	278
Bolton	—	280	779	628
Bournemouth	—	—	77	1,583
Bracknell	—	174	110	277
Bradford	625	202	1,351	—
Brent	—	—	—	74
Brighton and Hove	88	110	268	576
Bristol, City of	—	203	192	303
Bromley	200	520	571	339
Buckinghamshire	146	160	1,313	1,608
Bury	584	1,145	1,082	199
Calderdale	162	100	308	0
Cambridgeshire	—	543	946	768
Camden	—	—	15	92
Cheshire	—	801	1,370	1,076
City of London	—	—	0	0
Cornwall	—	320	760	659
Coventry	452	40	604	227
Croydon	100	369	298	0
Cumbria	146	113	834	779
Darlington	—	170	186	266
Derby, City of	1,000	878	1,402	160
Derbyshire	1,160	1,597	2,294	1,926
Devon	1,000	576	1,505	594
Doncaster	—	—	507	291
Dorset	324	254	1,067	746
Dudley	—	374	233	608
Durham	250	167	810	508
Ealing	291	111	442	607
East Riding of Yorkshire	250	85	720	1,099

Allocations to reduce infant class sizes

£000

LEA name	*1998–99*		*1999–2000*	
	Revenue	*Capital*	*Revenue*	*Capital*
East Sussex	116	547	878	515
Enfield	—	380	393	644
Essex	—	543	1,183	1,149
Gateshead	100	200	181	0
Gloucestershire	—	238	804	629
Greenwich	—	80	0	200
Hackney	—	—	91	0
Halton	—	297	317	85
Hammersmith and Fulham	—	—	0	0
Hampshire	—	1,025	1,490	1,093
Haringey	146	—	148	0
Harrow	—	—	69	0
Hartlepool	100	69	194	180
Havering	—	77	0	257
Herefordshire	146	65	323	985
Hertfordshire	510	399	1,369	440
Hillingdon	291	864	427	1,126
Hounslow	—	—	160	507
Isle of Wight	135	170	308	164
Isles of Scilly	—	—	0	0
Islington	—	—	0	0
Kensington and Chelsea	—	—	0	0
Kent	—	850	1,126	1,169
Kingston upon Hull	—	—	315	434
Kingston upon Thames	—	—	131	3,306
Kirklees	500	540	1,138	719
Knowsley	—	80	164	428
Lambeth	—	578	69	359
Lancashire	1,000	1,285	2,390	4,064
Leeds	500	320	1,313	725
Leicester City	584	158	650	587
Leicestershire	291	566	943	510
Lewisham	—	—	0	0
Lincolnshire	102	318	503	690
Liverpool	—	85	124	224
Luton	—	59	110	574
Manchester	—	817	41	30
Medway	—	188	384	244
Merton	—	—	131	1,939
Middlesbrough	146	94	244	0
Milton Keynes	—	—	195	294
Newcastle upon Tyne	500	367	759	70
Newham	257	278	329	569
Norfolk	291	470	1,217	1,086
North East Lincolnshire	—	518	253	172
North Lincolnshire	675	410	889	140
North Somerset	—	212	260	87
North Tyneside	—	352	192	241
North Yorkshire	—	459	1,018	1,470
Northamptonshire	—	234	349	1,061
Northumberland	324	224	738	893
Nottingham, City of	146	452	412	149
Nottinghamshire	—	405	1,100	3,113
Oldham	—	1,112	589	1,287
Oxfordshire	584	842	1,011	1,263
Peterborough	150	—	368	415
Plymouth	500	—	870	0
Poole	—	246	164	324
Portsmouth	—	—	91	401
Reading	—	92	144	311
Redbridge	—	320	131	325
Redcar and Cleveland	—	253	69	326
Richmond upon Thames	—	762	117	847
Rochdale	—	320	471	711
Rotherham	219	85	471	1,140
Rutland	—	—	50	0
Salford	146	139	416	221
Sandwell	1,000	1,159	1,212	293
Sefton	59	359	357	552
Sheffield	525	—	1,005	148
Shropshire	—	591	540	249
Slough	88	—	275	717
Solihull	584	942	848	685
Somerset	—	378	795	618
South Gloucestershire	500	873	1,008	704

Allocations to reduce infant class sizes

£000

LEA name	*1998–99*		*1999–2000*	
	Revenue	*Capital*	*Revenue*	*Capital*
South Tyneside	100	—	160	0
Southampton	—	—	123	161
Southend on Sea	—	190	123	80
Southwark	—	—	0	160
St. Helens	—	344	110	608
Staffordshire	—	350	1,201	713
Stockport	204	190	749	698
Stockton on Tees	—	384	137	163
Stoke on Trent	—	151	278	1,077
Suffolk	—	—	234	883
Sunderland	—	55	82	155
Surrey	—	419	990	341
Sutton	168	453	295	358
Swindon	—	527	343	0
Tameside	291	—	590	813
Telford and Wrekin	291	329	468	100
Thurrock	—	80	82	434
Torbay	—	198	167	504
Tower Hamlets	—	—	0	0
Trafford	—	487	288	422
Wakefield	60	765	427	530
Walsall	146	397	360	454
Waltham Forest	—	—	0	285
Wandsworth	146	—	150	223
Warrington	59	332	151	963
Warwickshire	584	169	1,139	294
West Berkshire	—	—	94	534
West Sussex	—	826	521	798
Westminster	—	—	0	0
Wigan	290	726	659	968
Wiltshire	291	522	935	1,903
Windsor and Maidenhead	—	99	128	167
Wirral	—	202	273	924
Wokingham	—	414	82	527
Wolverhampton	—	357	288	753
Worcestershire	—	—	548	1,156
York, City of	146	116	350	180
GM Schools	680	1,113	—	—

Jobseeker's Allowance

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list for (i) each of the past four years and (ii) the current year to date *(a)* the number of jobseeker's allowance recipients who have been interviewed and *(b)* the number subsequently awarded a nil benefit. [74159]

Mr. Andrew Smith *[holding answer 4 March 1999]:* Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its Chief Executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Leigh Lewis to Mr. Jeremy Corbyn, dated 11 March 1999:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your question about how many jobseekers, who receive Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA), have been interviewed and how many, subsequently, had nil benefit awards. This is something which falls within the responsibilities delegated to me as Chief Executive of the Employment Service.

The Employment Service conducts many different types of interviews with jobseekers. These start at the new claims stage and develop as unemployment lengthens. The new jobseeker's interview is important in establishing whether jobseekers meet the labour market conditions for receiving JSA. It is normally at this stage that a Jobseeker's Agreement is drawn up and jobseekers are made aware of their responsibilities in order to receive JSA. Thereafter, entitlement to JSA is reviewed at interviews every fortnight. We also use these opportunities to offer jobseekers further advice and help in their search for work. Jobseekers are also asked to attend a Restart Interview at regular six monthly intervals at which they are offered further advice and information about employment and training opportunities. Beyond this interviews may take place for a variety of other reasons.

Questions about a jobseeker's entitlement to JSA could arise at any of the interviews referred to above. In these instances, there may be a reference to an independent Adjudication Officer for a decision on benefit entitlement.

On the specific issue of nil benefit awards, since JSA was introduced in October 1996, the number of claims processed and the number of nil awards by operational year has been as follows:

	Claims processed	*Nil awards*
7 October 1996 to 31 March 1997	1,280,960	164,460
1 April 1997 to 31 March 1998	2,966,185	470,047
1 April 1998 to 31 January 1999	2,339,348	403,897

These figures are based primarily on information held by the JSA Payments System. The figures for the period ending 31 March 1997 include a small number of claims held on the income support computer system because they linked back to an earlier Income Support claim.

I hope this is helpful.

Higher Education

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is the current ratio of school leavers to the numbers entering higher education. [75024]

Ms Estelle Morris: Information on the number of school leavers who entered higher education directly is not available centrally. In some cases, progression to HE will be direct from FE or tertiary college, and some students will enter after a year abroad or other sabbatical. The entry rate of young people to HE is measured by the Age Participation Index (API) which measures the chance of a young person entering full-time higher education before they are 21. In 1998–99 the API was in the range 30–32 per cent.

Special Educational Needs

Mr. Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many special schools he estimates will close as a result of the Programme of Action for meeting special educational needs. [74814]

Ms Estelle Morris: The Programme of Action makes it clear that we see a continuing and vital role for special schools. We want to build on their strengths and ensure that they are an integral part of an inclusive local education system for children in their area, and in some cases beyond. We recognise that some local education authorities may wish to propose changes to individual schools, both special and mainstream, to reflect changes in demand for special needs provision. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has, however, informed authorities that the Programme of Action should not be interpreted as providing justification on its own for making proposals to close special schools.

Grammar School Ballots

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on Trafford

Borough Council's advice to parent teacher associations regarding the dissemination of information to parents who are involved in grammar school ballots. [75226]

Ms Estelle Morris: The Council's action is not contrary to the provisions in the School Standards and Framework Act 1998. The letter from the Chief Executive merely points out that it would be prudent for parent teacher associations with charitable status to check their constitutions before disseminating any information from lobby groups to ensure that their actions would not be in breach of Charity law.

School Performance Tables

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans he has to reform school performance tables to allow schools to omit from their statistics those children who have been disregarded from SATs and public examinations by virtue of a statement of special educational needs. [75206]

Mr. Charles Clarke: We have no current plans to treat pupils with special educational needs differently in performance tables. The inclusion of such pupils is supported by the Government's National Advisory Group on SEN.

Many pupils with special educational needs are academically able or on a par with other pupils, and to ignore their achievements would be wrong. Schools do face particular challenges, however, in achieving results in line with national expectations for most pupils with special educational needs. The performance tables include information on the number of such pupils on roll, so that this can be taken into account in evaluating school performance.

New Deal

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) what assessment his Department has made of the improvements in employability of those passing through the New Deal programme; [75421]

(2) allowing for displacement and substitution, what estimate his Department has made of the number of new jobs which have been created by the New Deal; [75422]

(3) what percentage of those going through all stages of the New Deal for the young unemployed to date were without permanent employment at the end of the programme. [75423]

Mr. Andrew Smith: *[holding answer 8 March 1999]:* Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its Chief Executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Leigh Lewis to Mr. Graham Brady, dated 11 March 1999:

As the Employment Service is an Executive Agency, the Secretary of State for Education and Employment has asked me to reply direct to your questions about the New Deal initiative for young people aged between 18 and 24. This is something which falls within the responsibilities delegated to me as Chief Executive of the Agency.

The very early evidence from the New Deal suggests that it is having a significant impact on participants' employability. Comparing the pathfinder areas, where the New Deal commenced in January 1998, to the rest of the country, where it commenced in April 1998, the pathfinder areas showed a six percentage point higher flow of young people into jobs between January and April 1998.

In the longer term, as part of the overall evaluation of New Deal, we aim through a national survey of New Deal participants to make an assessment of employability in terms, for example, of improvements in basic skills and qualifications, increased work experience, increased levels of job search activity, increased levels of motivation and confidence about finding work and increased self-esteem. Findings from the first stage of the survey are expected to be available around September 1999; findings from the second stage around September 2000.

Turning to the number of jobs created by the New Deal, I should say that the New Deal was not planned as a job creation initiative. Its aim is to tackle long term unemployment among young people by improving their employability and helping them find jobs.

Finally, in respect of the percentage of young people without permanent employment at the end of their participation in New Deal, I should explain that the New Deal has a number of stages including Gateway, the options and a follow through period of support and guidance. Because New Deal only started nationally in April 1998 it is too early to evaluate what proportion of participants may not secure permanent employment at the end of their time on the programme. It may be helpful, however, to say that by December 1998 of the 214,300 young people who had started New Deal only 4,400 had started on the follow through period.

I hope this is helpful.

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on the progress of the New Deal for the young unemployed in Hendon. [75782]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its Chief Executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Leigh Lewis to Mr. Andrew Dismore, dated 11 March 1999:

As the Employment Service is an Executive Agency, the Secretary of State for Education and Employment has asked me to reply to your question about the progress of the New Deal for young unemployed people in Hendon. This is something which falls within the responsibilities delegated to me as Chief Executive of the Agency.

I regret that separate figures are not generally available for individual towns, or for constituencies. Government Statistical Service figures are produced for Employment Service Unit of Delivery areas. Hendon falls within the Edgware and Leaside Unit of Delivery.

The latest Government Statistical Service figures to the end of December 1998, and including Management Information to the end of January 1999, show that 3,329 young people have started on New Deal for 18–24 year olds in the Edgware and Leaside Unit of Delivery. Of these, 509 have secured unsubsidised employment; 100 have started subsidised employment through the New Deal Employment option; and 564 have started on either the Full-Time Education and Training, or one of the work experience options. Of the remainder, the majority are still in the initial Gateway phase of the New Deal. There will be other young people who have left the New Deal for jobs, and stopped receiving the Jobseeker's Allowance, without telling the Employment Service their reasons for leaving.

I hope this is helpful.

Ofsted

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, pursuant to his answer of 8 February 1999, *Official Report*, column *107*, if he will set out the

budget for Ofsted for the financial years *(a)* 1997–98 and *(b)* 1998–99, calculated on the same basis as the figures contained in his answer. [75488]

Ms Estelle Morris *[holding answer 8 March 1999]:* Total provision for Ofsted in the financial year 1998–99 is £110.3 million and total expenditure for 1997–98 was £151 million. The reduction in 1998–99 results principally from the change, announced by the previous Government and confirmed in July 1997 in the "Excellence in schools" White Paper, from a four-year cycle of school inspections to a differentiated approach in which schools will be inspected at least every six years but more frequently where weaknesses are apparent, and from lower than expected contract prices for inspections.

Child Minders

Mr. Dawson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will review local authority circular 94/23 which permits child minders to smack minded children with parental permission. [75152]

Ms Hodge: The guidance was introduced following a High Court judgment. The Department of Health will shortly be consulting on how the law can be improved to better protect children from assault. We will review the guidance in the light of this consultation.

A-levels (Review)

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment when he expects to announce the findings of his review of A-levels; and if he will make a statement. [75660]

Mr. Mudie *[holding answer 9 March 1999]:* We expect to make an announcement shortly on taking forward our commitment to support broader A-levels and upgrade vocational qualifications, underpinned by rigorous standards and key skills. This will support A-level students studying more subjects particularly in the first year of sixth form, recognising the lower levels of taught time at this stage in England compared with other European countries. We have already made it clear that reforms will be introduced nationally for teaching from September 2000.

National Curriculum (Review)

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment when he plans to announce the findings of his review of the national curriculum; and if he will make a statement. [75661]

Mr. Charles Clarke *[holding answer 9 March 1999]:* We will be consulting widely on draft proposals for revisions to the National Curriculum during the summer. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will then make final decisions in the early autumn before the revised National Curriculum is sent to schools. Schools will then have most of the 1999–2000 school year to prepare for any changes from September 2000.

Education Standards (Staffordshire)

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assessment he has made of education standards in *(a)* Tamworth Borough and *(b)* Staffordshire. [75651]

Ms Estelle Morris *[holding answer 9 March 1999]:* Statistics showing the standards of attainment by pupils in each school and local authority area are published in annual performance tables. A summary of recent results in Staffordshire and in primary and secondary schools in Tamworth Borough, which is not itself a local education authority, is set out in the following table. A sample of schools in each authority is inspected annually by Ofsted and reports published which include judgments about standards of attainment and the quality of education. A programme of inspections of all local education authorities is now being carried out by Ofsted, but none of the named authorities has yet been inspected. All authorities have just submitted for approval an Education Development Plan which includes a three-year programme for securing school improvement, and targets including those for pupil performance at ages 11 and 16 which will be monitored in future years.

LEA performance at key stage 2, GCSE and GCE A/AS level of LEAs in Tamworth borough and Staffordshire

	Tamworth borough[2]	*Staffordshire*	*England*
Key Stage 2			
Percentage of pupil's achieving level 4 or above			
English			
1998	57.3	65.9	64.1
1997	55.5	66.5	62.5
1996	50.8	56.3	56.3
Maths			
1998	50.0	60.2	57.9
1997	54.1	65.3	61.3
1996	49.8	51.5	53.2
Science			
1998	60.9	72.6	68.6
1997	60.6	72.2	68.1
1996	56.2	62.1	61.2
Aggregate			
1998	168.1	198.7	190.6
1997	170.1	204.0	191.9
1996	156.8	169.9	170.7
GCSE			
Percentage of 15 year olds achieving 5A[1]-C GCSEs			
1998	38.2	45	46.3
1997	38.2	45	45.1
1996	36.5	40.9	44.5
GCE A/AS level[1]			
Average point score			
1998	15.1	16.2	17.8
1997	13.7	17.7	17.3
1996	14.7	16.6	16.8

[1] Only for those entering two or more GCE A/AS Levels

[2] Not including special schools

Education SSAs

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) if he will make a statement on the funding for education in Staffordshire in 1999–2000; [75652]

(2) what assessment he has made of the current SSA formula for the distribution of education funding to shire authorities; [75653]

(3) if he will review the current SSA formula for funding education; [75654]

(4) what meetings he has had with Ministers at the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions to discuss the review of the SSA formula for education. [75655]

Ms Estelle Morris *[holding answer 9 March 1999]:* The education SSA for Staffordshire for 1999–2000 represents an underlying increase of £18.2 million or 6 per cent., after allowing for local authority changes of function. An increase on that scale should be sufficient to meet the pressures faced by Staffordshire schools, although my right hon. Friend appreciates the concern expressed by schools in Staffordshire and elsewhere about the fairness of the current education SSA system. In announcing the conclusions of the comprehensive Spending Review for the three years up to 2001–02, Ministers made it clear that they would not seek to change the current SSA system. It will, nevertheless, be subject to review. That will be led by DETR Ministers, and it will involve local government representation, and Ministers with local government service interests.

Mr. Gordon Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans he has to take account of levels of turnover in pupil enrolments in setting local education authority standard spending assessments. [75751]

Ms Estelle Morris *[holding answer 9 March 1999]:* None in the immediate future. In announcing the conclusions of the Comprehensive Spending Review for the three years up to 2001–02, Ministers made it clear that they would not seek to change the system of calculating standard spending assessments. It will, nevertheless, be subject to review. That will be led by DETR Ministers, and it will involve local government representation, and Ministers with local government service interests.

Employment Service

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what proportion of the Employment Service targets under the New Deal had been achieved by 1 March 1999. [75667]

Mr. Andrew Smith *[holding answer 9 March 1999]:* Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its Chief Executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Leigh Lewis to Mr. Graham Brady, dated 11 March 1999:

As the Employment Service is an Executive Agency the Secretary of State for Education and Employment has asked me to reply direct to your question regarding what proportion of the Employment Service targets under the New Deal had been achieved by 1 March. This is something which falls within the responsibilities delegated to me as Chief Executive of the Agency.

The most recent information available relates to the position at the end of January. This shows that the Employment Service had by then achieved 55% of its target to place 100,000 New Deal for 18–24 year old participants into work during 1998–99. The target set for the Employment Service measures only those young people who secure employment as a direct result of a submission to a vacancy by the Employment Service or one of its partners.

I hope this is helpful.

Single Gateway

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what percentage of those entering the New Deal Gateway in January 1998 were still in the Gateway on 31 December 1998. [75666]

Mr. Andrew Smith *[holding answer 9 March 1999]:* Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its Chief Executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Leigh Lewis to Mr. Graham Brady, dated 11 March 1999:

As the Employment Service is an Executive Agency, the Secretary of State for Education and Employment has asked me to reply to your question about the percentage of young people who joined the New Deal Gateway in January 1998 who were still in the Gateway on 31st December 1998. This is something which falls within the responsibilities delegated to me as Chief Executive of the Agency.

Of those young people who entered the New Deal Gateway in January 1998, 3% were recorded as still being in the Gateway at the end of December 1998. In some cases this will be because they have had a number of periods of sickness, or have left the Gateway for other reasons, but on each occasion returned within 13 weeks of leaving.

I hope this is helpful.

Early Years Education

Charlotte Atkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what advice has been issued to local education authorities on involving *(a)* parents and *(b)* governors in the development of early years education. [75564]

Ms Hodge *[holding answer 9 March 1999]:* The planning guidance on Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships for 1999–2000 asks Partnerships to ensure that the interests of parents, including those parents in employment, and of maintained schools, including nursery schools, are properly represented in drawing up the Early Years Development and Childcare Plan.

Charlotte Atkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment which local education authorities have submitted their draft Early Years Development Plans to his Department for approval; and how many have been approved. [75563]

Ms Hodge *[holding answer 9 March 1999]:* All local education authorities have submitted Early Years Development and Childcare Plans for approval. I shall shortly announce which have been approved.

Local Decision Making

Charlotte Atkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what advice has been issued to local education authorities on involving *(a)* parents and *(b)* governors in decision making on local education services, and giving them representation on (i) local education authority education committees and (ii) children's panels. [75565]

Ms Estelle Morris *[holding answer 9 March 1999]:* We are keen to encourage parents and governors to become involved in decision making on education

services. The Department has not issued general guidance to local education authorities on how to achieve this, although guidance to authorities on specific functions has included appropriate advice, for example the guidance on Education Development Plans issued in September 1998. The Department is due to consult on draft regulations on parent governor representatives on local authority committees dealing with education in the next few weeks, and to issue the final regulations and guidance in the summer. I believe that the reference to children's panels relates to Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships which are covered in a reply given today by the Under-Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Barking (Ms Hodge), at column *320*.

Innovative Projects Programme

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment when he plans to announce the outcome of bids for funding under the New Deal: Innovative Projects programme. [75748]

Mr. Andrew Smith *[holding answer 9 March 1999]:* Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its Chief Executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Leigh Lewis to Mr. Robin Corbett, dated 11 March 1999:

As the Employment Service is an Executive Agency, the Secretary of State for Education and Employment has asked me to reply to your question about when the outcome of bids for funding under the New Deal Innovation Fund will be announced. This is something which falls within the responsibilities delegated to me as Chief Executive of the Agency.

It may be helpful if I explain that New Deal Partnerships will have two opportunities a year to bid for funding from the Innovation Fund. Guidance will be issued to all partnerships in early April, alongside a timetable for bids to be received for assessment. We hope that the successful bids from the first round of assessments will be announced in July or August of this year.

I hope this is helpful.

Select Committee Reports

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if *(a)* he, *(b)* civil servants in his Department or *(c)* special advisers in his Department have (i) had sight of drafts of select committee reports, in whole or in part, or (ii) been informed of conclusions of select committee reports prior to their publication by the select committees. [75871]

Mr. Mudie *[holding answer 10 March 1999]:* I refer the right hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to the hon. Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire) on 1 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *531*. There have been no instances of members of select committees giving me, or my ministerial colleagues, drafts of select committee reports, or of parts of reports including their conclusions, before publication. Nor to the best of my knowledge there have been any occasions on which members of select committees have given such material to civil servants or special advisers in the Department. this excludes embargoed copies of reports issued under House of Commons Standing Orders.

Rainsford School, Chelmsford

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, pursuant to his answer of 5 March 1999, *Official Report*, columns *951–52*, concerning Rainsford School, when he expects *(a)* the further consultations to end with Essex Local Education Authority and local schools and *(b)* a decision to be taken on the case for admitting a pupil whose name has been sent to him. [76107]

Ms Estelle Morris: We have asked Essex Local Education Authority to provide details of this pupil and their handling of the direction process, along with information about alternative local schools, by Monday 15 March. Their response will determine whether we need to write to any other schools. Only once all local consultation is fully completed will it be possible for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to make a decision.

Higher Education Funding Council

Dr. Starkey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will publish the Quinquennial Review report on the Higher Education Funding Council for England. [76734]

Mr. Blunkett: I am publishing the report today. Copies have been placed in the Library.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Arts Funding

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how much additional money would have been available to *(a)* the Arts Council, *(b)* the Sports Council, *(c)* the Millennium Commission and *(d)* the Heritage Lottery Fund in (i) 1997–98 and (ii) 1998–99 if the Government had not introduced the New Opportunities Fund. [72175]

Mr. Chris Smith: In line with the overall income forecast of £10.6 billion, we expect the arts, sport, heritage and charities (with £1.85 billion each) and the Millennium Commission (£2.017 billion) to receive more in the current licence period than was originally forecast.

Any retrospective reallocation of the sums announced for the New Opportunities Fund (£1 billion) and the National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts (£200 million) is entirely hypothetical.

Lobbyists

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will make a statement on the role of professional lobbyists in formulating policy in his Department. [74359]

Mr. Chris Smith *[holding answer 4 March 1999]:* Any contacts with lobbyists by Ministers and civil servants in this Department are conducted in accordance with the "Ministerial Code and Guidance for Civil Servants: Contact with Lobbyists".

Departmental Logo

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what was the cost of *(a)* developing and *(b)* introducing the new departmental logo. [75184]

Mr. Chris Smith *[holding answer 5 March 1999]: (a)* The budget for developing the departmental visual identity was £26,000. We are still awaiting final invoices, but expect the final outturn to be close to budget.

(b) Introducing the new visual identity incurred no further costs, and has already resulted in savings of over 25 per cent. on the procurement of the Department's printed stationery. This will be a continuing saving and further efficiency improvements are also expected.

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport on what criteria the new departmental logo was chosen. [75296]

Mr. Chris Smith *[holding answer 8 March 1999]:* The logo, and the new visual identity of which it is a part, had to serve the overall purposes of the exercise. These were to improve the consistency and distinctiveness of DCMS communications. Further criteria were cost-effectiveness and acceptability to DCMS staff.

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport in what colours the new departmental logo will be available; and what the criteria are for deciding how the different colour logos are to be used by his Department. [75298]

Mr. Chris Smith *[holding answer 8 March 1999]:* The new visual identity uses a palette of 15 colours which will be used on the Department's publications and printed stationery. The Pantone Matching System references for these colours are:

3272
286
5483
032
5125
279
104
382
451
124
239
626
2735
633
130.

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if the contract for the design for his new departmental logo was put out to tender. [75297]

Mr. Chris Smith *[holding answer 8 March 1999]:* Yes. (The contract, however, included much more than designing a new departmental logo.)

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many design options for his Department's new logo were put forward for consideration; and to whom. [75295]

Mr. Chris Smith *[holding answer 8 March 1999]:* The initial phase of the communications consultancy involved extensive discussions with DCMS staff and with a variety of "partner bodies". The design company then put forward three options for a new visual identity to Ministers and staff.

Tourism Strategy

Miss Geraldine Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans the Government have to encourage the regeneration of traditional seaside resorts *(a)* through grant aid and *(b)* otherwise. [75699]

Janet Anderson: The Single Regeneration Budget brings together 20 separate programmes to create a flexible fund for local regeneration. In September, Ministers at the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions announced that SRB funds—about £3.8 billion over the next three years—would be available to tackle pockets of deprivation, including coastal towns. 44 of the bids included proposals for the regeneration of seaside resorts.

"Tomorrow's Tourism", our tourism strategy document published on 26 February, addresses this important industry sector and, through the eight-stage regeneration plan for resorts, will help to create the right framework in which tourism can flourish. The future of our seaside resorts depends on all those involved in both private and public sectors working together to develop the sort of products now needed and with the quality and value for money which visitors expect. The Government will continue to explore ways to encourage the regeneration of traditional seaside resorts.

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how the Government intend to implement their tourism strategy; and if he will make a statement. [75793]

Janet Anderson: Our strategy document, "Tomorrow's Tourism", sets out a number of specific proposals for action. The Government will review, and report annually on, the progress made in implementing the strategy.

Miss Geraldine Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans he has for overseas promotions to encourage people to visit traditional British seaside resorts. [75698]

Janet Anderson: The Government sponsor the British Tourist Authority, who are responsible for the promotion overseas of Britain as a tourist destination. The BTA assists seaside resorts both by promoting them in its overseas campaigns—such as Waterfront Britain, British Arts Cities, the Millennium Touring Brochure, UK The Guide, Britain for Walkers and the Movie Map—and by encouraging resorts to participate in overseas marketing partnerships and in overseas consumer trade exhibitions.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what were the design, printing and distribution costs of the document, "Tomorrow's Tourism". [75185]

Mr. Chris Smith *[holding answer 5 March 1999]:* The costs of designing, printing and distributing 15,000 copies of the document "Tomorrow's Tourism" are as follows:

Design

We are awaiting the final invoice from the company responsible for design, typesetting, proof reading and the conversion of the text into a format suitable for the Internet. However, we expect the final cost to be approximately £35,000.

Print

The cost of printing 15,000 copies of the document was £25,510.00.

Distribution

The distribution was undertaken by DCMS employees. The overall cost of postage was £1,850.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what discussions his Department held with each of the RDAs about the context of "Tomorrow's Tourism" prior to its publication. [75567]

Mr. Chris Smith *[holding answer 9 March 1999]:* Our strategy was developed with full involvement from the industry and other Government Departments with an interest in Tourism. This included the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, who have the policy lead for the RDAs. I discussed our new tourism strategy, "Tomorrow's Tourism" with the Chairmen designate of all the RDAs on 18 February.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if copies of "Tomorrow's Tourism" were sent to each of the chairmen designate of the RDAs. [75566]

Mr. Chris Smith *[holding answer 9 March 1999]:* Chairmen and Chief Executives designate of the RDAs were each sent copies of "Tomorrow's Tourism" on 25 February.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what discussions he has had with *(a)* the English Tourist Board, *(b)* regional tourist boards and *(c)* representatives of tourist attractions about proposals for a national quality assurance scheme; and if he will make a statement. [76068]

Mr. Chris Smith: One of the key aims of our new tourism strategy, "Tomorrow's Tourism", published on 26 February, is to develop and spread quality. "Tomorrow's Tourism" was developed with full involvement from the industry, including the English Tourist Board and the Regional Tourist Boards. The strategy promotes the use of the new harmonised quality standards for accommodation being launched to consumers in September. The ETB is considering the use of quality assurance schemes for other industry sectors, including the attractions sector.

Lottery Film Programme

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how much money has been recouped to date by the Lottery Film Programme. [75750]

Mr. Chris Smith *[holding answer 9 March 1999]:* To date, the Arts Council of England's Lottery Film Programme has recouped £2.33 million.

Lottery Funding

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how much of its funding from the National Lottery the National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts will make available for projects to turn innovations into products and services. [76027]

Mr. Chris Smith: The National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts is funded by an endowment of £200 million from the National Lottery, which will provide an annual income of up to £10 million. It has yet to be decided how the amounts will be apportioned to the different parts of NESTA's remit. As well as funding innovative products and services, finance will be provided for mentoring and placement schemes; masterclasses; centres of excellence; showcasing and summer schools.

Television Licence Fee

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when regulations will be laid to bring into effect the television licence fee increases due to come into force on 1 April. [76731]

Mr. Chris Smith: On 15 December 1998, *Official Report*, columns *420–21*, I announced that, from 1 April 1999, the fee for a colour television licence would increase to £101 and that for a black and white licence to £33.50. I have today laid before Parliament the regulations necessary to bring these fees into force.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Serious Fraud

29. **Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Attorney-General what steps he is taking to ensure that sufficient resources are deployed to counter serious fraud. [74110]

The Solicitor-General: The Serious Fraud Office deals with the most serious and complex fraud. The Comprehensive Spending Review resulted in an increase in financial resources available to the SFO over the next three years. In return, the SFO will be expected to increase its caseload and reduce average case costs and the average time it takes to investigate without sacrificing quality. Staff and other resources are sufficient to handle the current caseload.

Serious Fraud Office

30. **Mr. Gareth Thomas:** To ask the Attorney-General what proportion of cases investigated by the Serious Fraud Office in the past 12 months have resulted in a conviction. [74111]

The Solicitor-General: In the year to the end of February 1999, the Serious Fraud Office concluded 20 trials involving 38 defendants. In 19 of these trials, at least one defendant was convicted, usually the principal defendant. Of the 38 defendants, a total of 32 were convicted.

Private Prosecutions

31. **Mr. Chope:** To ask the Attorney-General how many applications he has received in the last year for him to halt private prosecutions. [74112]

The Attorney-General: The only power vested in me to halt proceedings is the right to enter a nolle prosequi, which is confined to cases proceeding on indictment in the Crown Court. It is usually more appropriate for requests to stop proceedings to be considered by the Crown Prosecution Service, which does have the power to intervene in all criminal cases.

Comprehensive statistics relating to applications for nolle prosequi are not kept and in any event would not separately identify those relating to private prosecutions.

Cross-border Crime

32. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Attorney-General what discussions he has had with colleagues in other jurisdictions on cross-border crime. [74113]

The Attorney-General: I maintain a close dialogue with colleagues on all matters of mutual interest, including how to prosecute effectively those involved in cross-border crime.

Crown Prosecution Service

34. **Mr. Lock:** To ask the Attorney-General if he will make a statement on the appointment of area business managers of the Crown Prosecution Service as part of the reorganisation of the CPS. [74115]

The Attorney-General: An exercise to select 42 Area Business Managers was advertised to staff within the Crown Prosecution Service. This has been completed and 37 Area Business Managers were appointed on 1 February 1999.

It is anticipated that the five remaining posts will be the subject of appointments in April. This step, together with the appointment of 42 Chief Crown Prosecutors, represents the most significant single step towards the restructuring of the CPS into 42 Areas as we promised on taking office.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Attorney-General what steps he is taking to improve the effectiveness of the Crown Prosecution Service. [74114]

The Attorney-General: Sir Iain Glidewell's Report on the Crown Prosecution Service made a number of recommendations aimed at improving the effectiveness of the Crown Prosecution Service.

Under its new Director of Public Prosecutions and Chief Executive, the Crown Prosecution Service is making good progress in considering and implementing the Glidewell recommendations. From April 1999, the Crown Prosecution Service will be reorganised into 42 geographical Areas; the appointment of 42 new Chief Crown Prosecutors for England and Wales was announced by the Director of Public Prosecutions this week.

35. **Mr. Kidney:** To ask the Attorney-General if he will make a statement on the progress of appointments of the new Chief Crown Prosecutors. [74116]

The Attorney-General: The Director of Public Prosecutions announced on Monday 8 March the appointment of 42 Chief Crown Prosecutors for the new Crown Prosecution Service Areas and three Assistant Chief Crown Prosecutors for London.

This complements the appointment of 42 Area Business Managers referred to in my answer to the hon. Member for Wyre Forest (Mr. Lock) at column 327. The restructuring of CPS into 42 areas not only fulfils our promise on taking office, but is an important milestone in restructuring the criminal justice system on a more rational basis—which will facilitate closer liaison between police and the CPS as well as greater co-operation among the criminal justice agencies as a whole.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Metropolitan Police Manpower

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police officers there were *(a)* in each division of the Metropolitan police force and *(b)* in total, (i) on the last date for which figures are available, (ii) on 31 March 1998, (iii) 31 March 1997 and (iv) 31 March 1992. [75271]

Kate Hoey: The Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police tells me that the information is not available for the precise dates requested, but that it is recorded for different dates, as in the table. The various reasons why some entries are blank are that:

(i) West Hendon and Golders Green Divisions amalgamated to form Collingdale in August 1997; and

(ii) there were some different divisional boundaries, and a different area structure, within the Metropolitan Police District in 1992. The Area Headquarters in 1992 were not the same Headquarters as those in later years and the final 21 entries in the table, starting with WD, relate to divisions and areas that existed only in 1992.

Metropolitan Police Manpower

Division	*6 January 1999*	*31 December 1997*	*2 January 1997*	*7 January 1992*
Greenwich	292.45	298.4	302.5	281
Bexleyheath	274.4	282	287.3	285
Croydon	265.38	272.84	297.36	323
South Norwood	324.34	327.77	327.98	303
Epsom & Sutton	412.81	404.5	405.23	402
Area 5 HQ	712.7	753.7	777.36	508
Heathrow	340.73	362.06	364.99	444
Brixton	290.58	299.08	322.65	301
Streatham	253.6	251.3	272.71	282
Vauxhall	350.11	366.51	371.94	—
Chiswick	171.71	186.3	197.2	204
Hounslow	266.3	270.26	272.7	270
Spelthorne	180.08	178.4	198.2	203
Twickenham	267	283.15	295.85	333
Kingston	329.89	366.89	362.24	403
Wimbledon	294.83	292.48	325.25	—
Battersea	263.4	268.7	306.9	257
Wandsworth	312.58	327.18	355.38	231
Hillingdon	395.5	398.2	418.7	—
WD	—	—	—	231
LK	—	—	—	180
LM	—	—	—	225
VW	—	—	—	313
Area 3 HQ	803.7	831.9	888.51	495
Shoreditch & Hackney	329.32	330.4	326.8	—
Stoke Newington	338.1	346.24	349.24	300
Limehouse	259.8	267.09	267	316
Whitechapel	301.3	300.4	329.4	—
Barkingside	260.98	268	292.4	292
Chingford	241.9	238.7	238.3	244
Ilford	231.65	228.95	259.6	263
Leyton	220.2	224.8	238.92	228
Havering	326.38	334.33	351.05	369
Forest Gate	295.48	303.48	314.48	—
Dagenham	279.12	299.8	299.85	279
Plaistow	286.88	286.88	311.4	295

Metropolitan Police Manpower

Division	*6 January 1999*	*31 December 1997*	*2 January 1997*	*7 January 1992*
Edmonton	267.68	268.3	261.78	247
Enfield	277	282	292.1	280
Area 4 HQ	658.2	694.7	680.43	420
Southwark	296.87	289.18	308.88	319
Peckham	296.76	302.63	303.78	300
Walworth	282.8	268.7	265.5	267
Catford	287.9	290.85	297.7	269
Lewisham	307.56	319.38	328.6	329
Bromley & Orpington	442.66	464.1	471.44	—
Plumstead	303.04	313.49	320.35	288
West End Central	298	309	308	256
Charing Cross	295.2	398.6	403.7	374
Marylebone	307.3	329.1	332.7	255
Paddington	324.2	352	350	—
Fulham	313.6	230.76	225.73	184
Hammersmith	300.82	311.02	335.52	352
Area 2 HQ	686.8	708.8	706.18	514
Hampstead	186.5	213.35	208.15	262
Kentish Town	291.66	285.46	274	279
Holborn	206.90	199.7	199.8	208
Holloway	245.01	250.5	255.9	267
Islington	284.4	298.9	313.7	—
Harrow	281.45	289.05	283.4	288
Wembley	257.48	266.48	272.6	258
Kilburn	336.18	346.75	367.26	402
Barnet & Hertsmere	225.55	277.26	285.26	298
Golders Green	—	—	215.15	210
Collingdale	427.79	428.73	—	—
West Hendon	—	—	235.65	245
Ealing	312.8	338.35	354.28	346
Southall	281.99	288.16	291.19	258
Hornsey	245.4	261.4	263.3	284
Tottenham	273.1	265.1	271.7	293
PN	—	—	—	238
PR	—	—	—	285
GH	—	—	—	351
HB	—	—	—	206
HD	—	—	—	206
KW	—	—	—	300
ND	—	—	—	332
Area 6 HQ	—	—	—	441
XY	—	—	—	214
XU	—	—	—	253
BC	—	—	—	210
BD	—	—	—	230
Area 7 HQ	—	—	—	504
Area 8 HQ	—	—	—	486
CV	—	—	—	137
DD	—	—	—	289
DR	—	—	—	224
Totals	21,517.18	22,088.90	22,761.38	23,636

Integrated Immigration Caseworking System

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if his Department carried out a feasibility study before it agreed the contract for an integrated immigration caseworking system; and if he will make a statement. [75741]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The need for an integrated Information Technology system in the Immigration and Nationality Directorate (IND) was originally identified in an independent study carried out by Sema Group in 1994, which recommended a programme of computerisation to achieve productivity improvements. During the competition for the contract IND received confirmation of this assessment from each of the three shortlisted service providers, working on-site with full access to officials at all levels. Siemens Business Services proposed the extensive use of electronic imaging of documents. The technical feasibility of achieving this was established by visits to reference sites where such systems were already in use.

Coldingley Prison

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 4 February 1999, *Official Report*, column *752*, on HMP Coldingley, (1) if Wackenhut (UK) Limited paid the sums owing in relation to the contract at HMP Coldingley within the 30-day payment period; and if he will make a statement; [75731]

(2) what other sums have been established by the Prison Service as due from Wackenhut (UK) Limited; and if he will make a statement; [75732]

(3) what is the total amount which Wakenhut (UK) Limited has owed the Home Office in relation to the contract at HMP Coldingley; what sums are outstanding currently; and if he will make a statement. [75733]

Mr. George Howarth: Wackenhut UK Limited has paid all of the £170,531 which was owed at 29 January, together with invoices for £50,507 issued by the Prison Service since that date, and the Prison Service had paid Wackenhut £76,522 in respect of goods provided by Wackenhut.

Work is continuing to ascertain other sums due from Wackenhut, and the Prison Service is considering claims made by the company.

The payment of all moneys identified as being owed by Wackenhut to the Prison Service will be rigorously pursued.

Women Prisoners

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the provision of places at open prisons for women. [75713]

Mr. George Howarth: The table lists the three female open establishments. These prisons currently provide 519 certified normal accommodation (CNA) places for 481 sentenced adults and young offenders. There are no current plans to change the number of places provided.

CNA places and population at open female establishments as of 8 March 1999

Establishment	*Certified normal accommodation places*	*Number of prisoners*
HMP Askham Grange	130	128
HMP and YOI Drake Hall	295	266
HMP and YOI East Sutton Park	94	87
Total	519	481

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the average annual increase in the number of *(a)* women prisoners and *(b)* places at open prisons for women in each of the last five years and in total. [75780]

Mr. George Howarth: Information on the average female prison population is given in table 1. This information, up to 1997, is published in "Prison statistics

England and Wales" (Table 1.2 of the 1997 edition), a copy of which is in the library. Information on the certified normal accommodation (CNA) for female open prisons is given in table 2.

Table 1: Average female population in prisons in England and Wales 1994–98

Year	Average female prison population	Difference
1994	1,811	—
1995	1,979	+168
1996	2,262	+283
1997	2,675	+413
1998[1]	3,105	+430

Total change between 1994–98 +1,294

[1] Provisional figures.

Table 2: Average Certified Normal Accommodation (CNA) at female open prisons, 1994–98

Year	Female open prisons	Female open young offender institutions	Total	Difference
1994	422	53	475	—
1995	444	53	497	+22
1996	453	53	506	+9
1997	452	53	505	−1
1998[1]	459	53	512	+7

Total change between 1994–98 +37

[1] Provisional figures

Life Prisoners

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners serving life sentences have escaped from open prisons in each of the last 10 years; and how many were convicted for an offence committed while escaping. [75551]

Mr. George Howarth: Central records cover the period from 1 March 1991. The number of reported absconds by life sentence prisoners from within open prisons since that date is as follows:

Date	Number
1 March 1991–29 February 1992	7
1 March 1992–28 February 1993	12
1 March 1993–28 February 1994	13
1 March 1994–28 February 1995	10
1 March 1995–29 February 1996	18
1 March 1996–29 February 1997	9
1 March 1997–28 February 1998	9
1 March 1998–28 February 1999	12

As there is no central record of either those absconds which occurred prior to 1 March 1991, or offences committed by prisoners whilst at large, the further details requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners serving life sentences are currently placed at open prisons. [75552]

Mr. George Howarth: On 31 January 1999, there were 380 life sentence prisoners in open prisons in England and Wales.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on his policy concerning the placement of life sentence prisoners in open prisons. [75558]

Mr. George Howarth: A period in open conditions is regarded as essential for most life sentence prisoners before they are considered for release on life licence. This period allows for the testing of areas of concern in conditions which are closer to those in the community than are found in closed prisons. Decisions to transfer life sentence prisoners to open conditions are taken by Ministers on consideration of recommendations made by the Parole Board.

The Secretary of State's directions to the Parole Board in relation to mandatory life sentence prisoners require the Board, before making a recommendation for transfer to open conditions, to balance the risks against the benefits of such a move, taking into account:

a. whether the lifer has made sufficient progress towards tackling offending behaviour to minimise the risk and gravity of re-offending and whether the benefits suggest that a transfer to open conditions is worthwhile at that stage; and

b. whether the lifer is trustworthy enough not to abscond or to commit further offences (either inside or outside the prison).

In each case the Board is also directed to consider whether:

a. the extent to which the risk that the lifer will abscond or commit further offences while in an open prison is minimal;

b. the lifer has shown by his performance in closed conditions that he has made positive efforts to address his attitudes and behavioural problems and the extent to which significant progress has been made in doing so; and

c. the lifer is likely to derive benefit from being able to continue to address areas of concern in an open prison and to be tested in a more realistic environment.

The same considerations apply in principle to recommendations for the transfer to open conditions of those subject to discretionary and other life sentences.

Workplace Drug Screening

Mr. McCabe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he will take to ensure that workplace drug screening programmes are applied equally to employees at all levels within the organisation. [75647]

Mr. Straw: The Home Office does not operate any drug screening programmes of its employees within the workplace.

Firearms Compensation

Mr. McCabe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are the criteria for determining compensation claims under Option C for people required to hand in firearms and ancillary equipment; and how the criteria were established. [75619]

Mr. Boateng: Claims under all options of the firearms compensation schemes are determined by the eligibility requirements set out in the Firearms (Amendment) Acts 1997 and in the compensation schemes. To qualify for compensation, a surrendered handgun or small calibre pistol must be a prohibited weapon as defined in the Acts, and ancillary equipment must be of a type specified in the compensation schemes. The categories of ancillary

equipment covered by the schemes were drawn up in consultation with a number of shooting representative bodies.

Derker and Stoneleigh Residents Association

Mr. Woolas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received from the Derker and Stoneleigh Residents Association in Oldham. [75517]

Mr. Boateng: The Derker and Stoneleigh Residents Association wrote to my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary on 17 February 1999 and will receive a reply very shortly. I am not aware of any other representations.

Refugee Arrivals Project

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many refugees have been allocated to the North East Region by the Refugee Arrivals Project; where they have settled; and what is the unit cost per week in each location. [76127]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The Refugee Arrivals Project provides an advice service to asylum seekers arriving at Gatwick or Heathrow who declare their application for asylum at their port of entry. Such asylum seekers may be entitled to income support and housing benefit. Because of current difficulties experienced by single asylum seekers in obtaining suitable accommodation in the London area, the Refugee Arrivals Project has advised some to seek support in other parts of the country. At present, about 350 asylum seekers have gone to the North East Region while their asylum claim is being considered.

Chelmsford Prison

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action will be taken following the report by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons on HM Prison Chelmsford to rectify problems identified in that report; and if he will make a statement. [76080]

Mr. George Howarth: Work has already begun to address the issues raised in the report including installation of a new cell call bell system and the building of a new reception area.

The Prison Service will, within 30 working days of the date of publication of the report, prepare an action plan addressing all the recommendations made by the Chief Inspector.

Sexual Offences

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many individuals have been wrongly *(a)* arrested and *(b)* convicted for committing sexual offences from 1995 to date; and if he will make a statement. [74073]

Mr. Boateng: Data on wrongful arrest are not collected centrally. Data on wrongful conviction are available for persons whose appeals against conviction were heard at the Crown Court or the Court of Appeal and are as follows:

Appeals from persons against conviction (1) for a sexual offence where the conviction was quashed (2), 1995–1997.

Appeals from persons against conviction [1] for a sexual offence where the conviction was quashed [2], 1995–97

Year	*The Crown Court*	*Court of Appeal*
1995	22	30
1996	6	31
1997	16	[3]46
1998	[4]—	[3]66
1999 (to 1 March)	[4]—	[3]7

[1] Includes appeals against conviction and sentence
[2] Includes results where a lesser offence was substituted
[3] Compiled by the Court of Appeal and may be on a different basis to previous years
[4] Not yet available
Source:
Data compiled by the Home Office using case data supplied by both courts

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many appeals are currently being considered from individuals who assert that they are innocent of sexually related offences. [74074]

Mr. Boateng: At 1 March of this year, in the Court of Appeal, there were 264 outstanding applications from individuals against conviction for a sexually related offence.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many of the sexual offences currently being investigated relate to incidents which took place more than a year ago. [74075]

Mr. Boateng: The information requested is not recorded centrally.

Sexual Abuse (Compensation)

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the average level of compensation paid to a victim of sexual abuse in the three most recent available years. [74076]

Mr. Boateng: Data are only available for claims received on or after 1 April 1996 under the tariff-based criminal injuries compensation scheme effective from that date. Details of awards made in respect of sexual abuse in childhood are as follows:

£

Period	*Average award*
1 April 1996 to 31 March 1997	4,388
1 April 1997 to 31 March 1998	4,609
1 April 1998 to 28 February 1999 (11 months)	4,586

Pascal Lissouba

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the terms are under which Pascal Lissouba has been given rights of residence in the United Kingdom. [76140]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: It is not our practice to disclose details of individuals' immigration records.

Railway Stations (CCTV)

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what consultation has taken place between (i) his Department and Railtrack and (ii) the British Transport Police and Railtrack on the co-ordination of publicly funded CCTV and CCTV operated by Railtrack; in how many mainline railway stations there is currently *(a)* operational CCTV, *(b)* installed but non-operational CCTV and *(c)* no CCTV; and if he will make a statement. [75700]

Dr. Reid: I have been asked to reply.

No specific discussions have been held between my Department and Railtrack concerning CCTV. The British Transport Police (BTP) hold discussions with Railtrack on an ad hoc basis regarding the installation of CCTV. Initiatives such as the Secure Stations Scheme and the Secure Car Parks Scheme require Railtrack, the BTP and the train operators to liaise on improving security at stations with measures such as CCTV.

Eleven of the 14 mainline stations operated by Railtrack have some form of operational CCTV. At the remaining three, CCTV has been installed but it is not operational. No information is held centrally on the number of CCTV cameras and their operational status for the rest of the network.

PRIME MINISTER

Ministerial Travel

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Prime Minister what the cost has been of his visits to Scotland in the current year, and if he will provide a break down of *(a)* travel, *(b)* accommodation, *(c)* security and *(d)* other costs; how many civil servants travelled with him for each visit and what the cost was for each; and if he will list the meetings he held on each visit, stating at which ones he performed in his capacity as Prime Minister. [72616]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 24 February 1999]:* I have visited Scotland on two occasions since 1 January 1999: Glasgow on 5 February and Glasgow again on 4–5 March 1999.

My programme on 5 February included a visit to the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama and to the Western General Hospital. These engagements were undertaken in my capacity as Prime Minister. Separately, the Labour Party arranged a Question and Answer session in the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama to which students were invited.

During my visit on 4–5 March I undertook a number of official engagements in my capacity as Prime Minister. These included a visit to Marconi Marine Limited and Richmond Park School, Glasgow and a Question and Answer session in Carluke. I also addressed the Scottish Labour Party Conference as Leader of the Labour Party.

On both occasions I was accompanied by five members of my Office and the usual number of security and secure telecommunications staff who travel with a Prime Minister on visits within the United Kingdom. This is in line with the practice adopted by previous Governments.

It is not possible to give costs for these visits as final bills are not yet in.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Prime Minister on what dates he plans to visit Scotland during the period of the Scottish general election campaign; from what source such trips will be financed; what role civil servants and special advisers will play on such visits; and if he will make a statement. [72617]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 24 February 1999]:* My programme of visits during the campaign is yet to be finalised although I greatly look forward to visiting Scotland over the next few months. Depending on the nature of the visit, travel costs for any visits will be met from the appropriate source. All expenditure will be in accordance with the Ministerial Code.

Involvement by civil servants, including Special Advisers will take place in line with the relevant guidance set out in the Civil Service Code, the Ministerial Code and the Model Contract for Special Advisers.

I also refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Middlesbrough, South and Cleveland, East (Dr. Kumar) on 16 February 1999, *Official Report,* column *721,* setting out guidance to civil servants during the period before the forthcoming elections to the Scottish Parliament.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Prime Minister (1) which countries of the G8 he has visited since 1 May 1997; [76155]

(2) when he plans to make an official visit to Canada. [76137]

The Prime Minister: I have visited all the G8 countries, with the exception of Canada. I look forward to visiting Canada at the earliest possible date, thus reciprocating Prime Minister Chretien's successful visit to Britain in May last year.

Food Safety

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Prime Minister how many representations he has received during the last six months on food safety; and how many of these mentioned *(a)* genetically-modified organisms, *(b)* genetic engineering and *(c)* biotechnology. [75064]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 5 March 1999]:* My office has received 100,000 items of correspondence from members of the public in the last six months. Approximately 2,400 have related to food safety and biotechnology issues and, of these, approximately 100 have specifically mentioned genetically modified organisms or genetic engineering.

Gibraltar

Mr. Howard: To ask the Prime Minister if he has responded to the allegations by the Prime Minister of Spain regarding criminal activity in Gibraltar. [75795]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 9 March 1999]:* We are investigating these allegations, together with the relevant Gibraltar authorities. This involves careful and detailed research but we expect to respond shortly.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Genetically Modified Crops

14. **Mrs. Ann Winterton:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received advocating a moratorium on the planting of genetically modified crops. [74093]

Mr. Rooker: We have received representations from a range of organisations and individuals advocating a moratorium on commercial planting of genetically modified crops.

24. **Mr. Syms:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement about English Nature's recommendation on the planting of genetically modified crops. [74105]

Mr. Rooker: The Government believe that the necessary protection of the environment can be achieved without the moratorium on herbicide-tolerant and insect-resistant crops which English Nature have recommended.

Food Safety Regulations

15. **Mr. Evans:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement about food safety regulations in other parts of the EU. [74094]

Mr. Rooker: Food safety is an area of EU competence. Most food law is harmonised across the EU and rules equivalent to those in place in the UK apply in other Member States. The Government see this as the best way to promote common food safety standards across the EU.

Fur Farming

17. **Mr. Loughton:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has made to his European colleagues to bring about an EU-wide ban on fur farming. [74096]

Mr. Morley: The Government's primary concern is to bring about an end to fur farming in this country, which is why we are supporting the Private Member's Bill promoted by my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Garston (Maria Eagle). We have made it clear in Council of Europe discussions on welfare standards that the UK is opposed for ethical reasons to fur farming.

Food Marketing

18. **Ms Rosie Winterton:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what measures his Department is taking to improve marketing in the food industry. [74098]

Mr. Rooker: We pursue a range of activities to help the agri-food industry to improve its marketing performance. We also work with industry initiatives in this area.

Flood Defences

20. **Mr. Amess:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what recent representations he has received about the impact of the operation of flood defences on fisheries. [74101]

Mr. Morley: Fishermen have an opportunity to make representations to the responsible authority when proposals for flood defence work are advertised under the Environmental Impact Assessment Regulations. MAFF is not aware of any recent cases where the authorities have been unable to resolve any potential problems raised.

Animal Feed

21. **Mr. Alan Simpson:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what action his Department plans to take to ensure animal feed including genetically modified ingredients is adequately labelled. [74102]

Mr. Rooker: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to him on 15 February 1999, *Official Report*, column *576*.

British Fishing Industry

22. **Mr. Mitchell:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what proposals he has for ensuring that charges made by public bodies and regulated bodies to the British fishing industry are no higher than the charges imposed on the fishing industries in the rest of Europe. [74103]

Mr. Morley: Charges by public or regulated bodies to the British fishing industry can be made only within the statutory frameworks of the bodies concerned, which will include procedures for complaints or representations against levels set. It would not be appropriate for my Department to seek to vary these by reference to the actions of similar bodies elsewhere in Europe.

Food Labelling

23. **Mr. Nigel Griffiths:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what further steps he is intending to take to ensure better labelling of the products of humanely reared animals. [74104]

Mr. Morley: We will continue to encourage the growing number of organisations who have responded to consumer demand by introducing schemes which allow easy identification of food produced from animals reared to high welfare standards.

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to improve the accuracy and informative content of food labelling. [74088]

Mr. Rooker: Detailed and extensive rules on food labelling are already in place, including a general prohibition on falsely describing food or labelling it in a way likely to mislead. In addition new regulations on the labelling of genetically modified soya and maize will be laid shortly and, from February next year, further information covering the quantity of certain ingredients in certain foods will be required.

Common Fisheries Policy

25. **Mr. Brady:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement about the practice of quota hopping in relation to the common fisheries policy. [74106]

Mr. Morley: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to my hon. Friend for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) on

30 July 1998, *Official Report*, column *467*, and the reply given to my hon. Friend for Castle Point (Mrs. Butler) on 2 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *718*.

Organic Farmers

Mr. Drew: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the help he is proposing to give to those farmers who wish to change to organic production. [74095]

Mr. Morley: We will be seeking Parliamentary approval shortly to double the rate of aid for farmers in England converting to organic practices, following approval of the revised scheme from the European Commission. We have also increased support for the Organic Conversion Information Service, which advises farmers about conversion.

Organic Production

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what support his Department is giving to research into organic production techniques. [74099]

Mr. Morley: MAFF has a dedicated programme of research into organic farming methods. The value of this programme will rise to £2.1 million (an increase of 40 per cent.) in 1999–2000.

Biodiversity

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the impact on biodiversity of the adoption of intensive farming methods since 1969. [74951]

Mr. Morley: The Ministry is a partner in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan, which concluded that the adoption of intensive farming methods has had a substantial adverse impact on biodiversity. The Ministry is currently funding research into the effects of intensive management of arable land on birds, and of intensive management of grassland on birds and invertebrates. In addition the Ministry is continuing to fund work on the indirect effects of pesticides on birds.

Intervention Board

Ms Christine Russell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how the Intervention Board performed against its targets for 1997–98. [76732]

Mr. Nick Brown: The Intervention Board's performance against its key targets in 1997–98 was as follows:

Percentage

	Target	*1997–98 Performance*
Percentage of claims processed within deadlines	99.0	91.3
Percentage of claims processed correctly	98.5	99.5
Cumulative running cost efficiency gains	2.5	0.4
Improvement in index of productivity	6.0	–3.7
Ratio of disallowance to EAGER funds handled	0.40	0.06
To maintain expenditure within vote provision, cash and running cost limits	—	Met
New value for money savings in procurement of goods and services	6.5	11.0
Yield: cost ratio of anti-fraud activities	3.0:1.0	5.8:1.0

Cattle Passports

Mr. Drew: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many cattle now have passports issued by the British Cattle Movement Service. [76733]

Mr. Rooker: The British Cattle Movement Service (BCMS) has now provided more than a million cattle with passports since its launch on 28 September 1998. In addition BCMS has processed more than a million passports of slaughtered cattle, entered more than 600,000 live cattle movements on to the Cattle Tracing System database, and dealt with around 140,000 phone calls from farmers to its Helpline.

These are impressive achievements. As a result of BCMS' work, it will be much easier to check where cattle have been during their lives. This will help to trace animals during disease outbreaks, and is an important factor in rebuilding confidence in British cattle and beef, at home and abroad.

CAP Reform

Mr. Woolas: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what progress has been made on reform of the Common Agricultural Policy, with particular reference to wheat production. [74080]

Mr. Morley: The Government strongly support the European Commission's proposal for a 20 per cent. cut in the intervention price for cereals. If this is agreed by the Council of Ministers, European wheat prices would come into line with world prices, to the benefit of consumers.

Supermarket Chains

Miss Geraldine Smith: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received from *(a)* farmers and *(b)* consumer groups on the buying power of supermarket chains; and if he will make a statement. [74092]

Mr. Rooker: We have received a number of representations from both farmers and consumer groups on the buying power and pricing policies of supermarkets. These are matters within the competence of the competition authorities and are currently subject to an inquiry by the Office of Fair Trading which expects to report on their findings later this month.

SOCIAL SECURITY

National Insurance

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his estimate of the *(a)* number and *(b)* value of national insurance payments in arrears; and if he will make a statement. [74034]

Mr. Timms: The collection of National Insurance contributions is a matter for the Chief Executive of the Contributions Agency, George Bertram. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from George Bertram to Mr. David Atkinson, dated 10 March 1999:

As Chief Executive of the Contributions Agency, I have responsibility for answering questions about the Contributions Agency and operational matters relating to the collection of National

Insurance contributions (NICs). I have been asked to reply to your question about the number of National Insurance (NI) debtors and the amount of NI in arrears.

Although the Agency has the ability to collect information on the debt outstanding from some of our customer groups, problems with the implementation of the Agency's NIRS2 computer system mean that these figures are not readily available.

Currently the Agency is concentrating its efforts on the NIRS2 Stabilisation and Recovery plan. However, when NIRS2 is fully implemented it will allow the Agency to provide improved debt management and accountability.

The latest reliable information about NIC debt was reproduced in the National Audit Office report on the National Insurance Fund 1997–98 and used the information available within the Agency at 31 March 1998.

At the time the only figures available related to self-employed contributors who pay Class 2 NICs monthly by direct debit, or in quarterly instalments. The figure quoted in the NAO report was an estimate based on the outstanding debt recorded on the Agency's three main systems for recording Class 2 debt and amounted to £513 million, which represents a significant proportion of the Agency's total debt.

Overseas Pensioners

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate the cost or uprating the pensions for UK citizens resident overseas in 1999–2000 in line with UK pensioners, for *(a)* all overseas pensioners and *(b)* only those overseas pensioners whose net income would increase as a result. [75238]

Mr. Timms: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is in the table.

The approximate cost of uprating pensions for all UK residents overseas in 1999–2000 in line with UK pensioners

	£ million
Not frozen cases	19
Frozen cases	18
Total	37

Notes:
1. The figures are based on recent data and allow for some increase in the numbers of overseas cases.
2. The numbers are presented in terms of the total cost of paying an annual uprating to all UK pensioners living overseas, including both cases that already receive annual uprating and those who do not (ie, the frozen cases).

Source:
Figures are provided by the Government Actuary's Department. The measure used to uprate pensions is the Retail Prices Index (RPI).

Pensioners (Income Support)

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many (i) single and (ii) married pensioners aged *(a)* 80 or above and *(b)* 75 to 79 are receiving weekly amounts of income support of (I) £0.01 to £2.99, (II) £3.00 to £4.99, (III) £5.00 to £9.99 and (IV) £10.00 to £14.99. [75538]

Mr. Timms: The information is in the table.

Income support pensioners aged 75 and over, by weekly amount received and marital status—August 1998

Thousand

		Weekly amount of Income support				
	All amounts	*£0.01 to £2.99*	*£3.00 to £4.99*	*£5.00 to £9.99*	*£10.00 to £14.99*	*£15.00 and over*
All aged 75 and over	931	33	34	148	186	530
Single	861	27	28	129	173	504
Aged 75–79	238	14	15	69	16	124
Aged 80 and over	623	14	13	60	157	379
Couples	70	6	6	19	13	26
Aged 75–79	27	3	3	6	3	12
Aged 80 and over	43	3	3	13	10	14

Notes:
1. Figures are based on a 5 per cent. sample of all cases and as such are subject to a degree of sampling error.
2. Figures have been rounded to the nearest thousand and may not sum due to rounding.
3. The figures for couples relate to both married and unmarried couples, and will include cases where one member is aged 75 or over and the other is under 75.

Source:
Income Support Statistics Quarterly Enquiry, August 1998

Housing Benefit

Ms Kelly: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many households in receipt of housing benefit have no one in work in (i) Bolton, (ii) the North West and (iii) England. [75634]

Angela Eagle: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is as follows.

Housing benefit recipients in the North West and England who have no earnings

North West	*England*
387,000	3,287,000

Notes:
1. The figures relate to those recipients where no earnings are declared, either full-time or part-time.
2. Recipients may be a single person or a couple.
3. Figures are rounded to the nearest thousand.

Source:
Annual 1 per cent. sample taken in May 1998—the sample is too small to give single local authority information.

Ms Kelly: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people in receipt of housing benefit live in *(a)* local authority properties, *(b)* housing association properties and *(c)* owner-occupied housing, in (i) Bolton, (ii) the North West and (iii) England. [75632]

Angela Eagle: The information is in the table.

Housing benefit recipients May 1998

	Bolton	*North West*	*England*
Local authority	14,810	263,580	2,135,100
Housing association	3,860	79,560	729,620
Private tenants (excluding HA)	4,030	96,660	861,200

Notes:
1. Figures for Bolton are estimated.
2. Figures for North West and England include estimates where individual local authority data are not available.
3. Recipients may be a single person or a couple.
4. Figures rounded to the nearest ten.

Source:
Quarterly caseload inquiries.

Council Tax Benefit

Mr. Coleman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what savings have been made so far by the Government as a consequence of the changes to council tax benefit regulations introduced on 1 April 1998; [75615]

(2) what estimate his Department has made of the savings in financial year 1999–2000 resulting from the changes to council tax benefit regulations introduced on 1 April 1998; [75696]

(3) when he will make a statement on the planned review of the changes to council tax benefit regulations introduced on 1 April 1998. [75695]

Angela Eagle: The information on savings made so far as a result of the April 1998 changes to the Council Tax Benefit regulations is not currently available. Savings for the financial year 1999–2000 are estimated to be £4 million (to the nearest million).

We are committed to monitoring the effects of the changes to the Council Tax Benefit Regulations introduced on 1 April 1998, in partnership with local authorities. Officials have recently conducted a competitive tender for research to monitor the change. The results will be published in due course.

Benefit Integrity Project

Mr. Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if people over retirement age will be exempt from inspection under the replacement for the Benefit Integrity Project. [75646]

Mr. Bayley: The new system of periodic inquiry into the current entitlement of people receiving Disability Living Allowance (DLA) will be introduced from April 1999. Of claimants aged 65 or over, those with lower awards of DLA may be contacted from the outset of the new process. Those with an award of DLA which comprises the higher rate of the mobility component with either the highest or middle rate of the care component will not be contacted in the early stages, as evidence indicates a low level of change in the entitlement of this group over time. We intend to evaluate and refine the process as it develops, and will be taking decisions about the position of this group in the light of growing experience.

State Earnings-related Pension

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when the decision was taken to reduce the support available through SERPS to surviving spouses; and how this decision was published. [75683]

Angela Eagle: The Social Security Act 1986 reduced the amount of SERPS which a surviving spouse, who is widowed on or after 6 April 2000, can inherit from 100 per cent. to 50 per cent.

The intention to make this change was first publicised in the White Paper "Reform of Social Security—Programme for Action" (Cm 9691) in December 1985. The House debated the change during the passage of the Social Security Bill.

Details of the change have been published in DSS leaflets NP46 "A guide to Retirement Pensions" and NP45 "A guide to Widow's Benefits" since April 1996.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what representations have been received by him on the decision to reduce the level of support through SERPS available to surviving spouses. [75684]

Angela Eagle: We recognise that there is concern regarding the level of public awareness about the reduction, from 100 per cent. to 50 per cent., in the amount of SERPS which a surviving spouse can inherit on or after 6 April 2000. We are actively looking at ways of raising public awareness of this change.

Benefits (Sanctions)

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to introduce benefit sanctions for those claimants who break their probation or community service orders. [76084]

Angela Eagle: We are currently looking into the possibility of testing arrangements which would link benefit entitlement to compliance with community sentences so, for example, someone subject to a probation or community service order may lose benefit if they breach the conditions of the order.

Benefit Claims

Mr. Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security for each social security benefit *(a)* how many pieces of information must be provided in order to make an initial claim for benefit, *(b)* how many separate pieces of documentation must be provided in order to make an initial claim and *(c)* how many person-hours are on average required to process a single initial claim. [75945]

Angela Eagle: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is set out in the tables.

Section 19 of the Social Security Administration (Fraud) Act 1997 makes benefit entitlement conditional upon a benefit claimant providing sufficient information

for a NI No. for themselves and anyone else included in the claim to be traced and confirmed as appropriate to them.

It provides powers to disallow a claim if identity cannot be established or confirmed. The Benefits Agency (BA) has introduced new procedures for checking identities thoroughly using the powers in the fraud Act; this commenced on a rolling programme from 1 December 1997.

All claims to benefit must either be made in writing on a properly completed claim form relevant to the individual benefit being claimed, or in such other written manner that the Secretary of State will accept. The length and complexity, and therefore the amount of information required, varies from benefit to benefit and depends on an individual's personal circumstances. It is not possible to quantify exactly how many pieces of information must be provided.

The volume of documentation is similarly dependent on the individual benefit. For those customers on Income Support or Jobseeker's Allowance who are subject to the Evidence Requirement (ER) the claim form makes it clear which documents are required for a customer to satisfy that requirement. These include details of current and previous wages, any capital held, ground rent and service charges payable, details of any self-employment and any occupational pensions or other income which is received.

For those customers not subject to the ER it is for the Adjudication Officer to decide the amount of documentation required in order that when deciding upon the claim they can make a sound and reasoned decision thus protecting public funds.

Information on the time taken to clear a claim is in the tables.

Average time taken to clear a claim in person hours

	Time			
Benefit	*Mins*	*Hours*	*Volumes*	*Total hours*
1 Income Support (IS)				
1a) mortgage	38.28	0.64	173,400	110,976
1b) self employed	60.00	1.00	40,900	40,900
1c) people from abroad	53.59	0.89	27,700	24,653
1d) habitual residence test	58.20	0.97	30,600	29,682
1e) others	31.33	0.52	1,493,800	776,776
Total for IS	—	—	1,766,400	982,987

Note:
Average IS claim 33.6 mins

Average time taken to clear a claim in person hours

	Time	
Benefit	*Mins*	*Hours*
2 Jobseeker's Allowance	51.33	0.86
3 Incapacity Benefit	44.58	0.74
4 Severe Disablement Allowance	180.84	3.01
6 Maternity Allowance	95.83	1.60
7 Retirement Pension (RP) Districts	76.04	1.27
8 Widows Benefit	113.56	1.89
9 Disablement Benefit (Dis Ben)		
9a) Dis Ben Normal	67.63	1.13
9b) Dis Ben Accident	85.52	1.43
9c) Dis Ben Rea	98.47	1.64
10 Family Credit	47.74	0.80
11 DLA normal	147.20	2.45

Average time taken to clear a claim in person hours

	Time	
Benefit	*Mins*	*Hours*
12 DLA special	86.08	1.43
13 AA normal	130.31	2.17
14 AA special	69.88	1.16
15 ICA	116.74	1.95
16 DWA	100.38	1.67
17 War Pensions	332.78	5.55
18 War Pensions (Widows)	636.65	10.61
19 Child Benefit		
19a) Child Benefit New	35.39	0.59
19b) Child Benefit Duplicate	92.35	1.54
19c) One Parent Benefit	53.70	0.90
20 Pensions in Directorate		
20a) International Liaison Claim	224.40	3.74
20b) Widows Benefit	484.37	8.07
20c) RP claim	327.08	5.45

Note:
DLA—Disability Living Allowance; AA—Attendance Allowance; ICA—Invalid Care Allowance; DWA—Disability Working Allowance.

Minimum Income Guarantee

Mrs. Gilroy: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people are estimated to be ineligible for benefits under the minimum income guarantee, despite having incomes that fall below its threshold, who are aged *(a)* 60 to 74, *(b)* 75 to 79 and *(c)* over 80 years (i) in total and (ii) by gender. [75895]

Mr. Timms: The information is not currently available. We have previously estimated that the total number of pensioners who will be ineligible for the Minimum Income Guarantee because their savings exceed £8,000 but whose income is below the threshold is 230,000 (if income from savings is included in the assessment of total income) or 600,000 (if income from savings is not included).

These estimates were based on the data used to produce the published estimates of take-up of income related benefits. These estimates are currently being revised following the discovery in December of an error, the effect of which was to understate income brought to account. The estimates will be republished in May.

National Insurance Numbers

Mr. Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what measures are in place to vet key staff involved in issuing national insurance numbers. [76085]

Mr. Timms: We are currently conducting a risk assessment and cost benefit analysis to identify the need for, and potential use of enhanced personnel checks.

We have recently reviewed our recruitment procedures for all staff. Our procedures already follow Cabinet Office guidelines. We are implementing a number of improvements which include; more rigorous checks on identity; new mandatory management checks of our recruitment procedures; internal audit checks to provide a further level of assurance.

Pensions

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the general levies payable under the Pension Schemes Act 1993 by occupational and personal pension schemes. [76730]

Mr. Timms: The general levy covers the costs of bodies which exist either to safeguard the rights of, or to provide information to, pension scheme members. These bodies are the Occupational Pensions Regulatory Authority (OPRA), the Pensions Advisory Service, the Pensions Registry and the Pensions Ombudsman. Rates of general levy for the 1999–2000 year are shown in the table.

The increase in the levy rates in respect of occupational pension schemes reflects, in particular, the steady increase in the number of cases OPRA is having referred to it and the complexity of the issues it is dealing with. It is important, therefore, that the Authority and the other bodies concerned continue to have the resources necessary to ensure that scheme members' interests are properly protected. The rates in respect of personal pension schemes remain the same as last year.

£

		Occupational pensions		*Personal pensions*	
Scheme size (members)	*Basis*	*Amount per member*	*Minimum payment*	*Amount per member*	*Minimum payment*
2–11	Each scheme	—	11	—	3.75
12–99	Member	1.20	—	0.35	—
100–999	Member	0.85	120	0.25	35
1,000–4,999	Member	0.69	850	0.20	250
5,000–9,999	Member	0.53	3,450	0.15	1,000
10,000+	Member	0.37	5,300	0.10	1,500

DEFENCE

Military Exercises

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) which countries had armed forces involved in the NATO joint exercise in Norway carried out between 1 April 1997 and 31 March 1998; [72828]

(2) what assessment he has made of the NATO joint exercise in Portugal carried out between 1 April 1997 and 31 March 1998; [72831]

(3) which countries had armed forces involved in the NATO joint exercise in Portugal carried out between 1 April 1997 and 31 March 1998; [72835]

(4) what is his assessment of the value of the NATO joint exercise in Norway carried out between 1 April 1997 and 31 March 1998; [72968]

(5) what is his assessment of the principal benefits of the NATO joint exercise in Portugal carried out between 1 April 1997 and 31 March 1998. [72969]

Mr. Doug Henderson *[holding answer 1 March 1999]:* Exercise STRONG RESOLVE, which took place in March 1998 jointly in Norway and in Portugal, consisted of two halves; exercise CRISIS NORTH, in Norway, and exercise CRISIS SOUTH, in Portugal. The aim of exercise STRONG RESOLVE was to exercise NATO's ability to cope with multiple, simultaneous crises in separate geographic regions, drawing on the resources of both Major NATO Commanders, and involving the full spectrum of NATO missions, and the exercise is assessed to have succeeded in its aim. Members of the armed forces of the following nations participated in CRISIS NORTH: Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, the United Kingdom and the United States. Members of the armed forces of the following nations participated in CRISIS SOUTH: Belgium, the Czech Republic, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Sweden, Spain, Turkey, the United Kingdom and the United States.

NATO

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will specify the minimum military readiness and training standards required of members of NATO; and whether the UK currently complies. [75274]

Mr. Doug Henderson: NATO Allies, including the United Kingdom, hold forces at a range of readiness and training levels required to meet the full range of Alliance missions, so that NATO is ready to respond effectively to present and future needs. The UK reports to NATO on its forces through the Alliance defence planning process.

Britannia Beagles Kennels

Angela Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the cost to public funds of *(a)* the demolition of the Britannia Beagles kennels at the Royal Naval College, Dartmouth and *(b)* their rebuilding elsewhere. [75525]

Mr. Spellar: The beagles at BRNC Dartmouth are funded by private subscriptions, and are not supported by public funds. The beagles are a registered encroachment, and as such the MOD can terminate the agreement at any time giving reasonable notice. The MOD is not liable for any damage or repairs and if notice was given for the beagle pack to leave BRNC Dartmouth, then any costs for a new facility outside the College would be the sole responsibility of the beagle pack.

As an option within the College redevelopment plan, the present beagle kennels have been identified as a potential site for the College's new recreational facility. However, options are still being developed and no decisions have yet been taken. The approximate cost of any demolition of the kennels would be in the region of £1,000.

Royal Hospital, Haslar

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what instructions were given to *(a)* service personnel and *(b)* civilian personnel employed at the Royal Hospital, Haslar concerning (i) participation in the save Haslar rally and march on Sunday 24 January and (ii) signature of a petition to save Haslar organised by Gosport Borough Council. [75213]

Mr. Doug Henderson *[holding answer 8 March 1999]:* Written instructions were issued to Service and civilian staff by the Hospital Commander at the Royal Hospital, Haslar concerning participation, by staff, in the 'Save Haslar' campaign. Those instructions reminded staff of their responsibilities as public servants. They also requested that items promoting the campaign should not be displayed within the hospital, directed that petition signatures should not be collected on site and advised Service personnel that they should not participate in the march, in accordance with joint Queen's Regulations and MOD policy.

Nuclear Test Veterans

Joan Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what research his Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated into the possible genetic effects on the children of veterans who served on Christmas Island during nuclear testing periods. [75831]

Mr. Spellar: My Department has not commissioned any research into the possible genetic effects on the children of nuclear test veterans who served on Christmas Island.

As far as I am aware, there is no scientific or medical evidence to show that health or other physical problems suffered by the children or grandchildren of nuclear test veterans can be attributed to participation in the UK's nuclear test programme 40 years ago.

In November 1997, the National Radiological Protection Board (NRPB) published the results of a major epidemiological study of the children of radiation workers. The study, entitled "Cancer in the Offspring of Radiation Workers—A Record Linkage Study" discounted the hypothesis (known as the Gardner Hypothesis) that fathers' exposure to radiation before conception is a cause of childhood leukaemia and non-Hodgkin lymphoma. This study was peer reviewed and published in the *British Medical Journal.*

The other major study in this area involved about 30,000 children of those Japanese nationals irradiated as a result of the dropping of atomic bombs on Japan in World War II. This was published in 1990 and failed to detect any significant excess of mutations, untoward pregnancy outcomes, childhood mortality or excess cancer.

A report on the US Nuclear tests published by the US Institute of Medicine in 1995 concluded that the size of the US test veteran population was not large enough to make practical a scientifically adequate and epidemiologically valid study of genetic effects in the children of test veterans. This is despite there being over 210,000 US test veterans, ten times the number in the UK.

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will reinstate multiple myeloma as a pensionable condition for UK nuclear test veterans. [74729]

Mr. Bayley: I have been asked to reply.

There is no prescribed list of medical conditions for which a war pension may be awarded. A war pension claimed more than seven years after discharge from service can be awarded for any condition, if, on the basis of reliable evidence, there is a reasonable doubt that disablement or death is due to service in HM forces. The Department's policy is that on current medical evidence and research a reasonable doubt has not been established that a causal link exists between multiple myeloma and participation in the UK nuclear tests programme. However, the Ministry of Defence has recently announced a further limited study into the incidence of multiple myeloma among veterans of the UKs atmospheric nuclear test programme in the 1950s. The results of this study are expected to be available by the end of next year.

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will review the pension applications of nuclear test veterans that were rejected on the basis of the National Radiological Protection Board's conclusions on risk of cancer. [74727]

Mr. Bayley: I have been asked to reply.

We know of no reason to do so. We accept the current findings of the study by the National Radiological Protection Board. However, the Ministry of Defence has recently announced a further limited study into the incidence of multiple myeloma among veterans of the UKs atmospheric nuclear test programme in the 1950s. The results of this study are expected to be available by the end of next year.

CABINET OFFICE

Biotechnical Industry

Mr. Baker: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office how many unminuted pre-arranged meetings occurred between *(a)* himself, *(b)* Ministers in his Department and *(c)* his officials and representatives of the biotechnical industry sector since 1 May 1997. [74835]

Dr. Jack Cunningham *[holding answer 5 March 1999]:* I refer to the answer I gave to the hon. Gentleman on 25 February 1999, *Official Report,* column *430.*

Mr. Baker: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office if he will list the biotechnical companies which have placed staff *(a)* on secondment and *(b)* on placement within his Department since 1 May 1997. [74841]

Dr. Jack Cunningham *[holding answer 5 March 1999]:* Secondments and attachments from other sectors of the economy are part of the Interchange Initiative, which promotes the exchange of people and good practice between the Civil Service and other organisations.

No staff from biotechnology companies have been placed in the Cabinet Office since 1 May 1997.

Genetic Modification

Mr. Baker: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, pursuant to his answer of 25 February 1999, *Official*

Report, column *430*, on genetic modification, what criteria inform his decisions as to whether or not he releases information about meetings with private individuals or companies. [75187]

Dr. Jack Cunningham *[holding answer 8 March 1999]:* I refer to the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 9 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *168*.

ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND THE REGIONS

Discretionary Rate Relief

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list for each *(a)* metropolitan district council, *(b)* shire district council, *(c)* unitary council, *(d)* shire county council and *(e)* London borough council the sums of money in the 1999–2000 financial year they will be required to pay to the Government in respect of (i) discretionary rate relief and (ii) other grants issued in previous financial years. [74776]

Ms Armstrong: I have placed two tables in the Library. The first shows the amounts which local authorities have budgeted to pay into the non-domestic rates pool as a result of their own decisions to grant discretionary relief to businesses in 1999–2000. These payments ensure that the rates pool, and hence the amount to be redistributed to local authorities, is not adversely reduced by decisions taken by individual local authorities to reduce non-domestic rates bills for certain businesses. The table gives figures for each authority responsible for the billing and collection of non-domestic rates.

The second table shows the effect on local authorities in 1999–2000 of the Local Government Finance Report (England) 1997/1998: Amending Report 1999.

Housing Associations

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many housing associations received Government funding in *(a)* London, *(b)* the North West and *(c)* England as a whole in the last two years. [75264]

Mr. Raynsford: The number of housing associations receiving Government funding through the Housing Corporation's Approved Development Programme in 1997–98 and 1998–99 is shown in the table.

Number of housing associations receiving social housing grant through the Housing Corporation's approved development programme

Region	*1997–98*	*1998–99*
London	183	171
North West	57	56
England	548	500

Note:
1997–98 information is based on schemes given approval to start during the year
1998–99 information is based on start of year allocations

In addition, the Housing Corporation provides revenue funding to housing associations, eg Supported Housing Management Grant and Innovation and Good Practice grants. Housing associations also received funding from local authorities under the Local Authority Social Housing Grant scheme.

Mining Waste Disposal

Mr. Levitt: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of safeguards on the disposal of mining waste. [75345]

Mr. Raynsford: The effectiveness of safeguards on the disposal of mining waste is kept under review by the Health and Safety Commission in respect of stability and safety, by the Environment Agency in respect of pollution aspects, and by the monitoring of planning permissions by local authorities. The comprehensive framework of UK legislation which deals with location, stability and safety, and the pollution potential of tips and related structures, has ensured that very few problems have arisen in recent years.

Mr. Levitt: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to change the rules on the disposal of inert mining waste. [75346]

Mr. Raynsford: There are no plans at present to change the rules for the disposal of inert mining waste. There are, however, proposals for new quarries health and safety regulations which will include safety and stability of tips. These would not lead to any diminution of health and safety standards at quarries.

Housing Stock Transfers

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) when he proposes to announce the next round of approval for housing stock transfers; and if he will make a statement; [75466]

(2) what representations he has received regarding housing stock transfers; [75467]

(3) how many applications his Department has received for housing stock transfers in the last year for which figures are available. [75465]

Ms Armstrong: I am today announcing the names of the 25 local authorities which will be able to proceed, on a voluntary basis and subject to the approval of their tenants, with proposals to carry out 31 transfers of all or part of their housing stock to Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) in 1999–2000. The programme will involve over 140,000 dwellings in large-scale voluntary transfers, generating capital receipts of over £822 million. Nine of the transfers will be supported by Estates Renewal Challenge Funding.

Transfers can offer significant benefits for tenants. The new landlord must plan for proper maintenance and future repairs. Increased investment means that any backlog of repairs can be carried out more quickly than if the properties had remained in local authority ownership. Rent increases are normally limited by a guarantee that rents will not rise by more than 1 per cent. above inflation for the first five years. In addition, RSLs are regulated

by the Housing Corporation, a government body which requires RSLs to adhere to performance standards in areas such as housing management, tenant consultation, and rents.

But housing transfers are voluntary and may take place only if tenants are in favour. The consent of the Secretary of State is also required before a transfer can proceed and will not be granted if it appears that a majority of tenants do not wish the transfer to proceed.

The 1999–2000 programme reflects the Government's commitment to support a continuing programme of transfers as a means of generating private finance to repair and improve the condition of social housing.

Both Coventry (20,349) and Tameside (16,959) are above the Department's size limit for transfers to one landlord. I am agreeing to proposals to transfer their stock to new group structure landlords involving, in each case, two asset owning RSLs.

Two of the authorities on the 1999–2000 programme—Coventry City Council and Burnley Borough Council—expect to have housing debt remaining in their Housing Revenue Account (HRA) after their stock is transferred. This is because the capital receipt will not be sufficient to clear all of the debt in their HRA. Transfer will depend on the successful resolution of this issue. We plan to issue a consultation paper on how to tackle overhanging debt in the near future. Our objective is to enable as wide a range of authorities to consider transfer as possible.

The authorities who have successfully gained a place on the programme, together with the intended recipient RSL are as follows:

(a) a disposal by Boston Borough Council of not more than 5,114 dwelling-houses to Boston Mayflower;

(b) a disposal by Burnley Borough Council of not more than 5,354 dwelling-houses to Burnley and Padiham Community Housing;

(c) disposals by Coventry City Council of not more than 20,349 dwelling-houses to registered social landlords;

(d) a disposal by Elmbridge Borough Council of not more than 5,022 dwelling-houses to a registered social landlord;

(e) a disposal by Fenland District Council of not more than 4,445 dwelling-houses to a registered social landlord;

(f) disposals by London Borough of Hackney of not more than 1,263 dwelling-houses on the Pembury estate to the Peabody Trust, and not more than 1,131 dwelling-houses on the Stamford Hill estate to the Stamford Hill Trust;

(g) a disposal by Huntingdonshire District Council of not more than 7,134 dwelling-houses to a registered social landlord;

(h) disposals by London Borough of Islington of not more than 646 dwelling-houses on the Barnsbury estate to Newlon Housing Group, and not more than 739 dwelling-houses on the Ten Estates to the Peabody Trust;

(i) disposals by London Borough of Lambeth of not more than 2,576 dwelling-houses on the Central Stockwell estate to Hyde Southbank Homes, and not more than 1,282 dwelling-houses on the St. Martins estate to South London Family Housing Association, Metropolitan Housing Trust and Presentation Housing Association;

(j) a disposal by London Borough of Lewisham of not more than 7,213 dwelling-houses to a registered social landlord;

(k) a disposal by Liverpool City Council of not more than 4,685 dwelling-houses to South Liverpool Housing;

(l) disposals by Manchester City Council of not more than 646 dwelling-houses on the Colshaw Farm estate to Riverside Housing Association, and not more than 1,036 dwelling-houses on the Whitefield estate to a registered social landlord;

(m) a disposal by Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council of not more than 10,042 dwelling-houses to a registered social landlord;

(n) a disposal by New Forest District Council of not more than 5,883 dwelling-houses to a registered social landlord;

(o) a disposal by North Devon District Council of not more than 3,462 dwelling-houses to North Devon Homes;

(p) a disposal by Preston Borough Council of not more than 1,123 dwelling-houses on the Avenham estate to Collingwood Housing Association;

(q) a disposal by Restormel District Council of not more than 3,781 dwelling-houses to a registered social landlord;

(r) a disposal by London Borough of Richmond of not more than 8,780 dwelling-houses to a registered social landlord;

(s) disposals by Tameside Metropolitan Borough Council of not more than 16,959 dwelling-houses to registered social landlords;

(t) a disposal by Test Valley Borough Council of not more than 5,789 dwelling-houses to Testway Housing Ltd.;

(u) a disposal by London Borough of Tower Hamlets of not more than 1,780 dwelling-houses in Poplar to Poplar HARCA;

(v) a disposal by Tynedale Council of not more than 3,731 dwelling-houses to Tynedale Housing Ltd.;

(w) a disposal by West Lindsey District Council of not more than 3,919 dwelling-houses to West Links Housing Ltd.;

(x) a disposal by Weymouth and Portland Council of not more than 3,526 dwelling-houses to a registered social landlord;

(y) a disposal by Wyre Forest District Council of not more than 6,440 dwelling-houses to Wyre Forest Community Housing.

Construction Standards

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to review the buildmark and related construction standards. [75505]

Mr. Raynsford: Buildmark is a housing warranty scheme run by the NHBC, but I keep closely in touch with the steps being taken by them aimed at reducing the incidence of defects in new housing and at improving the procedures for resolving problems when they arise. My Department is represented on the NHBC Committee which keeps under review the technical standards drawn up in support of the Buildmark scheme. My Department also maintains contact with the other main providers of housing warranties.

Development Projects

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many new housing developments have been based on public design competitions in the last five years; and if he will make a statement on the role of urban design guidance in promoting such developments. [75506]

Mr. Raynsford: No data are collected by the Government on design competitions. A number of such competitions—approximately 20–25 per year, 4 or 5 of which involve new housing developments—are run by the Royal Institute of British Architects for a variety of public and private clients. The guidance used to conduct many of these competitions is issued by my Department together with the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, entitled "Architectural Competitions: A Handbook for Promoters" (1996). A copy of this publication is in the Library.

Forthcoming good practice guidance on design in the planning system will promote design competitions as a useful mechanism for achieving better quality housing development.

Roundabouts (Lighting)

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will remove the absolute requirement for roundabouts to be lit where they are situated in sensitive rural locations. [75101]

Ms Glenda Jackson *[holding answer 8 March 1999]:* There is no absolute requirement to light roundabouts. It is for the highway authority to decide whether to light, based on their assessment of the benefits to be gained and the potential adverse environmental impact.

Good design, installation and maintenance practices can do much to reduce the adverse environmental impacts of street lighting. My Department has issued advice on this subject in "Road Lighting and the Environment" and, with the Countryside Commission, has published a guide "Lighting in the Countryside: Towards Good Practice". The Highways Agency's Design Manual for Roads and Bridges contains advice on lighting rural roundabouts, which is to be supplemented following research.

Void Local Authority Properties

Ms Kelly: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what proportion of local authority properties are void in (i) Bolton, (ii) the North West and (iii) England. [75636]

Mr. Raynsford: The proportion of local authority dwellings which were reported as void on 1 April 1998 was 1.8 per cent. in Bolton, 3.7 per cent., in the North West region and 2.5 per cent. in England.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the numbers of void social housing properties by housing authority in England and Wales. [75540]

Mr. Raynsford *[holding answer 9 March 1999]:* I have placed the information requested in the form of a table in the Library. The table presents the latest information on the number of vacant dwellings owned by each local housing authority in England, as reported by them at 1 April 1998, and gives equivalent estimates for stock owned by Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) in those districts at 31 March 1998. The latter are based on information supplied by RSLs to the Housing Corporation.

Corresponding information for Welsh housing authorities is the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Carlisle Airport

Mr. Martlew: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment of the future role of Carlisle airport he plans to include in his proposed statement on UK airport policy; and if he will make a statement. [75532]

Ms Glenda Jackson: As foreshadowed in a "New Deal for Transport: Better for Everyone" (Cm3950), DETR has recently commission, in conjunction with the Government Offices for the North West, North East and Yorkshire and the Humber, a Regional Air Services Study for the North of England. This will include an assessment of the future role of Carlisle airport within the UK's airport system, its potential for meeting the demand for air services in Cumbria, Dumfries and Galloway and the Scottish Borders and the economic, environmental and social costs and benefits of doing so.

Near-miss Air Incidents

Ms Perham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what procedures are in place to investigate near-miss air incidents. [75706]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Under Article 106 of the *Air Navigation (No. 2) Order 1995*, controllers and pilots report airproxes (near miss) in which they were involved to the UK Airprox Board (UKAB), an independent organisation funded by the Civil Aviation Authority and the MOD.

Incidents involving commercial air transport, or which occur in controlled airspace, are passed to the CAA's Safety Regulation Group (SRG) for investigation. Where military aircraft are also involved, a separate investigation into the military aspects is conducted by the MOD. Once completed, the MOD's investigation report is sent to the SRG to be amalgamated with their own report of the incident.

Incidents which only involve military aircraft are referred to the MOD for investigation. The UKAB themselves conduct investigations of incidents involving general aviation in uncontrolled airspace.

SRG and the MOD forward their completed airprox incident reports to the UKAB which then independently assesses the degree of collision risk; and makes any necessary safety recommendations. The results are published.

In addition, the Chief Inspector of Air Accidents, who reports directly to the Secretary of State, has the right on any occasion to institute an investigation by the Air Accidents Investigation Branch (AAIB). The AAIB reports are published in due course.

Ms Perham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if his Department will be conducting a full investigation into the near-miss incident involving a Boeing 737 and a Gulfstream Jet over Chigwell on 26 February. [75705]

Ms Glenda Jackson: DETR's Air Accident Investigation Branch (AAIB) has begun an investigation of this incident and the results will be published in due course.

In addition to the AAIB investigation, the Civil Aviation Authority's Safety Regulation Group (SRG) is carrying out its own investigation. Once completed, the SRG report is passed to the independent UK Airprox Board (UKAB) for its review and assessment of the incident.

The UKAB will also publish its findings. These will include an assessment of the degree of collision risk and any appropriate safety recommendations.

SSAs (Snow Days)

Mr. Woolas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the weather station sites and the respective local authorities in England which are used in the calculation of snow days for the purposes of the standard spending assessment. [75518]

Ms Armstrong: Information about the weather stations used in the calculation of the number of snow-lying days for the purpose of standard spending assessments has been placed in the Library.

Haulage Companies

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what initiatives his Department is taking to provide assistance to the British haulage industry. [75759]

Ms Glenda Jackson *[holding answer 9 March 1999]:* The Government want a road haulage industry that is safe, competitive, efficient and sustainable. On 2 March we published *Sustainable Distribution: A Strategy*, which sets out our approach and the range of initiatives which we will be taking forward to assist the haulage industry to meet these aims. The initiatives include integration of the sustainable transport of goods with our planning and roads policies; improvements in safety and enforcement which will benefit the law-abiding majority of the industry; and the promotion of best practice.

Planning

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the average times taken for planning applications to be processed by each planning authority in the last year for which figures are available. [75302]

Mr. Raynsford *[holding answer 10 March 1999]:* The information needed to determine the average time for planning applications to be processed is collected centrally only for a small number of mainly minerals and waste development applications (known as 'county matters'). These represent less than 1 per cent. of all applications and include some large, complex and contentious applications which tend to raise difficult planning issues that take some time to resolve. Information on the average time taken to determine this category of applications for the year ending September 1998 is shown in the table.

The speed at which decisions are made for the vast majority of applications, i.e. all except 'county matters', is measured in terms of the proportion of decisions determined within 8 weeks and 13 weeks. In the year ending September 1998, 62 per cent. of these applications in England were determined within 8 weeks and 83 per cent. within 13 weeks.

The Department is currently considering whether average time taken to determine applications should be included in the suite of Best Value performance indicators on which the Department will be consulting later this year.

'County matters' planning applications decided: England, year ending September 1998

	Number of decisions	*Average decision time (days)*
County councils		
Bedfordshire	23	339
Buckinghamshire	36	232
Cambridgeshire[1]	37	165
Cheshire[1]	35	188
Cornwall	38	119
Cumbria	47	116
Derbyshire	43	230
Devon[1]	46	179
Dorset	33	95
Durham	25	378
East Sussex	39	107
Essex[1]	65	171
Gloucestershire	31	163
Hampshire	69	170
Hertfordshire	31	250
Kent[1]	57	204
Lancashire[1]	53	157
Leicestershire	27	230
Lincolnshire	59	127
Norfolk	57	235
North Yorkshire	51	208
Northamptonshire	34	346
Northumberland	55	152
Nottinghamshire[1]	38	237
Oxfordshire	21	328
Shropshire[1]	25	308
Somerset	44	168
Staffordshire	67	331
Suffolk	46	144
Surrey	53	151
Warwickshire	28	113
West Sussex	27	169
Wiltshire	11	223
Worcestershire[2]	7	305
London Boroughs		
Brent	3	189
Camden	2	96
Haringey	1	34
Hillingdon	1	248
Southwark[3]	1	121
National Park authorities		
Lake District	1	92
Peak	16	107
Dartmoor	2	106
Exmoor	2	57
North York Moors	5	177
Unitary Authorities		
Bath and North East Somerset	2	346
South Gloucestershire	7	937
North Somerset	4	93
West Berkshire[4]	3	120
Slough[4]	4	87
Windsor and Maidenhead[4]	1	290
Milton Keynes	2	344
Peterborough[4]	3	121
Hartlepool[3]	4	73
Middlesbrough[3]	2	92
Stockton-on-Tees[3]	6	82
Derby	2	102
Bournemouth	1	52
Thurrock[4]	2	108
Portsmouth	3	152
Southampton	2	203
East Riding of Yorkshire	17	218
North East Lincolnshire	2	98
North Lincolnshire	5	138

'County matters' planning applications decided: England, year ending September 1998

	Number of decisions	*Average decision time (days)*
Kingston-upon-Hull	3	88
Isle of Wight	3	264
Medway[4]	9	109
Leicester	1	129
Rutland	3	216
City of York	4	189
Stoke on Trent	2	131
Swindon	5	65
Metropolitan districts		
Bolton	6	205
Bury	6	160
Oldham[5]	5	82
Rochdale	5	235
Salford	1	222
Wigan	8	103
St. Helens	7	179
Barnsley[5]	8	158
Doncaster	13	325
Rotherham	12	125
Sheffield[5]	8	129
Newcastle upon Tyne	2	91
Dudley	1	133
Wolverhampton[3]	3	117
Bradford	21	210
Calderdale	10	109
Kirklees[5]	18	302
Leeds	41	165
Wakefield	7	261

[1] Excludes Unitary Authorities created on 1 April 1998.

[2] Following local government reorganisation on 1 April 1998, Hereford and Worcester county was split into Herefordshire Unity Authority and Worcestershire. Figures are provided from this date onwards.

[3] Authorities comprise parts of wound up Urban Development Corporations from 1 April 1998.

[4] Unitary Authorities created on 1 April 1998.

[5] Authorities include areas within a National Park but figures are for outside the park area only.

Press Cuttings

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions which company provides his Department with daily press cuttings on (i) environment issues, (ii) transport issues and (iii) local and regional Government issues; and if he will make a statement. [76040]

Mr. Meale: Press cuttings covering a broad range of the Department's responsibilities are supplied on a daily basis by Energy Data Services Ltd.

National Air Traffic Services

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he plans to sell a majority share of National Air Traffic Services in a public-private partnership; and if he will make a statement. [76067]

Dr. Reid: The Government are currently examining the responses received to the consultation paper on the proposal for a public-private partnership for National Air Traffic Services. A statement on the way forward will be made in due course.

Road Network (Hereford)

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans *(a)* he and *(b)* Ministers in his Department have to visit Hereford in the next six months to examine the road network. [75682]

Ms Glenda Jackson: My noble Friend the Minister for Roads and Road Safety proposes to visit Hereford later this month.

Right of Access

Mrs. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the framework within which appeals can be lodged against decisions made during any mapping exercise prior to legislation on the right of access to open countryside. [76026]

Mr. Meacher: The Government are giving consideration to the procedures for appeals in relation to mapping. No decisions have yet been taken on these.

Airport Policy

Mr. Quinn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has for airport studies in support of the development of the Government's airport policy. [76589]

Dr. Reid: The White Paper "A New Deal for Transport" (Cm 3950) announced the Government's intention to prepare a UK airports policy looking some 30 years ahead. The White Paper also announced a series of studies of the role of regional airports in the South West, the Midlands, and the North of England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland. These studies are all now under way.

To complement these studies, the Government have decided to set in hand a study of airport issues in the South East of England and the East of England. This study will consider future policies for these airports within the framework of the Government's sustainable development principles. It will take full account of the potential for airports in the other parts of the country to attract a greater proportion of the demand from their local area than they do at present, in accordance with the policy set out in the White Paper (paragraph 3.196).

The study will examine a wide range of options, and, in accordance with the new approach to appraisal set out in the White Paper, will appraise their economic, environmental and social implications. The study will consider both terminal and runway capacity. Projects for which planning applications have already been made, or are expected to be made shortly, will not be within the scope of the study. The Secretary of State must reserve his position on such cases, and cannot prejudge their outcome; the study will therefore examine a range of scenarios based on those projects either going ahead or not going ahead.

In accordance with our integrated transport policy, the study will consider not only airport capacity, but also the implications of possible developments for the planning of airspace capacity and air traffic control and for surface access to the airports concerned. The study will take account of work which the Department has recently

commissioned from OPRAF to examine the scope for improving long distance rail links to the major South East airports and the rail connections between those airports.

This work will be carried out in an open way. In particular, the Government recognise the substantial economic, environmental and social implications of runway capacity issues, and their interaction with land-use planning. The Government will therefore discuss with interested parties, including the regional planning conferences and regional development agencies, the process for taking forward the study, including the criteria which should be applied in the assessment of options.

The Government expect that the studies will take around two years. There will then be public consultation on options arising from this work. The Government envisage that the results of the airport studies will be incorporated in a White Paper on UK airports policy, which will also reflect the Government's decisions in response to the Inspector's report on the Heathrow Terminal 5 Inquiry.

Greater London Authority Elections

Mrs. Gordon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has for the voting and counting arrangements for the Greater London Authority elections on 4 May 2000. [76729]

Mr. Raynsford: I am pleased to announce that today we have sent an advertisement to the Office of the Official Journal for publication in "Tenders Electronic Daily" inviting expressions of interest from companies which could provide electronic voting equipment. This would enable votes in the first Greater London Authority elections to be electronically recorded and counted.

The new Authority will be modern, streamlined and efficient and we should work towards a voting system to match. This is particularly appropriate as the ballots for electing the Mayor and two types of Assembly Member require a more complex count than for most elections in this country. It is right, therefore to explore whether modern technology could improve the speed and efficiency of the process.

However, our top priority is to run a successful election on 4 May 2000, so we will be looking at systems which have proved extremely reliable in national or regional elections elsewhere. We will not therefore be committed to the use of electronic voting systems unless we are confident that the equipment offered will be easy for people to use, be value for money and make a real contribution to the success of the elections.

Local Government Act 1972

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to conduct research into local councils' and authorities' use of section 137 of the Local Government Act 1972. [76771]

Ms Armstrong: Section 137 is used by an increasing number of parish and town councils to provide a wide range of activities. The majority of section 137 spending by local councils is on grants to other bodies and funding for services such as youth activities, schools and playgroups. The findings of a study on local councils use of section 137 was published in November last year.

Furthermore, my Department has today published a report on local authorities use of section 137. The report found that while section 137 provides essential flexibility, authorities perceived that there are barriers to its use, such as the current financial limit on expenditure.

We are currently considering the best approach which will allow local authorities to carry out a new duty to promote the economic, social and environmental well being of their communities. Section 137 will be reviewed in the light of this new duty and we will take account of the findings of this report and the views of local authorities in doing so.

TREASURY

Unemployment

Mr. Brady: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate his Department made of the average duration of unemployment for a person unemployed and claiming benefit in each of the last four years. [75668]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 9 March 1999]:* The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Director of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Graham Brady, dated 11 March 1999:

As Director of the Office for National Statistics (ONS), I have been asked to reply to your recent parliamentary question on the average duration of unemployment.

Monthly estimates of median durations of uncompleted spells of claimant unemployment can be accessed by the House of Commons Library. The data are not readily available in precise annual form, but these monthly figures for each year average out as follows:

Estimated median duration of uncompleted spells of claimant unemployment, United Kingdom

	Weeks
1995	33
1996	33
1997	27
1998	22

These figures relate to computerised claims only i.e. they exclude a small proportion of claimants whose benefit claims are processed clerically.

Parliamentary Questions

Ms Lawrence: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his current estimate of the cost of answering *(a)* a written parliamentary question and *(b)* an oral parliamentary question. [76588]

Dawn Primarolo: As at April 1998, the average costs of answering a written parliamentary question and an oral parliamentary question were £115 and £267 respectively.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Ascension Island

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the bulk oil storage arrangements for the Ascension Island. [75638]

Mr. Doug Henderson: I have been asked to reply.

The present bulk fuel storage arrangements at Ascension Island are provided by the MV Maersk Ascension. Following a review of strategic fuel holdings on Ascension Island, my Department is considering the optimum arrangements for the future storage of fuel stocks.

Gibraltar

Mr. Howard: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations and at what level have been made to *(a)* the Government of Spain and *(b)* the European Commission in respect of the obstruction by the Government of Spain of free movement between Spain and Gibraltar. [76065]

Ms Quin: We have raised the border delays between Gibraltar and Spain on several occasions. In the last month, the Prime Minister has discussed the problem twice with Sr Aznar. The Foreign Secretary has done so twice with his Spanish counterpart. The Ambassador in Madrid has also raised the issue several times with the Spanish authorities, including with Sr Matutes. The UK Permanent Representative to the European Union has also written both to the President of the European Commission and to his *Chef de Cabinet* informing them of Spanish actions.

China (Human Rights)

Mr. Howard: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if the United Kingdom intends to sponsor a resolution on China's human rights record at the forthcoming meeting of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights. [76066]

Mr. Fatchett: We are discussing with our EU partners our policy on China at the United Nations Commission on Human Rights.

Congo-Brazzaville

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what restrictions exist on the purchasing or moving of arms directly or indirectly through agents, or other parties in the United Kingdom or its overseas territories by those seeking to overthrow the current regime in Congo-Brazzaville. [76138]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: There is no UN or EU arms embargo in place against Congo-Brazzaville. However, irrespective of the intended destination, all applications for an individual licence to export from the UK arms or other military equipment entered in Part III of Schedule 1 to the Export of Goods (Control) Order 1994, are considered against the criteria announced by my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary on 28 July 1997, *Official Report*, columns 26–29, and the EU Code of Conduct on Arms Exports, adopted on 8 June. At present, as noted in the Government's White Paper on Strategic Export Controls, published in July 1998, HMG can control trafficking and brokering only where this is necessary to implement a binding UN resolution. However, the White Paper proposed the extension of the controls on trafficking and brokering in several areas, including to countries subject to other types of embargo, eg imposed as a result of non-binding UN resolutions or EU or OSCE decisions or nationally.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on Her Majesty's Government's policy in relation to the restoration to power in Congo-Brazzaville of Pascal Lissouba. [76139]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: The UK wishes to see the initiation of an inclusive political process in Congo-Brazzaville. This would allow reconciliation and the return of all parties, including Pascal Lissouba, to participate in national reconstruction. We have urged all parties to the conflict to show restraint, and fully support UN Security Council Resolution 867 (1997) which calls for the withdrawal of foreign troops from Congo-Brazzaville.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what meetings or communications Foreign Office Ministers or officials have had with Pascal Lissouba since he commenced his exile from Congo-Brazzaville. [76141]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: No Foreign Office Minister has met Pascal Lissouba since his exile. FCO officials met him on 20 April and 26 June 1998 and on 10 March 1999 to hear his views on the situation on Congo-Brazzaville.

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if ex-President Lissouba has been issued with documents or letters of support from Her Majesty's Government supporting or facilitating his return to office; and if he will make a statement. [76142]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: On 9 November 1998, ex-President Lissouba wrote to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister requesting support. In a reply on 28 November 1998, a No. 10 official reaffirmed HMG's hopes that a process of political reconciliation would be initiated in Congo-Brazzaville, noted that this would allow all parties to return to participate in a project of national reconstruction and also urged all sides to exercise restraint.

I am placing a copy of this letter in the Libraries of the House.

Chevening

Mr. Soames: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) when he proposes to answer the question tabled by the hon. Member for Mid-Sussex on 22 February (ref. 72965) relating to the use of Chevening; [76039]

(2) when he proposes to answer the question tabled by the hon. Member for Mid-Sussex on 23 February (ref. 73515) relating to Chevening. [76038]

Mr. Robin Cook: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 9 March 1999, *Official Report*, columns *178–79*.

SCOTLAND

Waiting Lists

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement anent waiting lists in *(a)* Inverclyde and *(b)* Scotland as a whole. [69797]

Mr. Galbraith: On 31 December 1998, the number of patients waiting for inpatient and day case treatment at Inverclyde Royal NHS Trust was 2,083. On that date, the number of patients on the inpatient/day case waiting list in Scotland was 78,526, a reduction of 7.5 per cent. on the position at 30 September 1998.

From 1 July 1999, this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

Student Loans

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many loans to students have been made by the Student Loans Board (Scotland); what is the total value of the loans; how many *(a)* have been fully repaid, indicating the total sum repaid, *(b)* are in the process of being repaid, indicating the total sum so far repaid and *(c)* have made no repayment, indicating the total sum involved. [74405]

Mrs. Liddell *[holding answer 9 March 1999]:* The Student Loans Company Limited administers student loans for all UK students. The Scottish funding of loans and share of loan receipts is based on a notional split of the UK total which is approximately 11 per cent. The information is set out in the tables in respect of that proportion of the UK total which is deemed to be attributable to Scottish students studying throughout the UK.

Table 1: Loans made to students by the Student Loans Company Limited and their total value

	Number/Value
Number of loans issued	442,879
Value of loans issued	£423 million

1a. Number of loans fully repaid and the total sum repaid.

Number of loans fully repaid: 13,069.

It is not possible to disaggregate the repayments attributable to these loans from the total repayments shown in tables 1b and 1c.

Table 1b: Loans in the process of being repaid, and the total sum repaid to date

	Number/Value
Accounts in repayment	36,681
Total sum repaid	£35 million

Table 1c: Number of students who have made no repayment and the total sum involved

	Amount/Value
Number of loans due to repay where no repayment received	2,937
Amount outstanding	£1.54 million

Universities (Drop-out Rate)

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what estimate he has made of the drop-out rate at Scottish universities in each year between 1995–96 and 1999–2000; and if he will make a statement. [74560]

Mrs. Liddell *[holding answer 4 March 1999]:* There are no reliable estimates of the drop-out rate at Scottish universities available. However, methods are being developed to measure progression as part of the current work on Performance Indicators. The first information on progression will be published this summer.

From 1 July 1999, this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

Women's Aid

Mr. Sarwar: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the Government's support for Women's Aid and its plans for additional support in the future. [74885]

Mrs. Liddell: Our concern for the victims of domestic violence is reflected in Scottish Office funding of almost £220,000 this year to Scottish Women's Aid, the umbrella organisation for local women's groups. This consists of over £83,000 for work on developing refuge and permanent rehousing options for abused women who would otherwise be homeless, over £111,000 for the social welfare aspects of their work and £25,000 for training.

Because our advertising campaign has had an immediate impact on the demand for the services of Scottish Women's Aid, I announced on Monday 22 February the provision of extra one-off funding of £150,000 in the current financial year. Women's Aid intend using this to improve services and to publish leaflets at national level for the use of local groups dealing with inquiries.

We have committed £226,000 to Scottish Women's Aid for 1999–2000.

I have also established the Scottish Partnership on Domestic Violence which is charged with recommending minimum standards of services provision and looking at resources.

From 1 July 1999, this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

New Deal (Glasgow)

Mr. Sarwar: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many constituents in Glasgow, Govan have been found places under the New Deal. [74883]

Mr. Dewar: The information is not held on a constituency basis.

Information on New Deal is collated by unit of delivery. Details for Glasgow are set out:

Glasgow Unit of Delivery (figures to end of December 1998)

New Deal	
New Deal for Young People (18–24 years old)	
Number who had joined the programme	4,091
Number still on Gateway advisory process	1,532

Glasgow Unit of Delivery (figures to end of December 1998)

New Deal	
Number who had secured jobs	762
Number who had benefited from work experience opportunities or full-time education and training	978
New Deal for Long Term Unemployed (25 years and over)	
Number who had joined the programme	1,244
Number still on Advisory interview process	962
Number who had secured jobs	65
Number who had benefited from education or training	46

Nursing Homes (Waiting Lists)

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many people are currently on waiting lists for nursing home places in each local authority in Scotland. [74984]

Mr. Galbraith: This information is not held centrally.

Scottish Parliament (Tax-varying Powers)

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what expenditure has been incurred to date on making preparations for the possible use of the tax-varying powers of the new Scottish Parliament; and if he will make a statement. [74563]

Mr. Dewar *[holding answer 5 March 1999]:* There is a continuing project under way to put in place the mechanisms to enable the Scottish Parliament to implement its tax-varying powers from 1 April 2000. So far this has involved expenditure estimated at £2.5 million.

Higher Education (EU Undergraduate Students)

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the cost of providing higher education for the non-British EU undergraduate students who studied at Scottish higher education institutions in 1996–97; and out of which departmental budget it was paid. [75003]

Mrs. Liddell *[holding answer 5 March 1999]:* Institutions are funded through a number of block grants from the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council following allocation of grant from The Scottish Office. Costs of the delivery of education to individual students are not collected centrally. Estimates for the cost of providing higher education for non-British EU undergraduate at Scottish higher education institutions in 1996–97, based on average costs of any student, is £21.9 million.

From 1 July 1999, this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

Departmental Expenditure

Mr. Donohoe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what changes he intends to make to the cash limits and running costs provision for 1998–99 within his responsibility. [76565]

Mr. Dewar: Subject to Parliamentary approval of the necessary revised Supplementary Estimates, I intend to make changes to 2 voted cash limits and 1 non-voted cash block. These changes are in addition to the amounts I announced in my written answer to my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Pentlands (Dr. Clark), on 11 February 1999, *Official Report*, columns *372–74*.

The cash limit for Class XIII, Vote 3, Education, industry, arts and libraries, Scotland will be increased by a net total of £5,404,000 from £1,704,433,000 to £1,709,837,000. The net increase takes account of additional provision to be made available for books for schools, as announced by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer in his Budget statement, 9 March 1999, *Official Report*, columns 173–90.

The cash limit for Class XIII, Vote 5, Law, order and protective services, police grant and social work services, Scotland will be increased by £1,015,000. The cash limit has been increased by £1,015,000 from £677,087,000 to £678,102,000. The cash limit increase takes account of £830,000 for costs associated with the Lockerbie Trial in the Netherlands and £185,000 to meet the costs of training Returning Officers for the Scottish Parliamentary Elections.

The increases will be offset by transfers or charged to the Reserve and will not therefore add to the planned total of public expenditure.

Forestry Commission

Sir Robert Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will list those contracts entered into by the Forestry Commission which allow motor vehicles to use Forestry Commission land for activities not related to timber; and if he will make a statement; [75572]

(2) what guidelines he has issued to the Forestry Commission on the involvement of the local community in decision-taking on the non-timber activities allowed on Forestry Commission land; and if he will make a statement; [75573]

(3) what commercial organisations, not involved in the production of timber, operate on Forestry Commission land. [75681]

Mr. Macdonald: The subjects of these questions relate to matters undertaken by Forest Enterprise. I have asked its Chief Executive, Dr. Bob McIntosh, to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Bob McIntosh to Sir Robert Smith, dated 11 March 1999:

The Secretary of State for Scotland has asked me to reply to your Question Nos 75572, 75573 and 75681, about activities on Forestry Commission land not related to timber.

The Forestry Commission encourages the pursuit of many different activities on its land, provided that these activities do not conflict with its other economic, social and environmental objectives. We give consent to a wide range of commercial organisations to operate on Commission land and a detailed list is not held centrally. In nearly all cases vehicular access is involved. The organisations include those involved in sporting, the provision of recreational facilities such as cycle hire, pony trekking, and four wheel drive hire, management training companies, operators of windfarms and transmission mast sites, film production companies involved in filming on FC land, motor rallies and rally driving schools.

The Commission has a Master Agreement with the Royal Automobile Motor Sports Association for motor rallies on its land. The Commission also has individual agreements with "quad bike" operators who hire out the use of all-terrain vehicles and with rally driving schools for car testing. We also allow our land to be used for special events such as "four by four" safaris by Motor Clubs and members of the public.

The Secretary of State has encouraged the Commission to involve local communities in the management of Forestry Commission land but has not issued any specific guidelines. The Commission has an Environmental Panel in each of its Forest Districts as a forum to consider our Forest Design Plans and discuss the management of local forests. Local communities are often represented on these panels and have an opportunity to make their views known on issues of local concern.

I hope I have answered the questions you have raised.

WALES

Agriculture

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he last met (i) NFU and (ii) FUW officials to discuss the problems of the agriculture industry. [74179]

Mr. Michael: I have had numerous meetings with representatives of the NFU, FUW and CLA to discuss the problems of the farming industry. I met the President of the CLA on 25 February. I met the NFU on Friday 12 February at Ty Mawr Farm, Llanbadoc, Usk to discuss a variety of agricultural issues. I also met my hon. Friend the Member for Vale of Clwyd (Mr. Ruane) and a delegation of North Wales Farmers (including members of the FUW and the NFU) on 5 February at Hottia Farm, Dyserth, North Wales to discuss a variety of agricultural issues.

Members of all three organisations have attended several of the Question and Answer sessions I have held across Wales in recent weeks. The Under-Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, Central (Mr. Jones), met the three farming unions on 15 February and prior to this he met the NFU at the Welsh NFU Forum on 2 February. He also met NFU and FUW representatives in Brussels on 23 February, together with other UK Agriculture Ministers, prior to a meeting of the EU Agriculture Council. I understand that arrangements are in hand for a meeting with my hon. Friend the Member for Preseli Pembrokeshire (Ms Lawrence) and the NFU.

School Transport

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if he will list the statutory provisions which apply to the provision by local authorities of free school transport; [54016]

(2) what guidance his Department gives to local authorities on what constitutes an unsafe route for the purpose of providing free school transport. [74952]

Mr. Hain: Authorities are obliged under section 509(1) and (2) of the Education Act 1996 to make such arrangements for the provision of free transport as they consider necessary for the purpose of facilitating school attendance.

Parents have a defence under section 444 of the 1996 Act for not securing the regular attendance at school of children of compulsory school age if they live more than 2 miles from the nearest school (children under 8 years of age) or 3 miles away (older pupils) and the authority has made no suitable arrangements for the provision of free school transport.

The Courts have therefore ruled that free school transport should always be considered necessary under section 509(a) if children live more than 2 or 3 miles, as appropriate, from the nearest school. In other circumstances the need for free school transport has to be decided by local authorities in the light of local conditions and priorities.

When considering whether free school transport is necessary, authorities must, among other things, have regard, by virtue of section 509(4) of the 1996 Act, to the nature of the route, or alternative routes, that a child could reasonably be expected to take. Authorities should also have regard under section 509(4) to the age of the child and any parental wish for denominational education.

Whether or not a route is safe in the context of the provision of free school transport is a matter for authorities to decide. However, Welsh Office Circular 19/95, "Home To School Transport", points out that the Courts have held that a route to school is available if a child, accompanied as necessary, can walk along it with reasonable safety. A copy of the circular is in the Library of the House.

Local education authorities also have a power under section 509(3) of the 1996 Act to help with school transport costs in circumstances where they do not consider the provision of free school transport under 509(1) necessary.

Following the transfer of functions, this issue will be a matter for the National Assembly.

National Port Authorities

Mr. Peter Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list those of his appointees currently serving on national park authorities who have military backgrounds. [75570]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones *[holding answer 10 March 1999]:* Two Secretary of State appointees to the Welsh National Park Authorities, Dr. John Menon and Mr. Warren Dean Martin, have, in the past, served with the military.

This information is based upon current Welsh Office records and was provided voluntarily by the members. Applicants are not specifically asked to provide details of their military backgrounds.

Following the transfer of functions, National Park public appointments that are currently the responsibility of the Secretary of State will be transferred to the National Assembly.

HEALTH

Organ Transplants

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received urging that the organs of all deceased persons should be available for transplant unless they have clearly stated otherwise; and if he will make a statement. [73326]

Mr. Hutton: There have been several Parliamentary Questions and a number of letters from hon. Members and members of the public on this subject. We are looking into a wide range of possible ways of increasing current levels of transplantation. The issues involved in this area are very sensitive, and any measures we introduce must command public confidence. We will therefore be giving the options for action very careful and thorough consideration.

Cancelled Operations

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will place in the Library figures for each quarter in the past two years for *(a)* each health authority, *(b)* each NHS region and *(c)* England as a whole, listing the number of operations cancelled on (i) the day of or (ii) the day before admission to a hospital, stating the number of those patients not readmitted within a month. [75058]

Mr. Hutton: The figures requested are routinely placed in the Library every quarter. Copies of the latest figures have been placed in the Library today.

Worcestershire (Grants)

Mr. Lock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list (i) the names of the beneficiaries of all the discretionary grants awarded by his Department to organisations within Worcestershire during 1998, (ii) their monetary value, (iii) their total value and (iv) the proportion that that total sum comprises of the total sums awarded by his Department in discretionary grants in 1998. [75252]

Mr. Hutton: Discretionary grants totalling £4,235,276 have been awarded to organisations within Worcestershire during 1998–99; details are in the table. This represents 0.78 per cent. of the funds available to the Department for such grants. The figures exclude the Asylum Seekers' Grant because decisions on the claims submitted have not yet been taken.

Grant	*Organisations*	*Value £*
AIDS/HIV Support Grant	Worcestershire County Council	11,000
Training support programme for social services staff	Worcestershire County Council	279,751
Services for people with mental illness	Worcestershire County Council	452,926
Children's Services (Quality Protects) Grant	Worcestershire County Council	32,500
Community Care Special Transitional Grant	Worcestershire County Council	3,204,497
General Scheme of grants to voluntary organisations	The British Institute of Learning Disabilities	176,000
The promotion of training in the care of people with learning disabilities	British Institute of Learning Disabilities	40,040
Diploma in Social Work course grant from Central Council for the Education and Training in Social Work	North East Worcestershire College	7,975
Diploma in Social Work practice learning placements grants from Central Council for the Education and Training in Social Work	North East Worcestershire College	27,000
Daily Placement Fees for social work training placements from Central Council for the Education and Training in Social Work	The Diocese of Worcester Youth Support Services	1,887
Daily Placement Fees for social work training placements from Central Council for the Education and Training in Social Work	Totnall Children's Home	850
Daily Placement Fees for social work training placements from Central Council for the Education and Training in Social Work	M.S.C.A. Bromsgrove	850

Barnet Health Authority

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on progress in reducing hospital waiting lists by Barnet Health Authority. [75783]

Mr. Denham: At the end of January 1999, the waiting list in Barnet stood at 6,698. Barnet Health Authority's planned target for March 1999 is 5,846. Early indications show that significant progress was made during February 1999, with the Authority on course to achieve this target.

Breast Cancer

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what advice he has received from the Government's medical advisers on the probable impact of extending the routine call/recall element of the breast screening programme to women aged 65 to 69 years on *(a)* breast cancer detection rates and *(b)* breast cancer mortality rates. [75526]

Mr. Hutton: Interim results from one of the three pilot studies to test the feasibility of extending routine call/recall for breast screening to women aged 65 to 69 years showed breast cancer detection rates of 8 per thousand in women aged 65–67 and 17.4 per thousand in women aged 68 to 69. These results were published in the *British Medical Journal* on 8 August 1998. Copies of the Journal are available in the library. Previous evidence suggests that screening for breast cancer reduces mortality by 25 per cent. in both age groups.

West Pennine Health Authority (Mental Health)

Mr. Woolas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what extra resource allocation he has made to the West Pennine Health Authority from the additional spending on mental health for 1999–2000; [75536]

(2) if he will estimate the amount which would have been allocated to the West Pennine Health Authority from the additional spending on mental health funds for 1999–2000 on a purely per capita method of calculation; [75537]

(3) what were the criteria used for the allocation of the additional spending on mental health to health authorities. [75519]

Mr. Hutton: The West Pennine Health Authority received £30,000 as part of the directly allocated mental health element of the Modernisation Fund, which in 1999–2000 totalled £19.1 million.

Allocation to health authorities (HA) took account of three factors:

(a) identified service gaps in each

(b) the HA's need for mental health services based on a weighted population score;

(c) for London HAs recognition of the evidence of a higher level of need.

If the £19.1 million had been issued in line with the weighted capitation formula used to inform unified allocations, West Pennine Health Authority's hypothetical share would have been £185,000. However, this approach would not have been appropriate for distributing funds which we wished to target specifically to where they were most needed.

West Pennine Health Authority may benefit from centrally held budgets for mental health services yet to be allocated.

Restraint Techniques

Mrs. Brinton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many deaths have occurred in the United Kingdom as *(a)* direct and *(b)* indirect result of the use of control and restraint techniques by nurses in the last five years; and if he will give a breakdown by ethnicity of the deceased. [75949]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is not available centrally.

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the control and restraint techniques used on mentally ill patients. [75957]

Mr. Hutton: A number of courses are available to train staff in methods of restraint and many units have developed in-house procedures to meet their particular needs. Information about the range of techniques is not available centrally.

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 3 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *820*, on the Norvic Clinic, if he will list the circumstances of each of the occasions between 2 November 1997 and 4 December 1998 when control and restraint techniques were applied by nursing staff at the Norvic Clinic, Norwich; and if he will provide a breakdown by ethnicity of the patients involved. [75959]

Mr. Hutton: Between 2 November 1997 and 4 December 1998 there were 45 occasions when control and restraint techniques were applied by nursing staff at the Norvic Clinic, Norwich. Of those 45 occasions, 36 involved a patient categorised as white; 8 involved black Afro-Carribean patients; and 1 involved a patient categorised as "black other".

Violence against Nurses

Mr. Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many reported assaults, and other acts of violence there were against nurses in the workplace; and how many successful prosecutions of such assaults there were in each year since 1990; [75956]

(2) what action is being taken to ensure that nurses who are subject to violence in the workplace are supported in subsequent legal action. [75955]

Mr. Denham: We have made it very clear that violence against all staff working in the National Health Service is unacceptable. We expect employers in the National Health Service to establish close working relationships with the police and the Crown Prosecution Service so that staff can be assured that they will have the full force of the law behind them. We also expect local managers to provide whatever support is needed to help staff who are assaulted to recover, and also to advise and support them through any subsequent legal process.

Information on the number of reported assaults and other acts of violence against nurses in the workplace, and those that were successfully prosecuted is not available centrally.

Mr. Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has had from *(a)* the Royal College of Nursing and *(b)* other bodies, regarding violence against nurses. [75952]

Mr. Denham: We have received representations from the Royal College of Nursing (RCN) and other health bodies including the Manufacturing, Sciences and Finance Union, the British Medical Association, UNISON and the National Health Service Confederation regarding violence against nurses.

That is why we launched the NHS Guidance, "Safer Working in the Community: A guide for NHS managers and staff on reducing the risks of violence and aggression" at the start of the RCN's joint campaign "Stamp out Violence" on the 28 October 1998, which we fully endorse.

The Government are determined to ensure that NHS staff who spend their lives caring for others are not rewarded with intimidation and violence. Violence to staff is unacceptable and will not be tolerated.

Health Care Teams

Mr. Syms: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress has been made towards the Government's target of introducing three to five-year agreements between health care teams and hospitals. [76033]

Mr. Denham: Guidance issued in October 1998 set out how we expect health authorities, primary care groups and National Health Service trusts to work together and with social services, users and carers and others to develop and implement long-term service agreements.

All service agreements beginning April 1999 are to be set in the context of the longer-term relationships and objectives being established through health improvement programmes. Fully fledged long-term service agreements are to be developed through a rolling programme. The new primary care groups have been asked to aim to develop at least two such agreements for the period beginning April 1999.

Patients Charter

Mr. Syms: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress has been made towards creating a new Patients Charter. [76032]

Mr. Denham: We asked Greg Dyke, Chairman of Pearson Television, to develop proposals for a new National Health Service Charter. His report "The New

NHS Charter—A Different Approach" was published in December. We intend to undertake consultation on proposals taking account of the report in the near future.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Independent Complaints System

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Minister of State, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans he has to introduce an independent ombudsman or other independent complaints system for complaints about *(a)* QCs, *(b)* the Bar and *(c)* solicitors; and if he will make a statement. [75784]

Mr. Hoon: The Office of the Legal Services Ombudsman was established by the Courts and Legal Services Act 1990 because of concern that complaints about the provision of legal services should be investigated properly and thoroughly. The Ombudsman, who is statutorily independent of Government and the legal profession, has powers, inter alia, to examine allegations and make certain recommendations concerning the handling of complaints against barristers and solicitors (including QCs) by their professional bodies.

Pro Bono Work

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Minister of State, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans he has to monitor the amount of pro bono work done by *(a)* barristers, *(b)* QCs and *(c)* solicitors; and if he will make a statement. [75785]

Mr. Hoon: The Government have no plans at present to monitor formally the amount of pro bono work carried out by the legal profession.

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Minister of State, Lord Chancellor's Department to what extent, in considering the appointment of new QCs, the Lord Chancellor takes into account *(a)* the past record of the applicant's undertaking of pro bono work and *(b)* the willingness of the applicant, if appointed, to undertake pro bono work. [75787]

Mr. Hoon: Neither the undertaking of, nor a willingness to undertake, pro bono work is one of the published criteria for appointment. Where applicants highlight the extent of the pro bono work they have undertaken, this is treated as a part of their practice which is not reflected in their fee income.

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Minister of State, Lord Chancellor's Department to what extent, in considering the appointment of new QCs and taking into account levels of earnings of applicants a discount is given against the levels of earnings to reflect pro bono work; and if he will make a statement. [75786]

Mr. Hoon: My noble and learned Friend considers applications for Queen's Counsel against published criteria. The application form, which applicants complete, requires them to give gross fee income for the last three years. The criteria require successful applicants to have a high quality practice, and the level of fee income is an indicator of size of practice. Applicants are also asked to state if the level of their fees has been affected by the nature of their, or their firm's practice. Where applicants highlight the extent of the pro bono work they have undertaken that is treated as part of their practice which does not reflect in their fee income.

Legal Aid System

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Minister of State, Lord Chancellor's Department what steps he is taking to publicise the proposed reforms of the legal aid system in a manner accessible to potential users of the legal services, with particular reference to community legal services. [75512]

Mr. Hoon: The proposed reforms of the legal aid system have been publicised in the White Paper "Modernising Justice", published in December 1998, in a summary version which has been widely distributed and in press releases and media briefing in connection with the Access to Justice Bill. The proposals are also available on the internet.

My Department's press office has taken steps to publicise the proposals through the media in the six Community Legal Service Pioneer areas announced since December 1998 and will seek to arrange regional and national publicity when further Associate Pioneer ares are announced.

In addition, informing the public at grass roots level about the Community Legal Service is one of the key tasks being considered between my Department and the Pioneer area authorities and one which will also be considered with the Associate Pioneer area authorities.

Immigration Appeal Authority

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Minister of State, Lord Chancellor's Department how many regional adjudicators of the Immigration Appeal Authority have been suspended in the last 12 months; and for what reason. [76029]

Mr. Hoon: One Regional Adjudicator has been suspended in the last 12 months following a complaint from a member of staff.

Queen's Counsel

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Minister of State, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will make a statement on the observations of Mr. Justice Lightman of 9 June 1998 concerning *(a)* the nature and effect of the patronage in the QC system, *(b)* the fees claimed by QCs and their official endorsement through legal aid scale fees and *(c)* seating arrangements in court. [75789]

Mr. Hoon: My noble and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor has read the lecture, "Civil Litigation in the 21st Century", given by Mr. Justice Lightman to the Chancery Bar Association on 3 June 1998. He has no plans to make a statement.

Written Answers to Questions

Friday 12 March 1999

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Judicial Appointments

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Minister of State, Lord Chancellor's Department in each of the past four years, how many *(a)* QCs, *(b)* barristers and *(c)* solicitors were informally approached to see if they would accept, if offered, judicial appointment, in each case to (i) the High Court bench and (ii) the circuit bench; in each case, how many indicated they would, if offered an appointment at that time, decline it; and if he will make a statement. [75788]

Mr. Hoon: The table indicates the number, according to available Departmental records, of QCs in the last four years who *(a)* have been informally asked whether, if an offer were ever made, they would accept appointment to the High Court Bench; and *(b)* indicated that they would decline an offer of immediate appointment:

Year	*Number asked*	*Number who would decline offer of immediate appointment*	*Number who accepted subsequently*
1995	12	8	3
1996	14	9	5
1997	3	3	0
1998	2	0	0

Of these, only 2 in 1995, 1 in 1996 and 2 in 1997 indicated that they would never accept appointment, and one of these has subsequently changed his mind. In 1996, one barrister was informally approached who indicated that he would accept appointment, if offered, and subsequently did so.

During the past four years, no solicitor has been approached, nor has any QC, barrister or solicitor been informally approached about appointment to the Circuit Bench.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Computer Purchases

Dr. Cable: To ask the Chairman of the Information Committee what plans he has to reduce the costs to hon. Members of purchasing new computers through a bulk purchasing arrangement. [75902]

Mr. Allan: The Information Committee proposed, in its recently published report (*The Supply of Members' Information Technology Equipment, Software and Associated Services (HC 1998–99, 76—Incorporating HC 1997–98, 856-i)*) that there should be a central procurement option made available to Members at an early opportunity.

House Officials are currently negotiating prices for a range of suitable computer hardware and software, with a view to making equipment available to Members and Departments of the House at advantageous prices. The new arrangements are expected to be available in the first quarter of the new financial year.

The Stationery Office

Mr. Love: To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission, what monitoring of compliance by the Stationery Office with the contract to provide printing services has taken place since privatisation; when the contract is due for renewal; on what criteria the tendering process will be based; and if he will make a statement. [75815]

Mr. Kirkwood: The performance standards laid down in the current contract between the House and the Stationery Office (TSO) for the provision of printing services are monitored daily by the Vote Office, and senior House Officers meet regularly with the senior management of TSO to review performance and resolve problems. The contract will expire on 31 December 1999 unless the House exercises its option to extend the term for a limited period. With the approval of the Commission, the printing services covered by the contract have been put out to open tender in accordance with EU procedures, and expressions of interest are currently being evaluated. The relevant notice, which describes the award criteria, was published in the supplement to the Official Journal of the European Communities on 31 July 1998.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Freedom of Information

Mr. Rhodri Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to *(a)* encourage greater openness in the public sector and *(b)* prepare for legislation on freedom of information. [77107]

Mr. Straw: The Government's programme of constitutional reform seeks to involve people more closely in the decisions which affect their lives. Freedom of Information is a fundamental part of that process and should significantly transform the relationship between citizens and the state.

The Government hope to publish a draft bill on Freedom of Information in May. It will allow for a period of public consultation, as well as appropriate pre-legislative scrutiny by the Public Administration Committee of the House of Commons.

Legislation while necessary is, in itself, not sufficient. There is a substantial programme of work needed to create a culture of openness in all public services and lay the foundations for the implementation of a future Freedom of Information Act.

I have, therefore, established the Advisory Group on Openness in the Public Sector to advise me on the steps needed to be taken ahead of legislation. The group, which

has already had an informal meeting to discuss its programme of work, is being chaired by Lord Williams and the membership is drawn from a variety of backgrounds. Some bring a specialist knowledge of an area of public service to the Group's work, while others have a particular interest in Freedom of Information. Details of the membership of the Group are being placed in the Library.

The Group's terms of reference are:

"To advise the Home Secretary on proposals for promoting cultural change in the public sector to foster a culture of greater openness.

To assist in the development of training and education programme for public servants to promote cultural change and facilitate the introduction of Freedom of Information.

To undertake other tasks related to the implementation of Freedom of Information as directed by the Home Secretary".

Copies of papers considered by the Group and the minutes of its meetings will be available through my Department's web site on the Internet. I expect the Group to submit a report to me before the end of the year making recommendations on how I might facilitate an increase in openness in the public sector as a whole.

In the meantime, the Government are taking action now to extend openness and accountability. On 10 February, Her Majesty in Council approved an Order extending the jurisdiction of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration to an additional 111 executive non departmental public bodies and 47 advisory non departmental public bodies, with effect from 15 March. By bringing these bodies within the Ombudsman's jurisdiction, this Order has the effect of bringing them within scope of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

The Code of Practice commits public bodies to:

give facts and analysis with major policy decisions;

open up internal guidelines about dealings with the public; and

give reasons with administrative decisions; and provide information about their service to the public (their costs targets and performance and information about complaints and redress).

The Code also sets out how public bodies should respond to specific requests for information from members of the public. The approach to the release of information is based on the assumption that information should be released except where disclosure would not be in the public interest. In the period before a Freedom of Information Act comes into force, the Government are committed to using the flexibility and discretion available under the Code to release as much information as possible.

Criminal Offences (EU)

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the progress of Council Document 5202/98; and to which provisions his Department objects. [76299]

Kate Hoey: The United Kingdom Presidency consulted the European Parliament in January 1998 on the text in Council Document 5202/98 of the draft Convention on mutual assistance in criminal matters between the member states of the European Union. Two of the Parliament's proposed amendments have been incorporated into the draft. The Convention has been further developed and negotiations are continuing. The most recent consolidated text is in Council Document 13144/98, which was submitted to the Select Committee on European Scrutiny last January with an Explanatory Memorandum giving details of the Government's negotiating position. Copies are in the Library. The Government attach importance to the Convention, but have concerns about the scope and detail of the provisions on interception of telecommunications.

Open Prisons (Former Inmates)

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the number and type of offences committed by those who have absconded from open prisons in the past five years. [76297]

Mr. George Howarth: Prior to 1 April 1997, no central information is available that provides details of any further offences committed while unlawfully at large. This information could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

From 1 April 1997, prison establishments have been responsible for reporting details of absconds and returns to lawful custody, along with any known further offences to Prison Service headquarters. The accuracy of the information available cannot be guaranteed as prisons are not always aware of offences committed while a prisoner is unlawfully at large, and such offences may not come to light until some time after the prisoner's return to custody.

The available information from 1 April 1997 is given in the tables.

Absconders from open prisons

	1 April 1997 to 31 March 1998	*1 April 1998 to 10 March 1999*
Prisoners who absconded from open prisons	984	783
Recapture/Surrenders	909	632
Of which on return to lawful custody, were charged with further offence(s) committed whilst unlawfully at large	182	109

Type of offence committed whilst unlawfully at large since 1 April 1997

Offence	*Total*
Assault	12
Drugs offences	14
Firearm offences	2
Public Order offences	2
Rape/Attempted rape	2
Robbery	5
Theft/Burglary	134
Vehicle crime/RTA	68
Other offences	52
	291

Schengen Agreement

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on Government plans to sign up to elements of the Schengen

Agreement at the forthcoming Justice and Home Affairs Council; which elements are concerned; and what representations he has received on this matter. [75722]

Mr. Straw: I have today made the following statement to the Justice and Home Affairs Council in Brussels.

Other member states will be interested to know of the intentions of the United Kingdom about our participation in JHA matters after the entry into force of the Treaty of Amsterdam, in accordance with Article 4 of the Protocol integrating the Schengen *acquis* into the framework of the European Union and by the Protocol on the position of the United Kingdom and Ireland.

The United Kingdom is committed to active and effective co-operation in the JHA field. We demonstrated that during our Presidency last year. Our citizens have a common interest in ensuring that effective action is taken to combat international organised crime; we shall continue to play a full role in such European union level co-operation. We have been playing an active part in preparation for the incorporation of Schengen and for the establishment of the new Free Movement Chapter under Amsterdam. We are also keen to assist in the development of a useful agenda for the special European Council in Tampere later this year.

We have been giving serious thought to the areas of the Schengen *acquis* and the measures to be adopted under the Title IV in which we would wish to participate once Amsterdam comes into force. The different effects of our various Protocols influences our approach in this respect.

Our starting point is the Protocol on frontier controls to which all member states agreed at Amsterdam. The United Kingdom Government will maintain their former controls, in line with that political agreement.

Subject to the Amsterdam Protocol, the United Kingdom wishes to approach participation in Schengen and the Free Movement Chapter positively. Indeed we are keen to engage in co-operation in all areas of present and future JHA co-operation which do not conflict with our frontiers control.

We are therefore ready to participate in law enforcement and criminal judicial co-operation derived from the Schengen provisions, including the Schengen Information System. We have been in the forefront of European Union co-ordination in the fight against crime and drugs and we shall maintain that position. We are also interested in developing co-operation with European Union partners on asylum—a European Union-wide phenomenon—and in the civil judicial co-operation measures of the Free Movement Chapter.

Our intention to maintain our frontier controls has implications for our participation in the direct operation of external frontier controls. For similar reasons, enhanced visa co-operation raises difficulty for us. But, within this constraint, we shall seek discussions with European Union colleagues to maximise the scope for mutual operational co-operation in combating illegal immigration, without prejudice to the maintenance of our national immigration controls. We shall also look to participation in immigration policy where it does not conflict with our frontiers-based system of control.

We realise that much detailed discussion with our European Union partners will be necessary in order to pave the way for co-operation in these areas. We shall shortly put forward a formal request for participation.

Lighter Fuel Refills

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information his Department has collated on the number of deaths, broken down by age group, arising from misuse of lighter fuel refills in each of the last three years. [75471]

Ms Jowell: I have been asked to reply.

Information for 1997 and 1998 is not yet available. Data for 1994 to 1996 are given in the table.

Number of deaths arising from the abuse of lighter fuel refill canisters, by age group—Great Britain 1994–96

Number of deaths

Age	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*
All age groups	31	38	39
0–9	0	0	0
10–14	4	5	5
15–19	16	23	23
20–24	5	7	5
25–29	6	1	3
30 and over	0	2	3

Note:
Figures for 1994 have been revised since publication in June 1996
Source:
Register of Volatile Substance Abuse Mortality, St. George's Hospital Medical School, London

WALES

Countryside Stewardship Scheme

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) how many applications were received in Wales during 1998 to join the Countryside Stewardship Scheme; what area of land they represented; how many were approved; and what area of land they represented; [76096]

(2) what is the total area of land in Wales covered by the Countryside Stewardship Scheme; and what is the area covered by the scheme within the less favoured areas and its proportion of the total LFA area; [76092]

(3) what the total budget allocated to the Countryside Stewardship Scheme in Wales is in each of the next three years. [76094]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones *[holding answer 11 March 1999]:* The Countryside Stewardship Scheme is not available in Wales.

PRIME MINISTER

Foreign Affairs Committee

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Prime Minister when *(a)* he, *(b)* his officials, *(c)* his advisers and *(d)* his parliamentary private secretary were first made aware of the leaked

Foreign Affairs Committee documents on (i) its Human Rights inquiry and (ii) its European Union enlargement inquiry. [75862]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 10 March 1999]*: My office was made aware on Wednesday 3 March. I was told the same day.

Al Shifa Factory

Mr. Gummer: To ask the Prime Minister what discussion he has had with the Sudanese Government as to their version of the purpose of the factory bombed by the United States with the support of the United Kingdom. [76446]

The Prime Minister: FCO officials have been in regular contact with the Government of Sudan following our withdrawal from Khartoum last August.

We continue to encourage Sudan to become a party to the Chemical Weapons Convention which prohibits the acquisition, development, production, stockpiling and use of chemical weapons and is supported by a verifications regime consisting of data declarations and on-site inspections.

The Sunday Telegraph

Sir Norman Fowler: To ask the Prime Minister (1) for what reasons he approved the decision of the Home Secretary on 20 February to seek an injunction against *The Sunday Telegraph*; and if he will make a statement; [76394]

(2) at what time on 20 February he was consulted by the Home Secretary on the injunction he proposed to apply for against *The Sunday Telegraph*; and if he will make a statement. [76393]

The Prime Minister: I refer the right hon. Member to the reply given to him by my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary on 10 March 1999, *Official Report*, column 277. My right hon. Friend has explained fully the circumstances and events which led him to seek an injunction in his oral statement to the House on 22 February 1999, *Official Report*, columns 21–22.

ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND THE REGIONS

Maritime and Coastguard Agency

Mr. Alan Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will estimate the additional cost of introducing the ICCS system to the Maritime and Coastguard Agency while retaining the four coastguard stations due for closure. [75825]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The estimated additional cost to the Maritime and Coastguard Agency of introducing the ICCS system while retaining the four coastguard stations due for closure is in the order of £2 million. This includes additional capital and running costs associated with the system. However, there could also be additional estimate costs upwards to £1 million for new building works to accommodate the new equipment at least of the stations due for closure.

Mr. Alan Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has for the former Maritime and Coastguard Agency office at Gosforth, Tyne and Wear. [75826]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The Maritime and Coastguard Agency's Newcastle Marine Office currently occupies accommodation at Government's Buildings, Broadway West, Gosforth, Newcastle Upon Tyne under the terms of an inter Departmental Agreement with the Department of Social Security. MCA are currently exploring an option of vacating Broadway West site by the end of the year.

Maritime Rescue Subcentres

Mr. Alan Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many incidents were dealt with during 1998 by the Maritime Rescue subcentres at (i) Tyne Tees and (ii) Forth in which assistance was *(a)* rendered and *(b)* not rendered; and how many of the incidents were hoaxes. [75827]

Ms Glenda Jackson: In 1998, Tyne Tees MRSC dealt with *(a)* 274 incidents in which assistance was rendered and *(b)* 169 incidents in which assistance was not rendered. Seventeen incidents were hoaxes. For the same period, Forth MRSC dealt with *(a)* 167 incidents in which assistance was rendered and *(b)* 107 incidents in which assistance was not rendered. Four incidents were hoaxes.

Mr. Alan Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many incidents dealt with by the Tyne Tees Maritime Rescue subcentre in 1998 were *(a)* inshore and *(b)* offshore. [75824]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Applying a 3-mile limit to inshore incidents: Tyne Tees MRSC dealt with *(a)* 442 incidents inshore and *(b)* 18 incidents offshore in 1998.

Mr. Alan Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what estimate he has made of *(a)* the number of people assisted, *(b)* the number of people rescued and *(c)* the number of lives lost during incidents dealt with in 1998 by the Maritime Rescue subcentres at (i) Tyne Tees and (ii) Forth. [75828]

Ms Glenda Jackson: In 1988 Tyne Tees MRSC *(a)* assisted 769 people, *(b)* rescued 136 people and *(c)* recorded 15 lives lost during incidents. For the same period, Forth MRSC *(a)* assisted 244 people, *(b)* rescued 177 people and *(c)* recorded 5 lives lost during incidents.

Warcop to Appleby Line

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will set out the arrangements agreed between Sustrans and the Eden Valley Railway Company as a condition of the sale of the Warcop to Appleby line. [76184]

Dr. Reid: The transfer to Sustrans of the Warcop to Appleby line was subject, as part of the Agreement with the British Railways Board, to an undertaking by Sustrans that it would reach an agreement with Eden Council and the Eden Valley Railway Trust for retention of the track and site sharing.

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list all the bids made to purchase the Warcop to Appleby railway line. [76185]

Dr. Reid: No. Bids received by the British Railways Board for its land are commercially confidential.

British Waterways

Mr. Stringer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement about the external financing limit for the British Waterways Board. [77106]

Mr. Meale: The 1998–99 External Financing Limit for the British Waterways Board will be increased by £350,000 from £53,272,000 to £53,622,000. This will enable them to carry out additional major repairs to the canal network and other urgent maintenance. It will be funded by an increase in grant-in-aid to the Board arising from savings elsewhere on Class VI, Vote 3 and will not therefore add to the planned total of public expenditure.

NORTHERN IRELAND

New Deal (South Down)

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) how many people have registered for the New Deal at each social security office in South Down since its introduction; and of these how many were unemployed and in receipt of jobseeker's allowance or income support; [75227]

(2) how many people who registered for the New Deal at each social security office in South Down have obtained full-time employment. [75228]

Mr. Ingram: Responsibility for the matter has been delegated to the Training and Employment Agency under its chief executive, Mr. Ian Walters. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Ian Walters to Mr. Eddie McGrady, dated 10 March 1999:

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has asked me as Chief Executive of the Training and Employment Agency (T&EA) to reply to your questions about New Deal in South Down as most New Deal registrations are taken at T&EA JobCentres. Social Security Offices take registrations for the New Deal for Lone Parents only.

The information you asked for is set out in the following table.

Jobcentre	*Number of New Deal registrations*	*Number obtaining employment at 7 March 1999*
Ballynahinch	138	30
Downpatrick	304	61
Kilkeel	111	25
Newcastle	195	39
Total	748	155

Information is not currently available on how many of these 155 jobs are full-time.

The majority of those who have registered remain within the Gateway stage of New Deal. The number of people moving into employment will of course rise as New Deal participants leave Gateway.

All clients who registered for the New Deals for Young People aged 18–24 and for those aged over 25 were unemployed and in receipt of Jobseekers Allowance at the time of registration. Those registering for the New Deal for Lone Parents were unemployed and in receipt of Income Support.

I hope this reply is helpful.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Entry Charges

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what proposals he has to assist those galleries which do not currently charge for admission. [74501]

Mr. Alan Howarth: The grant-in-aid allocations announced by my right hon. Friend on 14 December 1998, *Official Report*, columns 589–90, were designed to enable the non-charging national museums and galleries to continue to offer free admission.

The Government do not in general provide revenue funding for other non-charging museums, but other current initiatives should help—notably the Designated Museums Challenge Fund, which will make £15 million available over the next 3 years to the 50 non-national museums in England with collections of pre-eminent importance, and the challenge fund of £0.5 million in each of the next two years which is intended to promote education and IT initiatives in registered museums.

In addition, registered museums are encouraged to apply to the Heritage Lottery Fund's £7 million Museums and Galleries Access Fund, which is intended to assist with access initiatives throughout the sector.

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what proportion of the funds allocated by his Department to remove charges for entry to museums and galleries is planned to be made available to those institutions which do not currently charge. [74500]

Mr. Alan Howarth: The extra funding for the non-charging museums represents 44 per cent. in 1999–2000, and 30 per cent. in 2000–01, of the total amount made available to promote access at the national museums and galleries. Decisions about the funding of free access in 2001–02 have not yet been taken.

Millennium Dome (Insurance)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, pursuant to his answer of 1 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *535*, what is the size of the annual premium paid to insure the Millennium Dome. [74731]

Janet Anderson: The New Millennium Experience Company's (NMEC) insurance arrangements reflect the Company's best commercial judgment about the scope and nature of the project's risks and exposures, as well as meeting all relevant legal obligations. The arrangements do not involve payment of annual premiums but do involve a spread of premium payments across the life of the project taking into account the changing nature of type

of cover needed as the project progresses. The detailed terms of the Company's insurance policy are commercially confidential; release of the details could adversely affect the Company's business relationship with its insurers, and future negotiations about the terms of the insurance.

Millennium Dome (Temperature)

Mr. Stringer: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what estimate he has made of the ambient temperature in the Millennium Dome between the zones in January 2000. [75678]

Janet Anderson *[holding answer 10 March 1999]:* The New Millennium Experience Company (NMEC) has undertaken detailed computational fluid dynamic studies of likely temperatures throughout the Dome, throughout the year of operation. There is an on-going review of these studies to identify any potential impact on the forecast comfortable temperatures of any detailed design changes within the Dome environment.

Millennium Dome (Construction Costs)

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what proportion of business sponsorship for the New Millennium Experience Company represents cash payments towards the construction costs. [75761]

Janet Anderson *[holding answer 9 March 1999]:* The sponsorship income component of the cash budget (£758 million) for the Millennium Experience project, agreed by the Government and the Millennium Commission in June 1997, is not linked specifically to individual expenditure components such as construction costs. No two sponsorship deals are exactly the same; some focus on individual zones within the Dome; others focus on particular strands of the Millennium Experience's National Programme; others combine the two. It is for the New Millennium Experience Company (NMEC), in consultation with the Millennium Commission, to decide how, in its best commercial judgment to apply sponsorship support to meet the costs.

Millennium Dome (Ferry Services)

Mr. Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) what proposals he has evaluated for ferry services from *(a)* Instones Wharf, *(b)* Woolwich Arsenal and *(c)* Gallions Reach to the Millennium Dome; what discussions he has had with ferry operators; and if he will make a statement; [73532]

(2) what estimate he has made of the potential numbers of people who could be transported by water to the Millennium Dome from points to the east of the Greenwich Peninsula; [73534]

(3) what proposals he has evaluated for the provision of piers at *(a)* Albert Lock and *(b)* Barking to serve ferry operators taking passengers to the Dome. [73533]

Janet Anderson *[holding answer 1 March 1999]:* The New Millennium Experience Company (NMEC) is constructing a new pier at the Dome site which is due for completion in July this year. The NMEC issued a tender document inviting bids for river services which identified routes from central London, from historic Greenwich and from points to the east of the Greenwich Peninsula. However, no bids were received for services from points to the east of Greenwich; only bids for the central London and historic Greenwich routes were received. Licences for those routes have now been awarded.

As part of its initial park and ride strategy NMEC did consider a pier option at Barking. However, no bids were received for river services from this area and the NMEC concluded that a new, temporary car park facility at Barking was not required to meet its park and ride objectives. NMEC is planning a park and ride, temporary car park at Woolwich which will be linked to the Dome by shuttle bus as the most efficient, flexible and economic means of accessing the Dome.

The response to the NMEC's tender processes so far indicate that the market does not consider a river boat service from the east of the peninsula to be viable on the basis of the likely number of users. The NMEC cannot fund or underwrite the costs of such a service but the Company would be happy to consider any fresh, financially viable proposal to accommodate at its pier a commercial river service bringing Dome visitors from points east of the Greenwich peninsula.

The number of visitors such a service could bring to the Dome would depend on the frequency of the service and the size of the craft but a boat service from a car park with 1,000 spaces would provide a potential demand of up to 3,000 people on a full capacity day at the Dome.

Thames Barrier

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans there are to raise the Thames barrier as part of the millennium celebrations. [73257]

Janet Anderson *[holding answer 25 February 1999]:* No formal proposals have been put forward by the New Millennium Experience Company (NMEC) to use the Thames Barrier to control the river's tide this New Year's eve.

The Thames Barrier and Flood Prevention Act 1972 defines the limited circumstances in which the Thames Barrier may be closed. Any proposals to raise the barrier would need to be studied closely by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAFF) against this legislation.

Alfred Hitchcock

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what representations he has received concerning his Department's role in marking the 100th anniversary of the birth of Alfred Hitchcock. [75940]

Janet Anderson: We have received a number of representations from the London Borough of Waltham Forest seeking the Department's support for the Borough's plans to mark the centenary of Alfred Hitchcock's birth. Although the Department will not be directly involved, I understand that the British Film Institute will shortly be announcing wide ranging plans to celebrate the life and work of Sir Alfred Hitchcock.

TREASURY

Public Works Loan Board

Ms Lawrence: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what changes are proposed to the quotas for lending to local authorities by the Public Works Loan Board. [77074]

Mr. Milburn: The Public Works Loan Commissioners have issued a circular today notifying local authorities that there will be no change in the formula for calculating quotas for 1999–2000.

A copy of the circular has been placed in the Libraries of the House.

Live Births

Mr. Field: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the percentage was of all live births with birth weight *(a)* under 2,500 grammes and *(b)* under 3,000 grammes in (i) England, (ii) Scotland, (iii) Wales, (iv) Northern Ireland and (v) the United Kingdom in each of the past five years. [75866]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 10 March 1999]:* The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Director of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from John Fox to Mr. Frank Field, dated 12 March 1999:

In the absence of the Director of the Office for National Statistics (ONS), I have been asked to reply to your recent parliamentary question on live birth weights.

The information requested is shown in the attached tables.

Number of live births by birthweight and percentages of live births with a stated birthweight, for the United Kingdom, England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland for 1993–1997[1]

	Total stated	Under 2,500 grams	Under 3,000 grams
United Kingdom			
1993	738,482	50,038	170,393
1994	731,842	50,548	170,209
1995	728,773	52,761	175,129
1996	729,299	52,408	173,838
1997	723,298	53,165	174,012
England			
1993	615,413	42,332	143,972
1994	611,988	42,846	144,218
1995	610,938	44,851	148,656
1996	612,712	44,697	148,092
1997	606,154	45,269	148,043
Wales			
1993	35,368	2,231	7,783
1994	34,547	2,233	7,845
1995	34,301	2,400	7,949
1996	34,830	2,418	8,014
1997	34,468	2,422	8,004
Scotland			
1993	62,883	4,040	13,961
1994	61,106	4,160	13,684
1995	59,683	4,123	13,813
1996	57,401	3,917	13,061
1997	58,614	4,053	13,336
Northern Ireland			
1993	24,818	1,435	4,677
1994	24,201	1,309	4,462
1995	23,851	1,387	4,711
1996	24,356	1,376	4,671
1997	24,062	1,421	4,629

[1] 1998 data could not be provided to timescale from Scotland and Northern Ireland offices

Percentage of live births with a stated birthweight

	Under 2,500 grams	Under 3,000 grams
United Kingdom		
1993	6.8	23.1
1994	6.9	23.3
1995	7.2	24.0
1996	7.2	23.8
1997	7.4	24.1
England		
1993	6.9	23.4
1994	7.0	23.6
1995	7.3	24.3
1996	7.3	24.2
1997	7.5	24.4
Wales		
1993	6.3	22.0
1994	6.5	22.7
1995	7.0	23.2
1996	6.9	23.0
1997	7.0	23.2
Scotland		
1993	6.4	22.2
1994	6.8	22.4
1995	6.9	23.1
1996	6.8	22.8
1997	6.9	22.8
Northern Ireland		
1993	5.8	18.8
1994	5.4	18.4
1995	5.8	19.8
1996	5.6	19.2
1997	5.9	19.2

Source:
ONS

Cancer Patients

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the five year survival rate for each main group of cancer patients in *(a)* England, *(b)* each region of England and *(c)* each health authority area for the most recent available period, distinguishing between men and women. [76111]

Ms Hewitt: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Director of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from John Fox to Mr. Jim Cousins, dated 12 March 1999:

In the absence of the Director of the Office for National Statistics (ONS), I have been asked to reply to your recent parliamentary question on the five year survival rate for each main group of cancer patients.

The five-year relative survival rates for each main group of cancer patients diagnosed in England were published in the volume, *Survival of cancer patients in Europe—the EUROCARE study* (IARC Scientific Publications no.132). Survival rates in England and Wales were most recently published in ONS Monitor MBI 98/1. Copies of both publications are available in the House of Commons Library.

Survival rates for England and the regions of England form part of the analysis presented within the report, *Cancer survival trends, 1971–1995: NHS Region and Deprivation*, to be published shortly by The Stationery Office. Survival rates by health authority are not the responsibility of the ONS, but have been published by a number of regional cancer registries within their annual reports.

Productivity Levels

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what research his Department has conducted on ways of calculating productivity levels in terms of resource use as well as in terms of labour; what conclusions he has reached; and if he will make a statement. [75249]

Ms Hewitt: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Director of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Andrew Stunell, dated 12 March 1999:

As Director of the Office for National Statistics (ONS), I have been asked to reply to your recent parliamentary question on the research that has been conducted into how to calculate productivity levels.

International productivity comparisons using output per worker convey useful information, but there is scope to improve the measure of productivity. Therefore the ONS Departmental Spending Review has recently allocated funding to create a new unit, which will take forward research into developing the current range of statistics available. As well as improvements to the existing estimates of output per filled job, the ONS is planning to produce a productivity series based on hours worked. The development of indices of service sector output, now being studied, would also facilitate the generation of productivity measures for the service sector. This extensive work programme reflects users' demand.

Productivity measures in terms of resource used raise considerable difficulties. These relate, amongst other things, to measurement of capital and the problems of weighting capital and labour. There are at present no plans to produce such a measure.

The ONS will keep users informed of any developments through the publication of articles in, for example, *Economic Trends*.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Housing Benefit

Ms Kelly: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how much money was spent on housing benefit in *(a)* 1980, *(b)* 1985, *(c)* 1990, *(d)* 1996, *(e)* 1997 and *(f)* 1998, in (i) Bolton, (ii) the North West and (iii) England. [75620]

Angela Eagle: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is in the table.

Housing Benefit expenditure

£ million

	Bolton	*North West*	*England*
1980–81	—	—	879
1985–86	—	—	2,686
1990–91	—	—	4,254
1996–97	48	1,043	9,906
1997–98 estimated outturn	—	—	9,932
1998–99 forecast	—	—	9,765

Notes:

1. Data are not available for Bolton and the North West for 1980–81, 1985–86 and 1990–91. Existing Housing Benefit scheme only began in 1988. Prior to 1988 a Supplementary Benefit Scheme was in place.
2. 1997–98 and 1998–99 figures are the estimates and forecasts underlying the Pre-Budget Report.
3. Figures are rounded to the nearest million.

Sources:

1980–81—Public Expenditure White Paper and Supplementary Benefit Statistics.

1985–86 and 1990–91—figures underlying the Departmental Reports and 1996–97—Housing Benefit final subsidy claims.

Child Benefit

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security for what reasons there is a presumption in benefit regulations that child benefit will normally be paid to a mother. [76296]

Angela Eagle: Child Benefit can be paid to anyone responsible for a child, either because the child lives with them or because they contribute towards the child's maintenance at not less than the weekly rate of Child Benefit. Where two people claim for the same child, priority rules apply as set out in Schedule 10 of the Social Security Contributions and Benefits Act 1992.

Briefly, a person with whom a child actually lives has priority over a person who contributes to the child's maintenance; where couples live at the same address a wife has priority over a husband, a mother has priority over a father, and a parent has priority over a non-parent. In other circumstances the two persons can jointly elect which of them shall claim, and in default of such election the Secretary of State may decide.

Tribunal Hearings

Mr. Davidson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the categories of appeals heard by the Independent Tribunal Service at its Glasgow office in the last year for which figures are available with in each case a breakdown of length of waiting time and numbers awaiting a tribunal hearing; and if he will make a statement. [75129]

Angela Eagle: The information is not available in the form requested. Such information as is available is in the table. The Independent Tribunal Service (ITS) has embarked on a major programme to reduce the number

of cases awaiting appeal hearings and the length of time appellants have to wait. Additional resources have been dedicated to the programme. The number of appeals sessions will have progressively been increased by some 40 per cent. (from 800 to 1,300 a month) by the end of this year and additional venues will have been secured. All cases are being systematically addressed to ensure that all necessary action is being expedited. The organisations who support and represent appellants are actively engaged in discussions about how individual cases can be resolved timeously with fewer postponements or adjournments. This programme is already beginning to have effect.

We are currently overhauling the whole decision making and appeals system. We are firmly committed to tackling the unacceptable delays in the appeals service—currently averaging 7 months across the country, with some appellants waiting over a year for the decision on their case. Regulations that will simplify and speed the appeals process will be debated shortly under affirmative procedures. Under the provisions of the Social Security Act 1998, which paves the way for modernising the delivery of Social Security, one of the major areas of change will be to reduce substantially the current waiting times for appeals.

Glasgow ITS performance figures for 1 April 1998 to 28 February 1999

Jurisdiction	*Total appeals in hand 31 March 1998*	*Appeals received*	*Appeals cleared*	*Average clearance time*	*Total appeals in hand 28 February 1999*
Total	33,107	36,850	44,739	—	25,451
SSAT	23,146	24,865	32,294	40.61	16,230
MAT	2,583	3,027	2,338	46.19	2,758
DAT	6,958	8,328	9,372	36.92	6,063
CSAT	420	630	735	32.24	400

	Appeals received	*Cleared/withdrawn at hearing*	*Non hearing clearances*	*Total cleared*	*To be decided*	*Clearance time*
Social Security Appeal Tribunals (SSAT)						
April	2,684	1,787	612	2,399	22,814	35.56
May	1,997	1,842	606	2,448	22,729	37.82
June	2,465	2,027	629	2,656	22,899	38.24
July	2,415	2,216	630	2,846	22,435	40.32
August	2,175	2,383	562	2,945	21,710	39.50
September	1,925	2,496	491	2,987	20,703	38.75
October	2,331	2,637	642	3,279	19,823	37.67
November	2,201	2,583	680	3,263	18,744	41.15
December	2,389	2,415	725	3,140	18,040	46.11
January	1,875	2,442	780	3,222	16,487	49.26
February	2,408	2,439	670	3,109	16,230	38.82
Total	24,865	25,267	7,027	32,294	—	40.61
Medical Appeal Tribunals (MAT)						
April	296	219	20	239	2,313	29.36
May	246	187	19	206	2,311	37.99
June	284	151	20	171	2,453	36.82
July	267	192	13	205	2,307	38.97
August	248	171	19	190	2,355	43.70
September	224	194	99	293	2,291	51.08
October	306	203	80	283	2,347	52.18
November	292	201	14	215	2,397	50.59
December	293	145	13	158	2,524	50.67
January	287	169	28	197	2,662	63.96
February	284	174	7	181	2,758	53.08
Total	3,027	2,006	332	2,338	—	46.19
Disability Appeal Tribunals (DAT)						
April	876	632	66	698	7,732	35.94
May	837	671	89	760	7,820	35.11
June	885	856	76	932	8,077	33.80
July	808	886	96	982	7,010	33.29
August	739	787	67	854	6,910	33.71
September	663	857	46	903	6,691	37.58
October	1,055	845	89	934	6,801	43.28
November	623	813	73	886	6,556	36.38
December	664	672	78	750	6,461	40.89
January	522	745	77	822	6,205	39.65
February	656	787	64	851	6,063	36.94
Total	8,328	8,551	821	9,372	—	36.92

	Appeals received	Cleared/withdrawn at hearing	Non hearing clearances	Total cleared	To be decided	Clearance time
Child Support Appeal Tribunals (CSAT)						
April	99	56	10	66	559	21.70
May	59	49	11	60	525	25.91
June	100	41	30	71	612	34.75
July	39	61	16	77	486	28.19
August	54	67	11	78	464	29.85
September	46	83	9	92	424	30.22
October	53	43	13	56	425	30.23
November	31	59	9	68	394	32.93
December	66	47	7	54	413	38.39
January	47	45	24	69	414	43.23
February	36	39	5	44	400	45.24
Total	630	590	145	735	—	32.24

Ms Kelly: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people are in receipt of housing benefit; and of these, how many are *(a)* of working age, *(b)* in receipt of incapacity benefit, *(c)* in receipt of unemployment benefit and *(d)* in receipt of income support, in (i) Bolton, (ii) the North West and (iii) England. [75631]

Angela Eagle: The information is set out in the table.

Housing Benefit recipients as at May 1998

Thousand

	Bolton	North West	England
Total Housing Benefit recipients	23	440	3,726
of working age	na	275	2,273
in receipt of incapacity benefit	na	33	214
in receipt of unemployment benefit (Jobseeker's Allowance (contribution based))	na	5	49
in receipt of income support or Jobseeker's Allowance (Income Based)	15	286	2,384

Notes:

1. Figures for Bolton are estimated.
2. Figures for the North West and England include estimates where individual local authority data are not available.
3. All figures include overlaps where cases fall into more than one of the above categories.
4. 'Working age' is defined as where either the claimant or any partner is aged under 60 years.
5. 'na' denotes information not available.
6. Recipients may be a single person or a couple.
7. All figures are rounded to the nearest thousand.

Sources:

Quarterly returns and Annual 1 per cent. sample in May 1998 (provisional)—the sample is too small to give detailed local authority information.

National Insurance Numbers

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when the NIRS2 facilities for issuing national insurance numbers for *(a)* adults and *(b)* juveniles will be implemented nationally. [76410]

Mr. Timms: Both facilities have been implemented. NIRS2 adult registrations was implemented in January 1999 and the Juvenile registrations were implemented on 10 March 1999.

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the current waiting time between the application for a new national insurance number and that number being issued. [76406]

Mr. Timms: The current waiting time between application and issue of the National Insurance number for new adult registrations is 17 days.

Where Juveniles contact the National Insurance number Helpline and request confirmation of their NI number, a letter is issued within two days.

National Insurance (Non-Domestic Residents)

Mr. Duncan Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people living abroad continue to pay voluntary national insurance contributions; and how many people not resident in the UK have built up sufficient national insurance contributions to entitle them to *(a)* jobseeker's allowance, *(b)* incapacity benefit, *(c)* the state pension, *(d)* widows' benefits and *(e)* maternity allowance. [75848]

Mr. Timms: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is set out here.

There are 30,000 requests to pay voluntary National Insurance Contributions (NICs) on an annual basis; 15,000 requests to pay voluntary NICs by Direct Debit (per annum); 7,000 requests to pay voluntary NICs by Employers (on their employees' behalf) and 13,000 customers who contact us (per annum) and request to pay NIC arrears.

Note:

The figures are approximate and rounded to the nearest thousand.

Cold Weather Payments (Enfield)

Ms Ryan: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the total amount of money paid in cold weather payments in 1998 to people resident in *(a)* the London Borough of Enfield and *(b)* the constituency of Enfield, North. [75835]

Angela Eagle: During 1998, there were no cold weather payments issued for the London Borough of Enfield or the constituency of Enfield, North.

Private Pensions (National Insurance Rebate)

Mr. Duncan Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what the total annual national insurance rebate to private pensions paid from the national insurance fund has been for the last 10 years. [75847]

Mr. Timms: The information is in the table.

The cost of the national insurance contribution rebates

£ billion

Tax year	*Rebate*
1988–89	5.07
1989–90	7.72
1990–91	7.78
1991–92	8.54
1992–93	8.82
1993–94	7.90
1994–95	6.99
1995–96	7.10
1996–97	7.37
1997–98	7.58

Note:
The figures show the total rebates in respect of both occupational and personal pension schemes in GB and include:
(i) a 2 per cent. incentive paid to certain schemes on earnings accrued in tax years 1988–89 to 1992–93; and
(ii) a 1 per cent. age addition paid to all personal pension scheme holders aged 30 and over on earnings accrued in tax years 1993–94 to 1996–97.
Source:
Government Actuary's Department and the Contributions Agency.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

European Communities Budget

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will place in the Library documentation supplied by successful applicants to budget line A-3021 in their application, in as far as it relates to how the organisation demonstrates that it works towards European integration. [75085]

Ms Quin: The Report on Beneficiaries of Community Grants 1997 was placed in the Library last year. The 1998 Report will be placed in the Library when it is published.

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what role his Department has in the selection of awards under Article A-3021 of the General Budget of the European Union, Grants to Organisations Which Actively Promote European Integration; what is his Department's policy as regards future funding of organisations under that Article; and what reports his Department receives of the activities of organisations so funded. [75084]

Ms Quin: The selection of awards under Article A-3021 of the General Budget of the European Union is a matter for the European Union Commission in Brussels; and all activities funded under this budget line are monitored in the first instance by the Commission. Reports on activities funded under this article are available through the Commission.

India (Nuclear Energy)

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received from the Indian Government regarding collaboration on civilian nuclear energy; and if he will make a statement. [75937]

Mr. Fatchett: No representations on this subject have been received from the Indian Government.

Mr. Öcalan

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Government of Turkey regarding *(a)* the treatment in detention of and *(b)* a fair trial for the Kurdish leader Mr. Öcalan; and if he will make a statement. [76128]

Ms Quin: We have made clear to the Turkish authorities the importance we attach to the trial of Mr. Öcalan being conducted in strict accordance with the rule of law and due process. We have asked that members of the British Embassy be allowed to attend the trial. We remain opposed to the use of the death penalty under any circumstances.

We welcome the public assurances by the Turkish authorities that Mr. Öcalan will receive a fair trial, and that he will be well treated in detention.

Millennium Compliance

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what data he has collated on other countries' computer millennium compliance readiness; and if he will make a statement. [76061]

Mr. Fatchett: We have long recognised the potential problems that could be caused internationally by the millennium bug. The UK is working hard to raise global awareness. Reliable information is difficult to obtain. However, we are working closely with other countries and international organisations to build up a picture of the state of readiness around the world in order to minimise potential disruption caused by millennium bug failures and to address potential consequences for British interests.

Consular Fees

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he plans to change any of the consular fees. [76948]

Mr. Fatchett: It costs more to issue a passport overseas than it does in the UK because the volume at each issuing post is small. Until now the additional cost of issuing passports overseas has been met out of fees charged for passports issued in the UK. In future, the costs of issuing passports overseas will be met in full from the fee charged to the applicant. The fee for issuing a passport in the United Kingdom remains unchanged.

The new charges, which will take effect from 12 April 1999, are:

	£
Standard (32 page) passport	43
Frequent Traveller (48 page)	50
Child passport (5 years validity)	25
Emergency passport	20
Amendments to an existing passport	30

Exports

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about the Government's arrangements for the support and promotion of exports. [77075]

Mr. Robin Cook: I am delighted to do so, also on behalf of the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry.

This Government attach great importance to the promotion of exports. That is why in June last year the then Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and I asked the Secretary of the Cabinet, Sir Richard Wilson, to review the current arrangements for the support and promotion of exports. I am pleased to be able to announce today the outcome of that Review. Copies of Sir Richard's report have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses, and will be widely distributed. It is also available on request to members of the public, and the executive summary can be found on the FCO and DTI websites.

The report records the excellent service given by personnel working on export promotion activity throughout the United Kingdom and in FCO posts around the world, while at the same time identifying a number of areas in the current arrangements which leave scope for improvement.

My right hon. Friend and I welcome the recommendations, the core of which is that all trade promotion and development activities of the DTI and FCO should be unified in a new joint operation led by a single Chief Executive. The Government will expedite the establishment of such a unified operation, equipped with resources, both personnel and finance, broadly along the lines recommended in the Review. It will be known as "British Trade International". This will be a radical change. The new operation, which will have lead responsibility within Government for trade promotion and development, will provide a coherent framework for the Government's work in this area. We are confident that it will deliver an even better service to business.

The operation's first Chief Executive, who will have Permanent Secretary rank, will be Sir David Wright, currently Ambassador in Tokyo. We are confident that, with his experience of export promotion at home and abroad, he is ideally equipped for the task. He will be responsible, in consultation with DTI and FCO and others concerned, for the design of the new operation's precise configuration and the implementation of Sir Richard's other recommendations. Sir David will of course have flexibility over the details of the implementation, and he will have effective control over the operation's resources and personnel. And he will be responsible to the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and myself, through a ministerially chaired board, for the performance of the entire operation from local to international level. This will be measured against a national export development strategy and objectives which the board will set.

The new board will be chaired by DTI and FCO Ministers and will subsume the present British Overseas Trade Board. It will be drawn predominantly from the private sector. In addition to senior officials from the FCO, DTI and the Exports Credits Guarantee Department, it will also contain representatives of the Scottish, Welsh and Northern Ireland administrations to guarantee their direct involvement in shaping the national strategy.

The current arrangements for the delivery of export promotion services in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland will continue within the context of national policy. The Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish administrations would continue to have discretion to provide supplementary programmes to meet the particular needs of businesses in those parts of the United Kingdom.

Overseas delivery of the services of the new operation will continue through our diplomatic posts overseas. Heads of Mission will be responsible to the Chief Executive for the performance of their posts in support of British business abroad against the strategy and objectives of the new operation.

In England, the new operation will place greater emphasis on effective delivery of export services in the regions. The regional and local network, at present in Government Regional Offices and Business Links, will be integral to the new unified operation, under the effective control of the Chief Executive. In implementing the recommendations, the Chief Executive will need to work closely with the new Small Business Service which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry announced earlier this week on 10 March 1999, *Official Report*, columns 367–79, and the Regional Development Agencies in each region.

British Trade International will seek to provide a fast, consistent and high quality response to its customers in the business community. It will be staffed by personnel from both the FCO and DTI, and may also recruit directly, including through secondments. It will be supported by modern IT and other facilities designed to provide integrated information and communication systems.

The Chief Executive and the board will review the balance between the present range of export services and the provision of help to firms to develop their export capability, and also the scope for devolution of responsibility to the regional and international networks.

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and I are confident that the new unified operation will represent a significant advance over present arrangements, both in terms of strategic direction and of improved customer focus, producing a real improvement in service delivery to business. It will be a major change and will take time to achieve. That will be primarily the task for the new Chief Executive. Meanwhile, I can assure the House that there will be no hiatus: the present services to exporters will remain fully operational and available throughout the transition period.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will deposit in the Library the answers to Parliamentary Questions 59798, 19 November 1998, *Official Report*, column *808*, on Our Europe Association; 59795, 19 November 1998, *Official Report*, column *808*, on the London Conference (European Association); 59805, 19 November *1998*, *Official Report*, column *808*, on the European Adventure Project; and 59796, 19 November 1998, *Official Report*, column *808*, on the Business Euro Label. [71146]

Ms Quin: The answers to Parliamentary Questions 59795 and 59798 have been deposited in the Library of the House. A letter has been sent to the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) requesting clarification on the Business Euro Label and the European Adventure Project. When this information has been received and a reply issued, copies will be placed in the Library of the House.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Genetic Modification

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) on how many occasions *(a)* Ministers and *(b)* officials in his Department have (i) spoken with and (ii) received representations regarding genetic modification from Mr. Stan Greenberg of Greenberg Research; [72245]

(2) on how many occasions *(a)* Ministers and *(b)* officials in his Department have (i) spoken with and (ii) received representations regarding genetic modification from Dave Hill of Bell Pottinger; [72065]

(3) on how many occasions *(a)* Ministers and *(b)* officials in his Department have (i) spoken with and (ii) received representations regarding genetic modification from Cathy McGlynn of Bell Pottinger. [72062]

Mr. Battle *[holding answer 23 February 1999]:* I and my officials are in regular contact with representatives of all those with an interest in biotechnology—including environmental groups, consumer groups and biotechnology companies. It is not the normal practice of governments to give details of specific meetings with private individuals or companies.

Task Forces

Dr. Tony Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will publish a list of (1) task forces and (2) policy reviews established by his Department since May 1997 which *(a)* had external members recruited by way of public advertisement, and details of any person so appointed and *(b)* engaged in public consultation exercises, and the form that these took. [74464]

Mr. Byers: None of the external members of task forces and review bodies established by my Department since 1 May 1997 were recruited by way of public advertisement. Most task forces and reviews are short-term bodies established to give thorough consideration to particular issues. External members are invited to sit on some reviews and task forces because they are able to contribute specific experience and expertise. In such cases, public advertising would be inappropriate and disproportionate. Since 1 October 1998, appointments to those task forces which qualify for classification as advisory non-departmental public bodies have come within the remit of the Commissioner for Public Appointments.

Details of public consultation carried out by task forces and reviews established since 1 May 1997 are set out in the table.

Review/task force	*Public consultation*
Review of Utilities Regulation	Published the Green Paper *A Fair Deal for Consumers: Modernising the Framework of Utility Regulation* (March 1998) and two further consultation documents: *A Fair Deal for Consumers: Modernising the Framework of Utility Regulation—Public Consultation Paper on Consumer Councils* (September 1998) and *A Fair Deal for Consumers: Modernising the Framework of Utility Regulation—Public Consultation Paper on the future of gas and electricity regulation* (October 1998)
Review of energy sources for power regeneration	The terms of reference for the Review were announced on 22 December 1997, and a general invitation was made for interested parties to submit representations. Proposals for reform were issued for consultation on 25 June 1998. The consultation document was sent to all those who had replied to the first invitation to make representations, to those with outstanding power station consent applications, and to any other organisation or person that requested a copy. It was also published on the Internet.
Review of the Post Office	Following announcement of the review in May 1997 discussions were held with Post Office senior management, the Post Office unions, the Post Office Users' National Council and other interested parties. A summary of the main points arising from these consultations were included in the Government's response to the Trade and Industry Select Committee's Report on the Post Office (response published in April 1998), since which time there has been further consultations with these parties as part of the next stage of the review.
Review of the Technical Help for Exporters Scheme	Views were sought from interested parties by means of a questionnaire issued in November and December 1997.
Review of Company Law	Published two consultation documents; *Modern Company Law for a Competitive Economy (March 1998)* and *Modern Company Law: The Strategic Framework (February 1999).*
Review of Assisted Areas	Published consultation document: *Review of Assisted Areas Map* (July 1998).
Oil and Gas Industry Task Force	Letters were sent to industry stakeholders and a dedicated website set up specifically inviting contributions.
Review of the framework for overseeing developments in biotechnology (joint Office of Science and Technology/Cabinet Office review)	Consultation paper issued following announcement of the review on 17 December 1998.
Review of new and renewable energy	A consultation document is expected to be published shortly.

Review/task force	*Public consultation*
Review of electricity trading arrangements	OFFER issued an initial consultation paper in November 1997 inviting views, which were taken into account when drawing up the proposed terms of reference. These terms of reference were in turn published for consultation in January 1998. Working papers were published and discussed at a two-day seminar in April 1998. OFFER published the interim conclusions in June 1998 which were discussed at a further seminar and on which written comments were also invited. The final conclusions were published in July 1998.

Industrial and Provident Societies

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if industrial and provident societies will be included in the current review of insolvency being carried out by his Department; and if he will make a statement. [74175]

Dr. Howells: The terms of reference of the joint DTI/Treasury review are to review aspects of company and insolvency law and practice in the UK and elsewhere relating to opportunities for, and means by which, businesses can resolve short to medium term financial difficulties, so as to preserve maximum economic value; and to make recommendations. The terms of reference would enable consideration to be given to the position of industrial and provident societies.

Car Prices

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the recent European Commission report on the cost of British cars for sale in the UK compared with their cost in other EU countries. [74033]

Dr. Howells: The European Commission's latest report on car prices in the European Union showed that price differences had significantly decreased since its previous report but that the UK continued to be the most expensive market for many models.

We shall be encouraging the Commission, as part of its evaluation of the cars block exemption, to identify the reasons for these price differences.

Biotechnological Companies

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many unminuted pre-arranged meetings occurred between *(a)* himself, *(b)* Ministers in his Department and *(c)* his officials and representatives of the biotechnological industry sector since 1 May 1998. [74838]

Mr. Battle *[holding answer 5 March 1999]:* I and my officials are in regular contact with representatives of all those with an interest in biotechnology—including environmental groups, consumer groups and biotechnology companies. It is not normal practice of governments to give details of specific meetings with private individuals or companies.

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the biotechnological companies which have placed staff *(a)* on secondment and *(b)* on placement within his Department since 1 May 1997. [74839]

Mr. Battle *[holding answer 5 March 1999]:* Secondments and attachments are part of the Interchange Initiative which promotes the exchange of people and good practice between the Civil Service and other organisations. All sectors of the economy are involved: Voluntary, Education, Health, Public and Private.

I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Minister for Competition and Consumer Affairs to the hon. Member for Wantage (Mr. Jackson) on 11 February 1999, *Official Report*, columns *405–10*. This refers to the list of companies which currently have staff on secondment in my department and the DTI directorate in which they have been placed. In addition, I attach a further list of those companies which have had staff on secondment to the department on or after 1 May 1997, which are no longer on the current list.

Management unit	*Company*
BL 1	NatWest
BNSC	National Remote Sensing Centre Ltd.
BNSC	Matra Marconi Space UK Ltd.
CACP	Herbert Smith
CB	Engineering & Physical Sciences Research Council
Communications and Information	NEL
Communications and Information	ICL
Communications and Information	NEL
Communications and Information	Reuters Ltd.
Communications and Information	Slaughter & May
Company Law and Investigations	Robson Rhodes
Company Law and Investigations	Littlejon Frazer
Company Law and Investigations	The Bank of England
EED	Process & Energy Ltd.
EID	Lockstair Ltd.
EID	GEC Marconi Avionics
Engineering Industries	Toyota
Engineering Industries	Honda
Engineering Industries	Mechadyne Ltd.
Engineering Industries	BAA
Engineering Industries	British Steel plc
Engineering Industries	MITI
Export Promotion	IMI plc
Export Promotion	Ocean Group plc
Export Promotion	Continental Tyre Group Ltd.
Export Promotion	Reuters Ltd.
Export Promotion	Elliott Pearce Limited
Export Promotion	British Marine Equipment Council
Export Promotion	Food Process Engineering (Scotland) Ltd.
Export Promotion	Allied Domecq plc
Export Promotion	HSBC Holdings plc
Export Promotion	Midland Bank plc
Export Promotion	The Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders Ltd.
Export Promotion	Mayell & Co.
Export Promotion	British Aerospace Defence Ltd.
Export Promotion	Weybourne Financial Services Ltd.
Export Promotion	International Knitwear
Export Promotion	Smith Kline Beecham
Export Promotion	Morlands (Glastonbury) Ltd.
Export Promotion	Balfour Beatty Limited

Management unit	Company
Export Promotion	Business Link
Export Promotion	British American Tobacco Co. Ltd.
Export Promotion	AMEC Process and Energy Ltd.
Export Promotion	Geoteam Wimpol Limited
Export Promotion	York Synthetics Ltd.
Export Promotion	Unilever International
Export Promotion	AMW Associates
Export Promotion	British Aerospace plc
Export Promotion	BT plc
Export Promotion	GEC Marconi Communications Ltd.
Export Promotion	Sims Portex Limited
Export Promotion	Glengarnock Garments Ltd.
Export Promotion	GEC Marconi Avionics Ltd.
Export Promotion	International Distributor Centre
Export Promotion	Lanimer Knitwear Ltd.
Export Promotion	Marks and Spencer plc
Export Promotion	Meggitt plc
Export Promotion	Drinks Marketing Consortium
Export Promotion	The West India Committee
Export Promotion	Delamore Associates Ltd.
Export Promotion	ICI plc
Export Promotion	River Don Castings Ltd.
Export Promotion	Glaxo Wellcome Plc
Export Promotion	Nat West Markets
Export Promotion	Alan Paine Knitwear Ltd.
Export Promotion	Reyrolle Projects Ltd.
Export Promotion	Barclays Bank plc
Export Promotion	CRL
Export Promotion	Texaco Ltd.
Export Promotion	Genesis Communications
Export Promotion	John Swire & Sons Ltd.
Export Promotion	Institute of Export
Export Promotion	Hyder Technologies Ltd.
Export Promotion	Turner & Newell plc
Export Promotion	World Trade Development Limited
Export Promotion	AEA Technology plc
Export Promotion	Knight Piesold Limited
GO-SW	Normalair-Garrett Limited
GO-SW (Plym)	Westcountry Development Corporation Ltd.
I	Arthur Andersen
IBB	British Telecom plc
IBB	British Embassy Tokyo
IEP	Airsys ATM
Insurance	Price Waterhouse
Insurance	Coopers & Lybrand
Insurance	PricewaterhouseCoopers
Insurance	Guardian Royal Exchange Assurance plc
NI	UKAEA
Nuclear Industries	Rolls-Royce & Associates
Nuclear Industries	Hunting Engineering Ltd.
Nuclear Industries	BNFL
Nuclear Industries 2	BNFL
Nuclear Industries TU	Nuclear Electric Ltd.
Oil & Gas 2	Mobil North Sea Limited
OSO	Trafalgar John Brown Oil & Gas
OST	ICI Chemicals & Polymers Ltd.
OST	British Computer Society
PORT	Burton Group (Local Enterprise Ltd.)
RD	Robson Rhodes
REG A	Hambros Bank Limited
REG A	Royal Bank Leasing Limited
SMD	Chesterton International plc
SMEP 3	Grant Thornton
SMEP 3	Lloyds TSB Group plc

Biological Materials (Patents)

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is his Department's policy in respect of the forthcoming review of TRIPS clauses on the protection of biological resources. [74848]

Mr. Battle *[holding answer 5 March 1999]:* The current exclusions from patentability for biological materials as set out in Article 27.3(b) of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) Trade Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) Agreement allow all WTO members sufficient flexibility to implement patent regimes appropriate to their individual circumstances, within internationally agreed boundaries. This provision allows national intellectual property regimes to focus clearly on technical contributions whether they be by genetic modification or traditional plant breeding techniques.

Departmental Meeting

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to his letter of 26 January to the hon. Member for Linlithgow, if he will make a statement on the outcome of the meeting between the Department of Health, the Department of Trade and Industry and the Association of British Pharmaceutical Industries to refine and prioritise an agreed action list. [73411]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 9 March 1999]:* The meeting has not yet taken place and is currently being arranged. I will let my hon. Friend know the outcome in due course.

Genetically Modified Products

Joan Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment he has made of the safety of cosmetics containing genetically modified products into which antibiotic resistance gene markers have been inserted when used by people undergoing antibiotic treatment for skin conditions. [76056]

Dr. Howells: Under the Cosmetic Products (Safety) Regulations 1996, cosmetic products must be assessed by their manufacturers for safety to ensure that they are not harmful to human health.

My Department has made no assessment of the safety of cosmetics containing ingredients which may be derived from a genetically modified source, but we will be supporting the moves proposed by the European Commission Scientific Steering Committee to develop harmonised guidelines for Genetically Modified Organism (GMO) risk assessments for cosmetic products.

Export Licences

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to his answers of 1 February 1999, *Official Report*, columns *505–06*, what assessment he made of the compliance of the licences for the export of military vehicles and electronic equipment specially designed and modified for military use to Rwanda with the terms of UN Resolution 1011 (1995). [75811]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 10 March 1999]:* Of the five licences detailed in my answer of 1 February 1999, *Official Report*, columns *505–06*, four covered exports to the Rwandan Government, and details of the other licence were set out in the answer given to the Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment, my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, South (Mr. Clarke), by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, on 30 October 1997, *Official Report*, columns *849–50*.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to his answers of 1 February 1999, *Official Report*, columns *505–06*, what steps he took to ensure that the equipment licensed for export to Angola was supplied in accordance with the embargo imposed by UN Resolution 864 (1993). [75810]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 10 March 1999]:* I will write to my hon. Friend as soon as possible and place a copy of that letter in the Library of the House.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to his answers of 1 February 1999, *Official Report*, columns *505–06*, what steps he took to ensure that the licences for the export of goods to the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia did not breach the embargo on the export of arms to the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. [75812]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 10 March 1999]:* I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given to my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North (Dr. Gibson) by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on 21 May 1998, *Official Report*, column *532*.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to his answer of 1 February 1999, *Official Report*, columns *505–06*, what steps he took to ensure that the licences for the export of goods to Afghanistan did not conflict with the EU Council Common Position 96/746/CFSP imposing an embargo on the export of arms, munitions and military equipment to Afghanistan. [75813]

Dr. Howells: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given to my hon. Friend the Member for Wirral, South (Mr. Chapman) by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on 26 November 1998, *Official Report*, column *11*.

Nuclear Waste

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on British Nuclear Fuel's plans to dispose of nuclear waste in Australia. [75941]

Mr. Battle: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given by the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, my hon. Friend the Member for Mansfield (Mr. Meale), to the hon. Member for Hazel Grove (Mr. Stunell) on 30 November 1998, *Official Report*, column *48*.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if the stockpile of nuclear waste at Sellafield contains material of high enough quality to make a nuclear weapon; and if he will make a statement. [76015]

Mr. Battle: The material contained within nuclear waste currently stored at Sellafield is not of suitable quality to make a nuclear weapon.

London Fashion Week

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment he has made of the risk to the future of London Fashion Week from fashion houses displaying in New York instead. [76158]

Mr. Battle: The success of London Fashion Week in February illustrated that the show is now firmly established as a leading fashion event alongside Milan, Paris and New York. Over 44 designers showed collections, over 140 companies participated in the exhibition and many others remain keen to take part.

There are many and varied reasons why designers decide to show in other cities either instead of, or in addition to London. These are often linked to business expansion and a wish to attach specific overseas opportunities. I expect the new design talent to participate in London Fashion Week, maintaining the Show's position as the leading international showcase for innovative, cutting edge fashion design talent.

Science Policy Initiatives

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what contributions he expects to be made to the Government's science policy initiatives by *(a)* the Wellcome Trust and *(b)* the Gatsby Foundation. [76072]

Mr. Battle *[holding answer 11 March 1999]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to my hon. Friend the Member for Luton, South (Ms Moran) on 10 March 1999, *Official Report*, columns *261–62*. The Wellcome Trust is contributing some £18 million and the Gatsby Charitable Foundation £2 million towards the University Challenge Fund. Both organisations have contributed to the arrangements for the Challenge and to the assessment of the entries.

In addition, the Wellcome Trust is contributing £300 million towards the Joint Infrastructure Fund and some £110 million towards the cost of a new synchrotron.

Technology-related Developments

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list successful clusters of technology-related developments of the kind described in the Competitiveness White Paper. [76075]

Mr. Battle *[holding answer 11 March 1999]:* The Competitiveness White Paper said that clusters were a strong source of business development for all types of business, not just technology-related ones. It would not be possible to list all the clusters in the UK, but examples include TV and film post-production in Central London, broadcast technology in Surrey, Hampshire and Berkshire, chemicals in Teesside, electronics in and around Cambridge, biotechnology clusters also in and around Cambridge and in Oxfordshire, Guildford and Central Scotland.

Non-fossil Fuel Energy (North-West)

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans he has to encourage non-fossil fuel energy production in the North-West of England. [76357]

Mr. Battle: The Government have a Manifesto commitment to

"a new and strong drive to develop renewable sources of energy".

As part of that commitment, the Government will be issuing a consultation document shortly on the status and

prospects for renewable energy in the UK as a whole and inviting views to help the Government frame future policy.

Under the fifth Non-Fossil Fuel Order (NFFO)—the largest round so far—which I announced last autumn, we have awarded 31 contracts for projects to be sited in the North-West of England. These contracts for landfill gas and small and large scale wind projects would provide additional generating capacity of 70MW DNC if they were all implemented.

Textile Industry

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations he has received from the textile trade *(a)* owners and *(b)* trade unions concerning problems facing the industry; and if he will make a statement. [76263]

Mr. Battle: My Department has received a number of representations from owners and trade unions involved in the textiles industry. The most significant of these was the presentation of a joint Action Plan to improve the competitiveness of the textiles and clothing sector submitted by the British Apparel and Textile Confederation and the industry's principal trade unions. The industry has now established the Textiles and Clothing Strategy Group, made up of representatives from trade associations, trade unions, academia, manufacturing and Government, to develop a strategy for the long term sustainable development of the industry, building on the work in the Action Plan. My Department provides the secretariat for the group.

HEALTH

Genzyme Corporation

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the licence applications received since 1 May 1997 from the Genzyme Corporation, indicating which *(a)* involve the injection of cells from pigs into human brains and *(b)* have been submitted for consideration to UKXIRA. [72571]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 22 February 1999]:* Applications to the United Kingdom Xenotransplantation Interim Regulatory Authority (UKXIRA) must be submitted in accordance with the requirements set out in "Guidance on making proposals to conduct xenotransplantation on human subjects". Copies of the guidance is available through the Department of Health, PO Box 410, Wetherby, LS23 7LL. The UKXIRA Website (address www.doh.gov.uk/ukxira.htm) also gives details of both of the guidance and the work of the authority.

Information contained in applications is submitted in confidence. The number of applications received has not changed since the answer given on 4 February 1999, *Official Report*, column *776*.

Waiting Lists

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 22 February 1999, *Official Report*, columns *138–39*, on waiting times, how many patients in the Mid Essex Hospital Trust area had been waiting *(a)* 13 to 25 weeks and *(b)* more than 26 weeks to see a consultant at the end of December 1998. [73154]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 25 February 1999]:* The number of people waiting 13 to 25 weeks to see a consultant was 1,848 at the end of December 1998; the number of people waiting over 26 weeks was 440 at the end of December 1998.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will take steps to ensure that the North Essex Health Authority publishes figures on waiting lists on the same basis as his Department. [73120]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 25 February 1999]:* We are content that the waiting list figures North Essex Health Authority publishes are consistent with those collected by the Department and published by the Government Statistical Service.

However, we have asked the North Essex Health Authority to ensure that, when publishing waiting list figures for local trusts, it is made clear that the figures relate only to the health authority's own residents.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will investigate discrepancies between the figures published by the North Essex Health Authority on the total number of people waiting for hospital treatment in the Mid Essex Hospital Trust Area and the figures published by his Department. [73119]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 25 February 1999]:* We have compared figures published recently by the North Essex Health Authority with those collected by the Department and published by the Government Statistical Service and identified no discrepancies. However, whereas the Government Statistical Service publishes the health authority total, North Essex Health Authority also publishes the number of its residents waiting at each local National Health Service trust.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will ensure that health authorities publish hospital waiting list figures that are compatible with the figures published by his Department. [73118]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 25 February 1999]:* National Health Service waiting list figures are collected from health authorities and NHS trusts by the Department and published by the Government Statistical Service. The data are subject to validation and any anomalies are investigated with the health authority or NHS trust concerned. We are not aware of health authorities publishing hospital waiting list figures differing from these figures.

Dental Services

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will commission a cost/benefit analysis of a preventive approach to dentistry. [74299]

Mr. Denham: The most effective oral health promotion measure is the fluoridation of water. A review of the economic benefits of fluoridation by the Health Economics Consortium of the University of York was published last year. Copies are available in the Library.

Mr. David Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to ensure that *(a)* primary health care groups and *(b)* future primary care trusts make appropriate provision for dentistry and oral health. [75677]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 10 March 1999]:* Health Improvement Programmes will ensure that all stakeholders are actively engaged in developing plans that will address all of the health and health care needs of local communities. All health improvement programmes must include oral health. In addition, we are already taking steps to improve the quality of dental services and ensure easier access, through the Personal Dental Services Pilots which began in October 1998 and through the Investing In Dentistry scheme, which is improving access to the General Dental Services.

Nursing and Care Homes

Mr. Dorrell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will state for the latest available year and the two preceding years the *(a)* number of residents of registered nursing homes, *(b)* number of residents of registered care homes, *(c)* average weekly cost of a place in a registered nursing home, *(d)* average weekly cost of a place in a registered care home, *(e)* proportion of residents of nursing homes who receive assistance with the cost of their care from public funds, and the total cost of that assistance and *(f)* proportion of residents of care homes who receive assistance with the cost of their care from public funds and the total cost of that assistance. [74949]

Mr. Hutton: The table contains figures on the number of residents in nursing and residential care homes for the last year available (1997) and the two preceding years together with information on the average weekly cost of a placement. We do not have data on the proportion of residents supported from public funds but the table contains data on numbers of supported residents and total expenditure on residential and nursing home care by social services and the number of people receiving help with the cost of their care through Income Support.

	1995	*1996*	*1997*
(a) Numbers of residents—Nursing—all (local authority support)	147,584	145,864	147,381
(a) Numbers of residents—Nursing—Elderly (local authority support)	135,469	133,387	137,755
(b) Numbers of residents—Residential—all (LA support)	288,640	292,719	278,000
(b) Numbers of residents—Residential—Elderly (LA support)	225,624	226,329	194,000
(c) Estimated average weekly fee level per resident per week for Residential Home Care for older people	£239	£247	£252
(d) Estimated average weekly fee level per resident per week for Nursing Home Care for older people	£333	£338	£352
(e) Social Services Gross expenditure on Residential Care older people (£000)	£1,330,734	£1,489,084	£1,699,722
(f) Social Services Gross expenditure on Nursing Care for older people (£000)	£370,450	£566,013	£754,600
(g) Numbers in receipt of Income Support for Residential and Nursing Home care and resident before 1993	205,000	168,000	not available
(h) Income Support expenditure on Residential and Nursing Home care for people resident before April 1993 (£000)	£1,955,000	£1,624,000	not available

Notes:
All expenditure figures are as at 31 March for each year.
Due to poor response from care homes, the residential figures for 1997 have been estimated and are not as reliable as previous years data.
The significant reduction in elderly residents between 1996 and 1997 can be attributed to better assignment of these residents to other client groups such as EMI, Learning Disabilities and Others.
Average weekly cost figures for residential/nursing homes are from Lang and Buisson Income Support expenditure is based on a 5 per cent. sample of all cases and as such is subject to a degree of sampling error.

Non-state-registered Doctors

Ms Moran: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to regulate the activities of non-state-registered doctors. [75223]

Mr. Denham: The General Medical Council is responsible for registering and regulating all doctors practising medicine within the United Kingdom, whether the doctors are working in the National Health Service or privately.

NHS Patients (Private Sector Hospitals)

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many NHS patients were admitted to private sector hospitals during the winter months. [75456]

Mr. Denham: The information requested is not available centrally.

Meningitis

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to implement a programme to vaccinate all high-risk groups of the population against meningitis; and how many cases of meningitis there have been in each year since 1990. [75457]

Ms Jowell: Present advice from the Public Health Laboratory Service Meningococcus Working Group, endorsed by the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation, recommends using the existing meningococcal vaccine under specific conditions for groups at high risk. There are no plans at present to widen these recommendations. Research is being actively promoted into meningococcal vaccines that may overcome some of the shortcomings of the existing vaccine and may, therefore, be suitable for more widespread use. Notifications of meningococcal disease are given in the table.

Notifications of meningococcal infection (septicaemia and meningitis) by epidemiological year (1 July-30 June) in England and Wales

Epidemiological year	*Notifications*
1998–99	[1,2]1,840
1997–98	[1]2,622
1996–97	2,519
1995–96	2,183
1994–95	1,559
1993–94	1,442

Notifications of meningococcal infection (septicaemia and meningitis) by epidemiological year (1 July-30 June) in England and Wales

Epidemiological year	*Notifications*
1992–93	1,328
1991–92	1,294
1990–91	1,365

[1] Provisional
[2] From 1 July 1998 to 26 February 1999
Source:
Public Health Laboratory Service, Communicable Disease Surveillance Centre

Meningococcal infection occurs throughout the year, but infections reach a peak in the winter months and the number of cases so far this year is in line with recent winters. There are irregular upsurges in meningococcal infection and recent years have seen an increase in the incidence of disease.

Medicines Control Agency

Mr. Gill: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will introduce a right of appeal against decisions of the Medicines Control Agency; [75730]

(2) what changes or amendments he proposes to the Medicines Marketing Authorisation Regulations 1994; and when. [75729]

Ms Jowell: We have recently consulted on proposals to amend the regulations to improve procedures for classifying "borderline products" as medicines or otherwise. We are considering the results of the consultation and will make an announcement shortly. As part of our consideration, we are examining whether we can introduce a system whereby licensing authority decisions can be made subject to appropriate review mechanisms.

Contaminated Blood Products (Compensation)

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the basis of the compensation entitlement for those suffering from *(a)* the AIDS virus and *(b)* hepatitis C through contaminated blood products. [75559]

Mr. Hutton: As a general rule, compensation or other financial assistance is paid only when the NHS, or individuals working in it, has been at fault. This is not the case with infection by HIV or hepatitis C through blood products before viral screening tests and inactivation processes were available. An exception to this general rule was the special payment scheme for people infected with HIV through NHS treatment with blood or blood products. This reflected the widespread public fear of the disease at the time, when the infection was rapidly fatal and associated with sexual transmission.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people in the United Kingdom are currently suffering from hepatitis C; and how many of these have contracted their condition as a consequence of receiving contaminated blood products in the course of NHS treatment. [75560]

Mr. Hutton: The exact number of people with hepatitis C in the United Kingdom is not known. Estimates suggest that around 250,000 to 300,000 may carry the virus. We estimate that 4,000 were infected with hepatitis C through their National Health Service treatment with blood products, mainly for haemophilia, before the introduction of viral inactivation processes in 1985.

Pregnancy Quitline

Ms Ryan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many calls the Pregnancy Quitline has received since it was established. [75836]

Ms Jowell: In its first 14 months the Pregnancy Quitline service, which is based in Doncaster, has recorded a total of 6,791 calls.

Mobile Phones

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress has been made in his Department's discussions with mobile phone companies on possible research into possible health risks. [76361]

Ms Jowell: A meeting has been arranged for Departmental officials to meet mobile phone companies to discuss areas of common interest.

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what results have been published from research supported by his Department into the health dangers of mobile phones. [76378]

Ms Jowell: The Department has funded research projects on possible health effects of radiofrequency fields which have not yet been published. The Department is also supporting the World Health Organisation (WHO) International Electromagnetic Fields Project which is reviewing electromagnetic field health effects in general. The WHO has placed its interim findings on its Web site.

Buckinghamshire Health Authority

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the post of Chairman of the Buckinghamshire Health Authority became vacant; when the post was advertised; and when he expects to appoint someone to the position. [75947]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 11 March 1999]:* The previous chairman of Buckinghamshire Health Authority submitted his resignation on 1 July 1998, giving three months notice. The post was subsequently advertised in the local press on 10 and 11 September. A decision will be announced shortly.

Mixed-sexed Wards

Mr. Syms: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress has been made towards eliminating mixed-sexed wards. [76037]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 11 March 1999]:* The National Health Service Executive is continuing to monitor progress towards achieving this policy objective. A monitoring exercise to establish the latest position throughout the NHS was carried out recently, and we shall publish the results of this exercise shortly.

Last week we unveiled details of a £1.1 billion capital investment to be made in the next financial year in new NHS buildings and equipment. This investment will further work towards the elimination of mixed-sex accommodation.

Cancer Surgery (Waiting Lists)

Mr. Syms: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress has been made towards the Government's target to end waiting for cancer surgery. [76036]

Mr. Hutton: We have a programme of measures in place targeted at cutting waiting times for cancer treatment. Additional resources have already been invested in breast and colorectal cancer services and we have recently announced a further £10 million to improve lung cancer services. This targeted investment has demonstrated tangible improvements in services and has enabled the National Health Service to finance additional work force, training and equipment to speed access to diagnosis, reduce waiting times for treatment and improve quality of care as part of the ongoing implementation of the Calman/Hine recommendations.

The National Health Service has put the necessary systems in place to meet The New NHS guarantee that by April 1999 everyone with suspected breast cancer will be able to see a specialist within two weeks of their general practitioner deciding they need to be seen urgently and requesting an appointment. We are also developing a programme of action which will deliver rapid and sustainable improvements in the speed and quality of care for all patients with a suspected or a diagnosed cancer. We will continue to build on this progress over the course of this Parliament.

General Practitioner Commissioning

Mr. Syms: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress has been made towards introducing general practitioner commissioning. [76031]

Mr. Denham: *[holding answer 11 March 1999]:* From April, primary care groups covering the whole of England will share with Health Authorities the task of commissioning health services. Primary care groups will enable local doctors and nurses, who best understand patients' to work together in partnership to help shape local services.

Earning Profiles

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research his Department is undertaking, or has undertaken, on the lifetime earnings profiles of women. [76097]

Ms Jowell *[holding answer 11 March 1999]:* The Women's Unit is undertaking, for the first time, a detailed analysis of the distribution of women's incomes over their lifetime. This will examine issues such as the pay gap, occupational segregation and the effects of key events (such as having children) on women's incomes. The project will build on the forthcoming report "Women's Individual Incomes 1966–67" which will be published jointly by the Women's Unit and the Government Statistical Service in the near future.

Suicide

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to improve training and support for GPs and family doctors to help them recognise the symptoms of potential suicide in young men. [76742]

Mr. Denham: In 1999–2000, £146 million extra funding will be invested in mental health services, of which £12 million will provide support for education and training of doctors and nurses. This will include general practitioners and family doctors. It is not however practicable or desirable for the Government to prescribe the exact training that any individual doctor will receive. The medical education curriculum is a matter for the General Medical Council, medical schools, the relevant Medical Royal Colleges and the Joint Committee on Postgraduate Training for General Practitioners.

Voluntary Organisations

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish a list of those organisations that have been awarded grant assistance under section 64 of the Health Services and Public Health Act 1968 for the coming year. [76087]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested has been placed in the Library.

Listening to Women Roadshows

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the women's organisations which have been invited to send representatives to the Listening to Women roadshows at *(a)* Norwich on 10 March, *(b)* Birmingham on 26 March, *(c)* Bristol on 16 April, *(d)* Newcastle on 19 April, *(e)* Reading on 21 May, *(f)* Leeds on 26 May and *(g)* Nottingham on 11 June. [76226]

Ms Jowell: The following organisations have been sent invitations to the Listening to Women meeting in Norwich on 10 March 1999.

1. Leeway
2. Family First
3. Breast Cancer Care
4. The Townswomen's Guild
5. Lady Wise Club
6. Equality in Employment
7. Gingerbread
8. Cinewomen
9. UK Federation of Business and Professional Women
10. Umbrella Housing
11. Eating Disorders Association
12. Magdalene Group
13. The Townswomen's Guild
14. Beldervale Community Association
15. Greenfields Management Committee
16. North Earlam Community Association
17. Catton Grove Management Committee
18. Heathgate Community Association
19. Chapel Break Community Association
20. Clover Hill Community Association
21. Meadow View Neighbourhood Association
22. Jubilee Community Association
23. Normandie Tower Community Association

24. Frere Road Community Centre
25. Russel Street Community Centre
26. Acle and District Voluntary Aid Scheme
27. Bereavement Support Service
28. Carers National Association
29. Families Matter
30. Lesbian Line
31. Harford Community Centre Ladies Group
32. Young Women's Christian Association
33. Women Working for the Environment
34. Well Woman Clinic
35. Norfolk Environment and Development Centre
36. Maier Partnership
37. Women's Outdoor Pursuits Group
38. Great Yarmouth Young Women's Project
39. Norwich and Norfolk Voluntary Services
40. Unemployed Workers Resource Centre
41. The Learning Shop
42. Philippine Community
43. Norfolk and Norwich Asian Society
44. Norwich Black Women's Group
45. Dereham and District Disabled Peoples Club
46. Macmillan Nurses Norwich Community Health Partnership
47. Norfolk and Norwich Pensioners Association
48. Thetford Disabled Activities Group
49. Disabled Persons Swimming Club
50. City Centre Residents Community Power Forum
51. Central West Community Power Forum
52. Norwich and Norfolk Racial Equality Council
53. Norfolk Disability Service
54. Women's Officer Norwich City Council
55. Leader of the Council
56. Bernard Matthews Plc.
57. Norfolk County Council
58. Norwich District Community Health Council
59. Norwich Union Plc.
60. Virgin Direct Personal Financial Services
61. Norwich City College
62. Women's Employment, Enterprise and Training Unit
63. Women's Health, Information and Support Service
64. Adult Basic Education Unit
65. Norwich City Council
66. Mothers Union
67. Womens Institute

To date the following organisations have been sent invitations to the Listening to Women meeting in Birmingham on 26 March 1999.

1. Careers and Education Business Partnership
2. Family Service Unit (South Birmingham)
3. Handsworth College, Golden Hillock Women's Centre
4. The Ladypool Project
5. Sparkhill Asian Women's Association
6. Women's Federation for World Peace
7. Chinese Community Centre
8. The Friendship Group—Friendship Care Choices
9. Central Gingerbread
10. National Childbirth Trust—Birmingham North and District Branch
11. St. Andrew's Family Centre
12. Disability West Midlands
13. Disability Resource Centre
14. City Technology College

In addition to organisations we are publicising the event to individual women not involved in public life. To this end we have invited women who had previously contacted the Women's Unit; published articles in the local press, with an open invitation to attend; publicised the event on local radio; and asked local job centres to issue invitations to female jobseekers in the area.

The invitations to the Bristol, Newcastle, Reading, Leeds, and Nottingham meetings will be issued shortly.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list those women's organisations which sent representations to the Listening to Women roadshow in London on 8 March. [76225]

Ms Jowell: The following organisations sent representatives to the Listening to Women event in London on 8 March 1999.

1. Women's Therapy Centre
2. Black Women's Rape Action Project
3. Manufacturing, Science and Finance Union
4. National Union of Students
5. Royal College of Nurses
6. Crossroads Women's Centre
7. Professional Afro-Asian Women's Association
8. Scottish Office
9. Eating Disorders Association
10. British Pregnancy Advice Service
11. National Board of Catholic Women
12. Solicitors Family Law Association
13. Working for Childcare
14. Housing for Women
15. Standing Conference of Women's Organisations
16. Pennell Initiative/Relate
17. New Ways to Work
18. Feminist Library and Information Resource Centre
19. Girls Friendly Society Platform
20. Greater London Association of Disabled People
21. Barnardos Young Women's Project
22. National Council of Women of Great Britain
23. Women's Engineering Society
24. Secondary Heads Association
25. Women Against Rape
26. Women's Aid Federation of England
27. National Childminding Association
28. Women Liberal Democrats
29. Miscarriage Association
30. International Planned Parenthood Federation
31. Townswomen's Guilds
32. Unison
33. Southall Black Sisters
34. Camden Council—Equality Unit
35. Women Against Sexual Harrassment
36. Full Time Mothers
37. British Federation of Women Graduates
38. National Childbirth Trust

39. Jewish Women's Aid
40. Family and Youth Concern
41. League of Jewish Women
42. Menerva Educational Trust
43. Society of Women Writers and Journalists
44. Child Support Agency
45. The Labour Party
46. Women and Medical Practice
47. National Union Teachers
48. Association for Post Natal Illness
49. National Association of Women's
50. London Irish Women's Centre
51. The Spiro Institute
52. United Kingdom Asian Women's Conference
53. Wise Campaign
54. Change International Consultants
55. Public and Commercial Services Union
56. British Housewives League
57. Pro-Choice Alliance
58. Birkbeck College—University of London
59. Change
60. Women's Health
61. British Association for Early Childhood Education
62. Women Connect
63. Muslim Women's Helpline
64. Soroptimist International, Beckenham and District
65. Women's Resourse Centre
66. Single Mothers Self Defence
67. Fawcett Society
68. Grandparent Federation
69. Medical Women's Federation
70. Feminist Library and Information Resource Centre
71. Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists
72. The Guide Association

The following organisations were invited but did not attend:

1. National Free Church Women's Council
2. National Association of Ladies Circle
3. Corona World-wide
4. Stonham Housing Association Royal College of Midwives
5. Practical Resourcing
6. Standing Conference of Women's Organisations
7. Alliance For Africa
8. East London Black Women's Organisation
9. International Planned Parenthood Federation
10. Gingerbread
11. White Ribbon Association Inc.
12. Campaign Against Domestic Violence
13. Business and Professional Women United Kingdom Ltd.
14. Carers National Association
15. Daycare Trust
16. London Women and Marital Trades
17. Breakthrough Breast Cancer
18. Women's Opportunities Unit
19. Forward

Dietary Supplement (Definition)

Mr. Gill: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is his Department's definition of a dietary supplement. [75728]

Mr. Rooker: I have been asked to reply.

The term "dietary supplement" is not defined in UK legislation, nor has a definition been adopted for administrative purposes. Depending upon their nature and presentation, products described as dietary supplements may be regarded in law as either foods or medicines and would be subject to the same controls as apply to other foods or medicines.

SCOTLAND

Dr. Arpad Pusztai

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will investigate the circumstances surrounding Dr. Arpad Pusztai's departure from his post at the Rowett Research Institute; and if he will make a statement. [69825]

Mr. Macdonald *[holding answer 8 February 1999]:* The departure of Dr. Pusztai was entirely a matter for the Rowett Research Institute as his employers.

From 1 July 1999, this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

Mr. Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what involvement his Office had in discussions leading to the retirement of Dr. Arpad Pusztai from the Rowett Institute. [70048]

Mr. Macdonald *[holding answer 15 February 1999]:* The Scottish Office had no involvement in the decision on Dr. Pusztai's retirement. This was entirely a matter for the Rowett Research Institute. The Director of the Rowett Research Institute kept The Scottish Office in touch with the situation.

From 1 July 1999, this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

Winter Deaths

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will break down the excess winter deaths for each of the last three years by socio-economic class, indicating *(a)* all ages, *(b)* those aged 60 to 70 years and *(c)* those aged 70 years and over. [75450]

Mr. McLeish: There is no universally accepted definition of "excess winter deaths". The information presented in the table is based on a formula that has been used in recent years by the Office for National Statistics when presenting data for England and Wales. This defines excess winter deaths as the difference between the number of deaths during the four months December to March and the average number of deaths during the preceding four months (August to November) and the following four months (April to July). As this is a crude measure of the increase in mortality associated with winter conditions the numbers of excess deaths have been rounded to the nearest ten.

The socio-economic breakdown used, social class based on occupation, is derived from information about the deceased's occupation and employment status (or, when appropriate, that of their parents and spouse) as stated at death registration. It is known that such information is incomplete for certain groups, particularly elderly women. As these form a large proportion of "excess" deaths the data need to be interpreted with care.

From 1 July 1999, this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

	1994–95			1995–96			1996–97		
Social class based on occupation	*All ages*	*60–69*	*70 and over*	*All ages*	*60–69*	*70 and over*	*All ages*	*60–69*	*70 and over*
I Professional	60	30	30	60	–10	60	40	30	20
II Managerial and technical	260	–30	260	570	50	470	470	50	380
IIInm Skilled—manual	170	10	150	490	40	410	310	10	280
IIIm Skilled—non-manual	540	140	370	680	80	630	640	130	470
IV Partly skilled	280	10	230	550	70	500	460	70	370
V Unskilled	220	30	200	330	30	300	350	80	250
Not Known	830	20	790	1,410	170	1,100	1,710	160	1,470
Total	2,360	210	2,020	4,090	420	3,460	3,980	520	3,250

Medical Students

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what is the capacity for expansion of existing medical schools to accommodate additional medical places required by the NHS; and if he will make a statement; [75454]

(2) if he will make a statement on the capacity for clinical positions for students at medical schools. [75452]

Mr. Galbraith: Current work force planning for the NHS in Scotland does not require a change in the level of intake for medical schools. There is therefore currently no need to expend the capacity of medical schools in Scotland.

There is sufficient provision for clinical positions for the current level of students at medical schools in Scotland. The NHS in Scotland will be able to meet changes in the demand for clinical positions arising from changes in the curriculum or future changes in the number of students.

From 1 July 1999, this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

Police Funding

Sir Robert Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the year-on-year change in central Government funding for police between 1979–80 and 1999–2000 in *(a)* cash and *(b)* real terms; and if he will make a statement. [75225]

Mr. McLeish: The Secretary of State pays police specific grant at 51 per cent. of net eligible expenditure by police authorities. Annual changes in police specific grant are determined by changes in the level of Grant Aided Expenditure as set by the Secretary of State and by forces' budgets set by police authorities.

The figures requested are shown in the table. The figure for 1997–98 includes £3.5 million for the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting.

Year	*Cash (£000)*	*Year-on-year (Percentage change)*	*Real terms*	*Year-on-year (Percentage change)*
1979–80	72,189	—	198,390	—
1980–81	86,833	20.29	201,812	1.72
1981–82	99,511	14.60	211,212	4.66
1982–83	112,529	13.08	223,367	5.75
1983–84	120,562	7.14	228,712	2.39
1984–85	130,591	8.32	235,366	2.91
1985–86	137,147	5.02	234,798	–0.24
1986–87	147,125	7.28	244,269	4.03
1987–88	161,155	9.54	254,014	3.99
1988–89	176,597	9.58	260,094	2.63
1989–90	200,764	13.68	276,577	6.09
1990–91	215,062	7.12	274,754	–0.66
1991–92	234,103	8.85	281,618	2.50
1992–93	253,514	8.29	295,198	4.82
1993–94	270,974	6.89	307,368	4.12
1994–95	274,262	1.21	306,716	–0.21
1995–96	287,141	4.70	312,031	1.73
1996–97	295,600	2.95	311,629	–0.13
1997–98	328,887	11.26	337,931	8.44
1998–99	337,500	2.62	337,500	–0.13
1999–2000	351,900	4.27	343,316	1.72

Note:
The cash figures shown have been recalculated using GDP deflators to show the equivalent real term figures at 1998–99 prices.

From 1 July 1999, this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

DEFENCE

Married Quarters

Mr. Brazier: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if RAF Bentwaters formed part of the sale of his Department's married quarters to Nomura negotiated in 1996–97. [76293]

Mr. Spellar: No.

RAF Brize Norton

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what complaints he has received regarding the

Defence Housing Executive's policy of evicting irregular occupants from his Department's houses at RAF Brize Norton; and if he will make a statement. [76298]

Mr. Spellar: None other than that from the hon. Member.

Select Committee Reports

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if *(a)* he, *(b)* civil servants in his Department or *(c)* special advisers in his Department have (i) had sight of drafts of select committee reports, in whole or in part, or (ii) been informed of conclusions of select committee reports prior to their publication by the select committees. [75875]

Mr. George Robertson *[holding answer 10 March 1999]:* I refer the right hon. Member to the answer given by the Prime Minister to the hon. Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire) on 1 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *531*. There have been no instances of members of Select Committees giving me or my Ministerial colleagues drafts of Select Committee reports, or parts of reports including their conclusions, before publication. Nor to the best of my knowledge have there been any occasions on which members of the Select Committee have given such material to civil servants or special advisers in my Department. This excludes embargoed copies of reports issued under House of Commons Standing Orders.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Mackerel (South Devon)

Mr. Steen: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what inspections have been carried out in each of the last 20 days within the mackerel conservation box off the coast of South Devon of factory and industrial fishing ships from European countries; when the inspections were made; and what was found there; [75201]

(2) which factory ships have been fishing in the mackerel conservation box off the coast of South Devon in the last 28 days; in which countries such ships are registered; and what steps have been taken to ensure their departure from the conservation box. [75202]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 10 March 1999]:* The Ministry has no record of any sightings of factory ships or industrial vessels fishing in the Mackerel Box in the last 28 days and there have been no inspections undertaken on such vessels during the last 20 days.

Mr. Steen: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what records are kept, and by whom, of satellite surveillance of the mackerel conservation box off the coast of South Devon. [75203]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 10 March 1999]:* The Ministry has no records of satellite surveillance of fishing vessels in the Mackerel Box.

GM Animal Feed

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the safety of products derived from animals which eat genetically modified animal feed. [75420]

Mr. Rooker: The Advisory Committee on Novel Foods and Processes (ACNFP) considers the implications for human health of the use of genetically modified (GM) materials in animal feed in its role as the UK body which carries out safety assessments under the EC Novel Foods Regulation. The Advisory Committee on Animal Feedingstuffs, which is currently being set up, will be liaising closely with the ACNFP and the Advisory Committee on Releases to the Environment on this matter.

GM Crops and Foods

Mr. Steen: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will introduce legislation to make biotechnology companies legally and financially liable for any damage to human health cause by genetically modified crops and foods made from plants manufactured by them. [75199]

Mr. Rooker *[holding answer 10 March 1999]:* There are rigorous procedures in place to assess the risks from foods derived from genetically modified plants before they are allowed into the food chain. This is to ensure that such foods are as safe as their non GM counterparts. On the basis of Common Law principles, a firm holding the marketing consent for a GMO crop can be held liable in law for any damages arising from ill effects attributed to that crop.

Bovine Tuberculosis

Mr. Gray: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement about the regional spread of bovine tuberculosis. [74687]

Mr. Rooker: Incidence of TB in cattle continues to be concentrated in the traditional TB "hot spot" counties of Cornwall, Devon, Gloucestershire, Hereford and Worcester and parts of Wales, with a number of incidents also recorded in several other counties, particularly Staffordshire and Wiltshire. Summarised in the table are details of the number of incidents of TB in cattle in Great Britain in each county in 1997 and the first six months of 1998. Figures for the whole of 1998 are not yet available.

Number of new confirmed TB incidents

County	*1997*	*January-June 1998*
Avon	10	15
Bedfordshire	0	0
Berkshire	0	0
Buckinghamshire	0	0
Cambridgeshire	0	0
Cheshire	0	1
Cleveland	0	0
Cornwall	74	61
Cumbria	0	0
Derbyshire	1	0
Devon	82	41
Dorset	12	5
Durham	0	0
East Sussex	4	0
Essex	1	0
Gloucestershire	85	63
Greater London	0	0
Greater Manchester	0	0
Hampshire	0	0
Hereford and Worcester	86	43
Hertfordshire	0	1
Humberside	0	0

Number of new confirmed TB incidents

County	*1997*	*January-June 1998*[1]
Isle of Wight	0	0
Isles of Scilly	0	0
Kent	0	0
Lancashire	0	2
Leicestershire	0	0
Lincolnshire	0	0
Merseyside	0	0
Norfolk	0	0
North Yorkshire	0	0
Northamptonshire	0	0
Northumberland	0	1
Nottinghamshire	0	1
Oxfordshire	0	2
Shropshire	7	2
Somerset	27	14
South Yorkshire	0	0
Staffordshire	24	16
Suffolk	0	0
Surrey	0	0
Tyne and Wear	0	0
Warwickshire	0	1
West Midlands	0	0
West Sussex	0	0
West Yorkshire	0	0
Wiltshire	30	18
England total	443	287
Clwyd	0	0
Dyfed	24	28
Gwent	33	12
Gwynedd	0	0
Mid Glamorgan	2	1
Powys	1	5
South Glamorgan	0	0
West Glamorgan	2	0
Wales total	62	46
Aberdeenshire	2	0
Angus	0	0
Argyll	0	0
Aryshire	0	0
Banffshire	0	0
Berwickshire	0	0
Bute	0	0
Caithness	2	0
Clackmannan	0	0
Dumbartonshire	1	0
Dumfreisshire	0	0
East Lothian	0	0
Fife	0	0
Iverness-shire	0	0
Kincardine	1	0
Kinross	0	0
Kirkcudbright	1	0
Lanarkshire	1	0
Midlothian	0	0
Moray	0	0
Nairn	0	0
Orkney	0	0
Peebles	0	0
Perthshire	1	0
Renfrew	0	0
Ross and Cromarty	0	0
Roxburgh	0	0
Selkirk	0	0
Shetland	0	0
Stirling	0	0

Number of new confirmed TB incidents

County	*1997*	*January-June 1998*[1]
Sutherland	0	0
West Lothian	0	0
Wigtown	1	1
Scotland total	10	1
Great Britain total	515	334

[1] Provisional

Notes:

1. Each new confirmed TB incident relates to a herd which has been TB free, but which during 1997 or January to June 1998 was found to have TB.

2. Although it is acknowledged that many of the counties no longer exist as administrative authorities, data are presented in this form in order to retain continuity for historical comparison.

Source:

Compiled from information provided by Divisional Veterinary Managers

Agrochemicals

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) if he will list the *(a)* herbicides, *(b)* fungicides and *(c)* pesticides which are banned in other EU member states but are approved for use in the United Kingdom, indicating the conditions attached to their use; [75495]

(2) he will list the *(a)* herbicides, *(b)* pesticides and *(c)* fungicides which have restrictions on their use in other (i) European Union and (ii) G7 countries and which are used in the United Kingdom without similar restrictions. [75498]

Mr. Rooker *[holding answer 10 March 1999]:* All 18 countries of the EU and G7 have regulatory systems that only permit pesticides (including herbicides and fungicides) to be used once they have been authorised by government. This means that a common reason why a pesticide is not authorised in one of these countries is that no application for authorisation has been made for commercial reasons. When the use of a pesticide is allowed, specific restrictions on use may be imposed by the government concerned, but these could reflect differences in climate, ecology and application methods available as well as the crop to be protected and the pest to be targeted.

While the EU produces lists of active substances of agricultural pesticides authorised for use in each Member State, there are no systematic arrangements for Member States to pool information about the decisions they make or the reasons for them. Similarly, the G7 countries do not exchange information about restrictions on the use of authorised agricultural pesticides. The information requested therefore cannot be provided.

In the UK, all herbicides, fungicides and other pesticides are strictly controlled. The government keep pesticides under review and do not hesitate to ban or restrict products if this is warranted. We also require companies to submit any potentially adverse information which comes to their attention, including studies generated at the request of another country's authorities.

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list *(a)* herbicides, *(b)* pesticides and *(c)* fungicides on the Red List which have been approved for use in agriculture and horticulture, indicating the conditions attached to their use. [75415]

Mr. Rooker *[holding answer 10 March 1999]:* Eight of the twenty three substances on the Red List are contained in pesticides approved for use in agriculture and horticulture. Atrazine, simazine and trifluralin are approved as herbicides, and gamma-hexachlorocyclohexane (lindane), dichlorvos, fenitrothion, malathion and endosulfan are approved as insecticides. In considering the approval or review of a pesticide, an assessment is made of the risk to the aquatic environment. Only if this assessment shows that there is no unacceptable risk will approval be granted or allowed to continue.

All pesticides are subject to strict statutory control. General conditions relating to use are imposed by Schedules 3 and 4 to the Control of Pesticides Regulations 1986 (as amended by the Control of Pesticides (Amendment) Regulations 1997). There are 166 products approved containing these eight pesticides and I shall write to my hon. Friend to set out the specific conditions attached to the use of these particular products.

Genetically Modified Material

Mr. Baker: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer of 27 January 1999, *Official Report*, column *302*, what recent legal advice he has *(a)* sought and *(b)* received in respect of whether World Trade Organisation rules permit genetically modified material used in food production to be segregated as a condition of import. [75188]

Mr. Rooker *[holding answer 8 March 1999]:* It is made clear under the World Trade Organisation Agreement on the Application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures, that World Trade Organisation members have the right to take measures necessary for the protection of human, animal or plant life or health, but these must be based on scientific principles and not maintained without sufficient scientific evidence. A requirement to segregate GM products at import other than on this basis would therefore be a trade-restrictive measure.

Milk Imports

Mr. Sawford: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how much milk was imported each year from 1990 to the latest year for which figures are available. [75842]

Mr. Rooker: Total UK imports of milk since 1990 are as shown.

	Tonnes
1990	35,147
1991	61,033
1992	125,577
1993	96,371
1994	169,221
1995	177,966
1996	122,994
1997	156,189
1998	[1]174,303

[1] January-November

Novel Foods

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list for each of the requests submitted to him and to other Member States in connection with the placing on the market of genetically modified novel foods or novel food ingredients, pursuant to Article 4 of Regulation (EC) No. 258/97, *(a)* the competent food assessment body which prepared each initial assessment under that Article, *(b)* the dates of each such assessment and *(c)* details of deliberate release consents and of decisions authorising the placing on the market under Part C of Directive 90/220/EEC accompanying the submission or to which the submission relates. [69876]

Mr. Nick Brown *[holding answer 8 February 1999]:* The following competent authorities have provided initial assessments for applications under the EC Novel Foods Regulation (258/97) on the dates given:

Advisory Committee for Novel Foods and Processes (UK): tomatoes (8 June 1998).

The Provisional Committee for the Safety Evaluation of Novel Foods (Netherlands):

radicchio rosso (27 October 1998), chicory (27 October 1998), maize and high oleic soya (still under consideration).

Copies of documents relating to these assessments have been placed in the Library of the House. Details of deliberate release consents under Directive 90/220 can be found on the following EC website addresses:

http://biotech.jrc.it;

http://biotech.jrc.it/gmo.htm;

http://biotech.jrc.it/gb.htm

Shellfish

Mr. Quinn: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if, following his Department's consultation exercise on shellfish conservation, he will make a statement on improved protection of UK shellfish stocks. [76947]

Mr. Morley: The responses to our consultation last Summer on improved conservation measures for shellfish proposed by the Fisheries Conservation Group were generally very positive.

In the light of this clear endorsement, the Government have decided that legislation should be laid, to increase from 1 January 2000, the minimum landing sizes of lobster, edible crab, and male spider crab landed into the UK from British registered fishing vessels.

From the same day, the landing of any lobster or crawfish which has been V-notched would also be prohibited. In Northern Ireland, the current Great Britain landing size of 65mm carapace width for velvet crab will be introduced there at the same time.

The landing size for whelks will be 45mm. This recognises concerns expressed in the consultation exercise that, in some parts of the country, 45mm was the largest size of whelk found and larger size was impracticable.

These moves are aimed at conserving shellfish stocks and clearly illustrate our commitment to work with the industry.

Full details are in the table:

Minimum landing sizes from 1 January 2000	*Minimum EU requirement*	*UK size*
	mm	
Lobsters:	[1]85	87
Edible crabs:		
North Sea south of 56°N (except the 'Cromer' fishery) to the Essex/Kent border	115	130
The 'Cromer' fishery (the coasts of Lincolnshire, Norfolk and Suffolk)	115	115
Scottish West coast and North Sea north of 56°N (including the whole of the Firth of Forth)	140	140
North of 55°N on the west coast of Scotland (but including Loch Ryan)	130	140
South of 56°N on the west coast except ICES areas VIId, e and f	130	130
Off Devon, Cornwall and the Scilly Isles within ICES VIIe and f	140	males-160 females-140
The Bristol Channel and the remainder of the English Channel	140	140
Velvet crabs:	none set	65
Spider crabs:	120	males-130 females-120
Whelks:	45	45

[1] 87mm from 1 January 2002

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Employment Service

Mr. Fitzpatrick: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) what amount of money has been set aside within the Employment Service budget in the current year to provide for child care for Employment Service staff; [75897]

(2) if he will make a statement about the effects of the family-friendly policies within the Employment Service listed by his Department in a booklet published in February *(a)* nationally, *(b)* regionally and *(c)* in east London; [75899]

(3) how many members of Employment Service staff are currently on term-time working initiatives; [75898]

(4) how many play schemes have been set up for Employment Service staff in the last 12 months. [75896]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its Chief Executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Leigh Lewis to Mr. Jim Fitzpatrick, dated 12 March 1999:

As the Employment Service is an Executive Agency, the Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your questions concerning the Employment Service's position on Family Friendly and Childcare Policies. This is something which falls within the responsibilities delegated to me as Chief Executive of the Agency.

I wrote to all staff in the Employment Service in January of this year restating the Employment Service Board's commitment to equality of opportunity. This week, we have also issued a document entitled "Childcare Provision and Family Friendly Policy. A Statement to Staff in DfEE and ES from the Secretary of State, the DfEE Board and the ES Chief Executive", a copy of which has been placed in the Library of the House.

The Employment Service has a wide range of policies available, all of which apply nationally, to support staff with family commitments and our intention is that these should be used to the full. The majority of Employment Service staff already work flexible hours, and 21% work part time. Of these, we estimate that around 40 work formal term time hours. Significantly more take advantage of our special leave arrangements to cover school holiday periods.

With regard to playschemes, in 1998 the Employment Service had 650 playscheme places in 22 locations. No new playschemes were opened in the last twelve months, but our intention is to encourage such schemes wherever they are viable and cost effective. We are also working closely with the Benefits Agency to establish where we can make joint provision available.

The Employment Service does not have a separate national budget for childcare. Overall budgets are allocated to our Regional Directors, and to the ES Directors for Scotland and Wales, who have authority individually to assess and where appropriate fund childcare facilities in individual locations.

I hope this is helpful.

Childcare Provision and Family Friendly Policy

Statement to Staff in DfEE and ES

From the Secretary of State, the DfEE Board and the ES Chief Executive

We are writing to let you know what is happening on childcare and family friendly policies in DfEE and ES and to emphasise our commitment to continue to make progress in this area.

DfEE is responsible for developing the National Childcare Strategy and for promoting good practice in family friendly employment. DfEE and ES must lead the way to help our own staff balance their work and home lives and to encourage other employers to do the same. We want to keep our skilled and talented people, supporting them to remain in, or return to, work.

DfEE and ES already have an extensive range of childcare and family friendly provision which includes:

Subsidised nurseries and holiday playschemes in some locations.

Maternity leave on 16 weeks full pay for permanent staff with 1 years service.

Paid paternity leave for 5 days.

Adoptive leave for 52 weeks including 20 days at full pay.

Payment for additional childcare costs where people have to work longer than their normal hours, for example to attend a training course.

Discretion for managers to agree special paid and unpaid leave.

Career breaks for women and men.

Provision for part-time working—10% of DfEE and 21% of ES staff currently work part-time.

A wide variety of flexible working patterns including job share, homeworking, part year or term time working and compressed hours working.

But we want to do more. In recent months, DfEE and ES have taken a number of steps to move the childcare and family friendly strategy forward.

DfEE has:

carried out a benchmarking exercise to determine what leading major employers are doing and measured ourselves against them. We will be publishing a summary of the results within the next few months:

undertaken a Carers' Survey to get views about a range of childcare and family friendly issues. We are now taking this a step further and will very shortly be carrying out a needs analysis on each site;

carried our research into eligibility criteria of childcare voucher schemes and prepared illustrative costings to help us decide whether vouchers are a feasible option;

called together a cross-Whitehall Departmental Working Group to determine how an affordable and targeted childcare voucher scheme might work;

agreed to extend payment for additional childcare costs to wider caring responsibilities;

issued guidance for all staff on family friendly policies and flexible working patterns.

ES has:

set out its intentions to be a leader in the field of equal opportunities in a letter to all staff from the Chief Executive;

issued booklets on setting up a nursery and a playscheme;

developed options on childcare for consideration by the ES Board;

set up an Action Group to consider issues on part-time and family friendly policies, sponsored by a member of the ES Board;

prepared a leaflet for all staff outlining current family friendly policy provision to be issued in the next few weeks;

surveyed, in one region, the specific childcare needs of staff.

We will continue this work. DfEE is currently investigating local nursery and playscheme partnerships which we could join. ES is exploring the use of local partnerships with the Benefits Agency to provide additional childcare places. Both DfEE and ES are looking to see how we can use our family friendly policies to the full. We also need to publicise them more effectively.

Management and trade unions are working together on these issues. DfEE and ES will continue to share knowledge and good practice. Our managers have a critical role in developing the Department as a family friendly employer. We look to them to play their part too.

If you are interested in further information on any of the above issues, you can contact:

Sheila Wigley, DfEE, Equal Opportunities Unit, 01928 4322, GTN 4197 (4)4322. Sue Locke, ES Equal Opportunities Team, 0114 259 7620, GTN 5301 (2)7620.

or

Your ES Regional Personnel Section.

Outdoor Education

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans he has to review outdoor education in the context of the National Curriculum; and if he will make a statement. [75857]

Mr. Charles Clarke: The review of the National Curriculum for the year 2000 is looking at all areas of the school curriculum. This includes outdoor and adventurous activities, which is one of six areas of activity in the National Curriculum for Physical Education. We will be consulting widely on proposals for the revised National Curriculum in the summer.

Mature Students

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was the total number of applications from mature students to universities in England and Wales in each of the last three years. [75076]

Mr. Mudie *[holding answer 9 March 1999]:* This information is given in the following table.

Applications from mature[1] students to higher education courses[2] in England and Wales

Year of entry	*Number of applications*[3]
1996	333,111
1997[4]	334,767
1998[4]	281,499

[1] Aged 21 or over

[2] Full-time and sandwich undergraduate courses

[3] Each applicant can make up to six applications

[4] Including applications to Art and Design courses which were included in the UCAS scheme for the first time in 1997.

The figures cover applications for full-time and sandwich students only, and exclude applications to part-time courses, which account for more than half of all mature undergraduate students. Early figures show that home and EU part-time numbers in England in 1998–99 are up by around 1 per cent.

The number of applications is not a reliable guide to the number of students who actually accept places; figures for the UK show that the number of mature students accepted for entry to full-time courses in 1998 exceeded the number accepted in 1996.

The fall in mature applications between 1997 and 1998 is attributable, at least in part, to demographic factors, the declining pool of potential mature applicants and the relative strength of the labour market. In addition, the surge in students admissions in 1997 meant that fewer prospective students were expected to apply in 1998.

Complete figures for applications for 1999 entry are not yet available.

Examinations (Availability in Foreign Languages)

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) if he will make a statement on the availability of GCSE and A level examinations in Somali; [75740]

(2) if he will make a statement on the availability of GCSE and A level examinations in Hindi. [75781]

Mr. Mudie: Somali has never been offered at either GCSE or A level. Hindi is currently offered at A level but not GCSE. Last year, at the Government's instigation, the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority secured an agreement with the awarding bodies to ensure that small entry A level language examinations which are currently available should continue to be offered without interruption.

The Institute of Linguists offers Contemporary Language Certificates in Hindi and Somali which have been approved for use in schools.

Education Business Partnerships

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assessment he has made of the benefits to pupils' education of participation in the activities of education business partnerships. [75618]

Ms Estelle Morris: Successive studies have demonstrated that education business partnerships make an important contribution to raising standards and to preparing young people for the world of work.

Salary Levels

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what representations he has received regarding disparities in salary levels between lecturers in the further education sector and teachers in the school sector. [75643]

Ms Estelle Morris: The Department has received a number of letters about salaries of lecturers in sixth form colleges as compared with those of teachers in state schools. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State recently had a constructive meeting on a wide range of issues with the National Joint Council for Staff in Sixth Form Colleges.

Pupil Turnover

Mr. Gordon Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assessment he has made of the effect of high levels of turnover in pupil enrolments on school performance. [75752]

Ms Estelle Morris *[holding answer 9 March 1999]:* We are seeking further information about the nature and extent of pupil mobility, and its effect on school and pupil performance. That is why we are supporting a research project into pupil mobility, conducted by the Migration Research Unit at University College London. We expect preliminary results from the project to be available in July, and hope the outcomes will provide a focus for proper debate and discussion of the issue of mobility and school and pupil performance. We will keep the House informed of progress in this important area.

Mr. Gordon Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many of the education action zones have identified high levels of *(a)* turnover in pupil enrolments and *(b)* absenteeism as contributing to underperformance in their participating schools; and what initiatives they have put in place to address these problems. [75715]

Ms Estelle Morris: It is likely that all 25 existing zones have problems with pupil attendance; and most of them contain at least some schools with high pupil mobility.

The zone action plans are due to be delivered to the Department at the end of this month. They will set out the initiatives that are to be put in place to address this problem.

Mr. Gordon Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many LEA education development plans have identified high levels of *(a)* absenteeism and *(b)* turnover in pupil enrolments, as factors affecting the performance of schools. [75716]

Ms Estelle Morris: Local education authorities' final education development plans were submitted to the Department on 28 February 1999. These are currently being considered. I will write to my hon. Friend as soon as the information becomes available and will place a copy of the letter in the Library.

Discretionary Grants

Mr. Lock: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list (i) the names of the beneficiaries of all the discretionary grants awarded by his Department to organisations within Worcestershire during 1998, (ii) their monetary value, (iii) their total value and (iv) the proportion that that total sum comprises of the total sums awarded by his Department in discretionary grants in 1998. [75254]

Mr. Mudie: The information is shown in the following table.

Beneficiaries of discretionary grant from DfEE in 1998–99

	£
Pershore and Hindlip College	26,996
Evesham College	15,972
Kidderminster College	14,664
North East Worcestershire College	48,171
Worcester College of Technology	28,437
Worcester Sixth Form College	942
Worcestershire Local Education Authority	5,764,000
Royal National Institute for the Blind New College Worcester	25,000
Avoncroft Museum of Historic Buildings	12,400
Malvern Girls College and Malvern Parish CE Primary School	9,000
Worcestershire County Council	312,805
Mencap Pathway	21,102
Redditch Borough Council	9,990
Areley Kings Playgroup	1,000
Broadwas Bumblebee Playgroup	1,000
Busy Bears Pre-School Playgroup	1,000
Busy Bees Pre-School Playgroup	1,000
Catshill Village Pre-School Playgroup	1,000
Cornmeadow Lane Playgroup	960
Droitwich Spa Pre-School Playgroup	700
Lower Broadheath Pre-School	500
Redditch YMCA Pre-School	600
Rowney Green Pre-School	300
Stoneyhill Pre-School Playgroup	1,000
Tan Lane Pre-School Nursery	1,000
Teddy Bears Club	1,000
Brockhampton Estate	16,975
SME Clean Technology grant	40,000
Ledbury Lower Link	45,000
Edwin Ralph multi-purpose village church	29,250
Witley Baroque Church	141,000
Total paid in discretionary grants	6,572,764

Notes:

1. Grants paid under the terms of the European Social Fund to organisations in Worcester are not separately identifiable. Organisations in Hereford and Worcester received £535,692.

2. Grants for Travellers and displaced persons in Worcestershire under section 488 of the Education Act 1996 are not separately identifiable. Grants paid to a consortium of West Midlands Local Education Authorities, including Worcestershire, received £826,167.

New Deal

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, pursuant to his answer of 3 February 1999, *Official Report*, columns *661–62*, for what reasons his answer did not indicate how many persons aged 18 to 24 years *(a)* have been invited to join the New Deal and failed to keep any appointments and *(b)* started the New Deal but subsequently dropped out. [71643]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Responsibility for the subject of this question has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its Chief Executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Leigh Lewis to Mr. James Clappison, dated 17 February 1999:

As the Employment Service is an Executive Agency, the Secretary of State for Education and Employment has asked me to reply to your question about the reasons why questions 66965 and 66966 were not answered in his reply on 3 February. This is something which falls within the responsibilities delegated to me as Chief Executive of the Agency.

I am sorry if my earlier reply was unclear.

As to those persons aged 18 to 24 years who have been invited to join the New Deal but who have failed to keep any appointments, I said in my earlier reply that of the 203, 100 young people who had started New Deal by the end of November, 14,170 signed off Jobseeker's Allowance before attending their initial appointment. All of the 14,170 therefore left before attending any appointment. We do not monitor centrally the number of young people who fail to attend their initial appointment but who do attend a second or subsequent appointment. Where a young person fails to attend interviews with an Adviser but continues to claim Jobseeker's Allowance a referral of their claim to an Adjudication Officer will normally be made. Up to the end of November 1998, 2,577 such referrals had been made.

As to those who started the New Deal but subsequently dropped out, my earlier reply said that, up to the end of November 1998, 22,760 young people had left New Deal and Jobseeker's Allowance to unknown destinations which I had taken to be the information which was being sought.

I would be very grateful if you would write to me if I am still not providing the specific information you are seeking in order that I may try to do so.

I hope this is helpful.

University for Industry

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on progress in relation to the University for Industry. [75354]

Mr. Mudie *[holding answer 10 March 1999]:* I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave to the right hon. Member for Penrith and The Border (Mr. Maclean) on 8 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *74*.

Individual Learning Accounts

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on the operation of individual learning accounts. [75355]

Mr. Mudie *[holding answer 10 March 1999]:* A national framework for individual learning accounts will be established in the year 2000, within which all learning accounts will operate. Proposals for the national framework will be published in due course. These will include details of the incentives for learning accounts, announced by the Chancellor in his statement yesterday. There will be significant developments in 1999–2000 in advance of the national framework, involving a range of local, sectoral and national organisations.

Class Sizes

Mr. Syms: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how much has been spent to date on achieving the Government's target that no Key Stage 1 pupil will be in a class of more than 30 pupils; and what is his estimate of the total expenditure that will be incurred to meet the target. [74741]

Ms Estelle Morris: We have allocated £221 million to local education authorities and schools to enable them to make a start in implementing our pledge that by September 2001 at the latest, there will be no infant classes of more than 30 pupils. We have made available a total of £620 million for the additional teachers and classrooms required to implement our pledge.

Mr. Syms: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list by region the amounts spent to date on *(a)* employing extra teachers and *(b)* building new classrooms in order for schools to ensure that no five to seven-year-olds are in classes with more than 30 pupils; and what is his estimate of the total expenditure that will be incurred. [74735]

Ms Estelle Morris: We have made available a total of £620 million in order to ensure that we meet in full our pledge that, by September 2001 at latest, no infant class will contain more than 30 pupils. The following table sets out the allocations we have made for 1998–99 and 1999–2000 by region.

£000

Region	*1998–99 Capital (classrooms)*	*1998–99 Revenue (teachers)*	*1999–2000 Capital (classrooms)*	*1999–2000 Revenue (teachers)*
Eastern	3,434	951	6,860	6,282
East Midlands	4,671	3,283	8,196	7,703
London	5,598	1,970	12,403	4,646
Northern	2,335	1,520	2,801	3,752
North West	10,036	2,959	16,585	12,302
South East	5,975	1,157	11,162	9,531
South West	4,757	2,615	8,238	9,108
West Midlands	5,051	3,203	8,014	8,114
Yorks and Humberside	3,560	3,662	7,662	10,444

Failing Schools

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what criteria are used to determine whether a school is failing; how many failing schools have been given a fresh start; what proportion of all failing schools this represents; and how many of those schools given a fresh start no longer meet the criteria for a failing school. [74774]

Ms Estelle Morris: Schools are inspected by Ofsted in accordance with the published "Framework for Inspection". Those which are judged to be failing or likely to fail to provide an acceptable standard of education are deemed to require special measures. Local Authorities adopt a wide range of strategies to improve the education of children attending schools in special measures. In two cases, schools have formally closed and a new Fresh Start school has been opened on the same site. Three schools have had Fresh Starts approved to start from this September and a further four have been submitted for approval. Taken together, these

represent just under 2 per cent. of the number of schools currently judged to be failing. New schools are not subject to special measures.

Education Action Zones

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on progress in introducing education action zones. [74768]

Ms Estelle Morris: There are 25 Education Action Zones; 12 started in September 1998 and 13 in January 1999. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced a new application round in January which will enable more Education Action Zones to be established.

Press Notices

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) if his departmental press office staff telephoned media outlets in Cumbria asking them not to use press notice LPN 41/99; [76186]

(2) on how many occasions since 1 May 1997 his Department's press notices have been withdrawn for reasons other than that they contained inaccuracies; [76187]

(3) on how many occasions his Department has withdrawn a press notice because of representations from a county council since 1 May 1997; [76188]

(4) if press notice LPN 41/99 was *(a)* issued and *(b)* officially withdrawn. [76192]

Ms Estelle Morris: LPN 41/99 was issued on 24 February 1999. No local or national press notices have been withdrawn since 1 May 1997.

Social Affairs Council

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on the outcome of the Social Affairs Council on 9 March indicating the position taken by the UK Government on each issue discussed. [76195]

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was the outcome of the Social Affairs Council held in Brussels on 9 March; and if he will make a statement. [76749]

Mr. Andrew Smith: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State was unable to attend this meeting of the Council due to the timing of the Budget. I attended in his place.

The morning session consisted of a meeting with Ministers for Employment and Social Affairs from the candidate countries of central and eastern Europe and Cyprus to discuss their pre-accession priorities for action in the social and employment fields.

In the afternoon, the Presidency gave an oral report on the informal meeting of Employment and Social Affairs Ministers which my right hon. Friend the Minister of State, Department of Trade and Industry and I attended in Bonn on 4–6 February. The Presidency also reported on its ideas for a European Employment Pact.

The Council noted the 1999 Work Programme for the Employment and Labour Market Committee and adopted a Decision to reform the Standing Committee on Employment by streamlining its operations and aligning its remit with the European employment strategy.

The Council reached political agreement on a draft Resolution on a Code of Conduct between authorities concerning the combating of social security fraud and undeclared work, and on the transnational hiring-out of workers.

The Presidency reported on the negotiations on the European Commission's proposals for organising the working time of the sectors excluded from the scope of the Working Time Directive. I raised UK concerns that any proposals should not undermine the delivery of health care in the NHS.

The Presidency outlined its plans to secure agreement on employee involvement within the European Company Statute.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 15 March 1999

PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

Brit Awards

Mr. Maclean: To ask the President of the Council if she will list those Ministers in her Department who were present at the recent Brit Awards in an official capacity, indicating the organisation acting as their sponsor or host. [76649]

Mrs. Beckett: Neither I nor the Parliamentary Secretary attended the Brit Awards.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Ministerial Statements

Mr. Peter Atkinson: To ask the Chairman of the Administration Committee what steps she proposes to take to ensure that copies of ministerial statements and accompanying documents are available in the Vote Office at No 7 Millbank on the day of the statement. [76576]

Mrs. Roe: The Vote Office endeavours to arrange distribution of ministerial statements throughout the Parliamentary estate on the same afternoon that such statements are made, where considerations of security, timing and the quantity of documents make this possible. However, it would be impracticable for the Vote Office to undertake always to distribute unknown quantities of documents which often arrive very late (or even sometimes after a statement) unless a van was made permanently available to the office, which would not be economic.

PRIME MINISTER

EU Budget (Contributions)

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the Government's policy in respect of possible increases in United Kingdom contributions to the EU budget which do not involve modifying the Fontainebleau rebate procedures. [75059]

The Prime Minister: The UK is arguing that spending on the existing Union should be stabilised at its present levels by 2006. This will ensure that the present member states can afford the additional costs of enlargement to central and eastern Europe. Stabilisation will help to keep down the largest net contributions, including the UK's "Co-financing" and other reforms of the CAP also have a role here.

Even with these measures the Fontainebleau arrangements will remain justified. Even after the rebate the UK's net contribution will remain much larger than those of some more prosperous states.

Economic and Monetary Union

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 1 March 1999, *Official Report*, columns *527–28*, on economic and monetary union, if he will list the microeconomic reforms he has put in place which will contribute to the passing of the five economic tests for joining the euro. [75164]

The Prime Minister: The Treasury's assessment of the five economic tests, published in October 1997, concluded that

"weaknesses remain in the UK which make it unclear that we are ready to be able to cope adequately with potential shocks that might arise in EMU, especially in the early years. The Government's welfare to work programme and the agendas for improving skills and competition will help to remove the underlying weaknesses that remain and improve the prospects of being ready to meet the flexibility test in years to come".

Chernobyl

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Prime Minister what representations he has made to the Ukranian Government regarding future power production at Chernobyl; and if he will make a statement. [75938]

The Prime Minister: Last year, in my capacity as G7 Chairman, I wrote to Ukranian President Kuchma on three occasions. These letters covered a number of issues relating to the G7/Ukraine Memorandum of Understanding on the closure of Chernobyl, including the safety improvements being carried out at the plant, the importance of power sector reform in Ukraine and the proposed financing package for the completion of the Khmulnitsky 2 and Rovno 4 nuclear power reactors. In particular, I consistently stressed the need for Ukraine to honour its commitment to close Chernobyl by the year 2000, as agreed under the Memorandum.

EU Fraud

Mr. Field: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the steps taken to work with the European Commission in countering fraud at EU level; and if he will publish the memoranda submitted by Her Majesty's Government to the President of the European Commission. [76199]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 12 March 1999]:* The Government believe that there must be a policy of zero tolerance to fraud and have consistently supported the European Commission in initiatives to fight fraud against the EC budget.

At the January ECOFIN Council, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor called for a strong, independent head of fraud investigations, reporting to an independent management board. These ideas are being used in discussions currently taking place on how to strengthen internal fraud investigations. Following this, the Government offered practical assistance to the Commission, specifically offering to share UK experience of best practice on codes of conduct for behaviour in public life. I am pleased to say that this offer was welcomed and officials have been in contact to take this forward. It is among the issues that will be covered in joint training with Commission officials and officials from other Member States starting in September of this year.

The Government have not submitted a memorandum to the European Commission regarding countering fraud at EU level.

Special Advisers

Mr. Drew: To ask the Prime Minister what arrangements he plans to make for the appointment of special advisers following devolution for Scotland and Wales. [77193]

The Prime Minister: An amendment has been made to the Civil Service Order in Council to allow for the appointment of a limited number of Special Advisers to Ministers in the Scottish Parliament and Assembly Secretaries in the National Assembly for Wales. The amendment takes account of the new ministerial arrangements that will apply in Scotland and Wales following devolution, and sets out the terms and conditions under which they can be employed including an upper limit on the numbers that can be appointed. A copy of the amended Order has been placed in the Library of the House.

Gibraltar

Mr. Austin: To ask the Prime Minister what recent discussions he has had with the Prime Minister of Spain about Gibraltar with particular reference to *(a)* frontier delays and *(b)* the allegations made by the Spanish Foreign Minister about criminal activity in Gibraltar; and if he will make a statement. [76659]

The Prime Minister: In the last month, I have discussed the delays at the Gibraltar/Spain border twice with the Spanish Prime Minister, Sr. Aznar, most recently on 25 February. I made it clear that we regarded the delays as unacceptable and unjustifiable.

The Spanish Foreign Minister's remarks were made after my meeting on 25 February. I have not discussed them with Sr. Aznar. Sr. Aznar's staff handed over on 26 February a paper referring to some alleged cases of criminal activity in Gibraltar. We have been looking into these allegations, together with the relevant Gibraltar authorities, and expect to respond very shortly.

Dr. Marek: To ask the Prime Minister what reasons underlie the length of time taken to grant to Gibraltar the ability to passport financial services. [76581]

The Prime Minister: In June 1997, after discussion with the Department of Trade and Industry, the Gibraltar Financial Services Commission was authorised to "passport" Gibraltar-based insurance companies to operate in the United Kingdom and elsewhere in the European Union. Authorisation for "passporting" in the fields of banking and investment services will be granted when the relevant financial services regulatory authorities in the United Kingdom are satisfied that Gibraltar has introduced the necessary legislation and regulatory structure and procedures.

British-Irish Council

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Prime Minister when the British-Irish Council will be established; and if he will make a statement. [76999]

The Prime Minister: The British-Irish Council (BIC) will be established immediately on entry into force of the Good Friday Agreement reached at Belfast on 10 April 1998. Membership of the BIC will comprise representatives of the British and Irish Government, of the devolved institutions in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, and the Isle of Man, Jersey and Guernsey. Its secretariat will be provided by the British and Irish Governments in co-ordination with officials of each of the other members. I have asked the Minister for the Cabinet Office to take responsibility within the British Government for matters relating to the BIC, including the necessary preparatory work.

Intelligence Service

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Prime Minister if he will review the access that the Foreign Affairs Committee has to appropriate intelligence material and witnesses from the Secret Intelligence Service. [71827]

The Prime Minister: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office gave the Foreign Affairs Committee unprecedented access to key official documents for the purpose of its inquiry on Sierra Leone. It is the Government's view that the Intelligence and Security Committee, set up by the previous Government under the Intelligence Services Act 1994, is the appropriate forum for Parliamentary oversight of the Intelligence Agencies. The Intelligence and Security Committee has been conducting its own inquiry into Sierra Leone. No previous Administration has ever agreed to witnesses from the Secret Intelligence Service appearing before Select Committees.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

Asset Management

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the Church Commissioners, what assessment the Commissioners have made of the cost benefit of co-ordinating management of assets with churches of other Christian denominations in England. [76043]

Mr. Stuart Bell: The Church Commissioners act as trustees for the management of their own endowment and have no general power to offer investment management for others. However, they are always willing, with their partners in the Archbishops' Council, to consider ways of furthering co-operation with other Churches.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

David Arundel

Mr. Randall: To ask the Attorney-General if, when deciding whether to refer back to the Court of Appeal the sentence imposed on David Arundel for causing death by dangerous driving (T980326), he had access to a transcript of the judge's summing up. [76024]

The Attorney-General: When I consider cases in the context of part IV of the Criminal Justice Act 1988 (unduly lenient sentences) I am provided with all the necessary case papers. Ordinarily, this will not include a transcript of the judge's summing up and I did not have

such a transcript when considering the sentence imposed on David Arundel. I did have a transcript of the judge's remarks regarding sentence made on 9 June 1998 and a transcript of the judge's sentencing remarks on 3 July 1998.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Task Forces

Dr. Tony Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will publish a list of (1) task forces and (2) policy reviews established by his Department since May 1997 which *(a)* had external members recruited by way of public advertisement, and details of any person so appointed and *(b)* engaged in public consultation exercises, and the form that these took. [74468]

Mr. Chris Smith: The following task forces and policy reviews have been established since May 1997:

1. *Task forces*

(i) Creative Industries Taskforce.

(ii) The Football Taskforce.

(iii) The Film Policy Action Committee.

(iv) A group of sponsorship experts assisting sports currently in receipt of tobacco sponsorship to find replacement sponsors.

2. *Policy Reviews*

(i) Review of Film Policy.

(ii) Review of arrangements for celebrating the Millennium.

(iii) Review of the National Lottery leading to the White Paper.

(iv) Review of Policy on admission charging by National Museums (Subsumed into the Departmental Spending Review).

(v) Review of the List of Nationally Important Sporting Events which must be made available on Free-to-Air Terrestrial TV Channels.

(vi) Review of the future of the Royal Opera House and the English National Opera (Eyre Review).

(vii) Review of the future funding of the BBC.

(viii) Review of the efficiency and effectiveness of Government sponsored museums and galleries.

(ix) Working Group on review of Legal Deposit.

(x) The Library and Information Commission's public library network implementation Committee.

(a) Most task forces and reviews are short-term bodies established to give thorough consideration to important and difficult issues. External members are invited to sit on some reviews and task forces because they are able to contribute specific experience and expertise. In such cases, public advertising would be inappropriate and disproportionate. None of the appointments to the task forces and review groups listed above were made by way of external advertisement.

Since 1 October 1998, appointments to those task forces which qualify for classification as advisory NDPBs have come within the remit of the Commissioner for Public Appointments.

(b) Public consultation exercises took place with the following:

(i) The Football Taskforce—Regional roadshows allowed football supporters to give their views directly.

(ii) Review of Film Policy—An industry consultation on the work of the Film Policy Review Group took place in 1997. The consultation period was for 2 months and replies were received in writing, in addition to being submitted orally.

(iii) Review of the National Lottery—The public was asked for views on the proposals in the White Paper.

(iv) Eyre Review—The Department issued a press release inviting written views from the public.

(v) Review of the future funding of the BBC—The Department issued a press release inviting written views from the public.

(vi) Review of policy on admission charging by National Museums, subsumed into the DSR consultation—The Department issued a consultation document on 24 July 1998 inviting public views.

World-class Performance Programme

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what estimate he has made of the level of the proposed reduction in the allocation from the Sports Council for the World-class Performance Programme following the apportionment of money from the National Lottery to the New Opportunities Fund. [75336]

Mr. Banks: There will be no reduction to the World-class Performance Programme. I can confirm that the amount of Lottery money available to sport has not reduced. In fact it has increased. When the Lottery was launched, the good causes expected to receive £9 billion in total over the licence period which ends in September 2001: that is £1.8 billion for each good cause, including sport. The National Lottery is now set to raise £10.6 billion for good causes over the current licence period. On this basis Sport will receive an extra £50 million over this period.

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport which World-class Performance Programme grants will be reduced following the apportionment of money from the National Lottery to the New Opportunities Fund; and which sports will be affected. [75337]

Mr. Banks: The amount of money available to sport has not reduced but will increase over the current licence period on the basis of current projections.

The allocation Lottery funding to sports and individuals who are in the World-class Performance Programme is a matter for the Sports Councils to decide at the moment on the basis of the forward plans submitted by the national governing bodies of sport and of the competing priorities. The hon. Gentleman may be assured that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I are determined to support our athletes. My right hon. Friend will announce shortly what share of the Lottery Sports Fund we propose the United Kingdom Sports Council should distribute in support of excellence in UK sport and other good causes.

After-school Sports

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans the Government have to increase the availability of after-school sports provision. [75721]

Mr. Banks: There are a range of initiatives designed to increase the availability of after-school sports provision.

Through the New Opportunities Fund (NOF) we have committed £400 million of National Lottery money to out of school hours activities during the current licence period to September 2001. Of this, £180 million has been committed to education activities, £200 million to child care, and £20 million to projects combining child care and education. Out of school hours education projects should involve at least half of all secondary schools, at least a quarter of all primary schools, and at least half of all special schools by 2001. Out of school child care projects should provide places for 865,000 children by 2003.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has also announced an extra £400 million for the New Opportunities Fund between now and 2001. We have consulted on how this money should be spent and have proposed that part of the additional amount should be committed to an expansion of the existing out of school hours initiative, to enhance the contribution made by summer schools not only to literacy, numeracy but also opportunities for sport.

The Policy Directions issued to NOF ensure that it takes into account relevant national and local strategies in relation to each initiative. For out of school hours learning this includes "Extending Opportunity: a national framework for study support" (in England) and any similar guidance produced elsewhere. Study support is learning activity outside normal lessons and embraces many activities, including sports, games and adventurous outdoor activities.

The National Lottery Act 1998 required NOF to draw up a strategic plan containing its assessment of needs and its priorities in dealing with them, on which it must consult the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport. This ensures that there is a proper strategy for distributing Lottery proceeds. No specific targets have been allocated to NOF for providing physical exercise opportunities at after-school clubs, but in reviewing NOF's strategic plan we shall ensure that the projects it supports promote young people's well-being through a range of activities, including sport and creative activities.

The TOP programmes are continuing to prove a valuable resource in enhancing the games element of the PE curriculum. Sport England, together with the Youth Sport Trust, are working with 126 Local Education Authorities and have put equipment and education/training into 10,000 schools. Sport England has provided funding of £1.8 million to support this delivery.

In addition to its extensive range of revenue programmes for young people, Sport England is committed to the Community Sports Co-ordinators. The Co-ordinators will act as a catalyst to assist young people to take maximum advantage of continued participation in sport by substantially improving the network between school, club and community.

The Lottery Awards for All, a unique small grants scheme, will be focused on groups who have missed out in the past. It will allow all distributors to give out grants of between £500 and £5,000 for capital revenue projects which involve people in their community and encourage school-club links. It will bring people together to enjoy sports and other activities.

Sports Grounds (Access)

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what measures the Government are introducing to increase access to football and other sports grounds for people with disabilities. [75790]

Mr. Banks: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Eltham (Mr. Efford), on 15 February 1999, *Official Report*, columns *470–71*.

World Cup (2006)

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what future support the Government plan for England's bid to host the 2006 World Cup. [75792]

Mr. Banks: The Government will continue to provide the fullest diplomatic and promotional support for the FA's bid in accordance with FIFA bidding guidelines. I believe it is an excellent bid with a very good chance of success. My Department is currently helping the FA draft the formal bid submission. I will continue to meet members of the FIFA Executive when they visit this country and will accompany the 2006 Bid team abroad when requested.

I am determined that the FA's bid should continue to be pursued with the utmost vigour and integrity, and very much hope that the bidding process between now and March 2000 will be conducted in a spirit of friendly rivalry.

Local Authority Grants

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will list the types of information collected centrally by his Department on local authority grants to *(a)* arts organisations, *(b)* museums and *(c)* libraries. [75568]

Mr. Chris Smith *[holding answer 9 March 1999]:* Although the bulk of the information my Department uses on local authority expenditure is collected by the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, my Department has, since 1998, required all library authorities to provide it with Annual Library Plans, containing structured information about their services and forward strategy and solicits, in a number of individual cases, detailed information on library expenditure.

Rugby World Cup

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many meetings he has had with the officials of *(a)* the International Board and *(b)* the Welsh Rugby Union to discuss contingency plans if the Millennium Stadium in Cardiff is not ready for the Rugby World Cup. [75855]

Mr. Michael: I have been asked to reply.

I have had no such meetings.

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many meetings he has had with the Welsh Rugby Union to discuss the pricing of tickets for the Rugby World Cup. [75854]

Mr. Banks: Neither my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State nor I have had any meetings with the Welsh Rugby Union to discuss the pricing of tickets for the

Rugby World Cup. However, in response to recent questions in the House, I have made written representations to Keith Rowlands, Chief Executive of Rugby World Cup 1999, supporting their pricing policy for the pool matches which is aimed at broadening public access, whilst expressing concern about the cost of tickets for the semi-final and final tickets. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales is in the lead for the Government on matters relating to this competition.

Libraries (Cumbria)

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will make a statement on Cumbria's first Annual Library Plan. [76160]

Mr. Alan Howarth: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has sent every library authority, including Cumbria, both an overall appraisal of all the 1998 Annual Library Plans and individual feedback about their own. The individual feedback is confidential, but each authority can publicise their own if they wish.

Libraries

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will list, by local authority, those local authority supported libraries which are proposed for closure; and if he will make a statement. [76390]

Mr. Chris Smith *[holding answer 12 March 1999]:* I am aware of possible library closures in a number of authorities and I am looking in detail at these proposals. Some of them are part of a wider restructuring and modernisation of services, but in all cases my concern is to ensure that library authorities continue to meet their statutory responsibility to provide a 'comprehensive and efficient' service. It could be prejudicial to my inquiries to name the authorities concerned.

SCOTLAND

Dance and Drama Courses

Ms Roseanna Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment he has made of the possible impact on Scottish colleges of new scholarship arrangements in England for students of further and higher education courses in dance, drama and stage management; what plans he has for similar arrangements in Scotland; what body will have responsibility for accrediting dance schools in Scotland; and if he will make a statement. [70362]

Mr. Galbraith *[holding answer 11 February 1999]:* The new arrangements reflect the special and significant role that private institutions have in delivering dance and drama provision in England. All EU citizens will be able to apply for assistance under the new arrangements, including the small number of Scottish students who have traditionally gone to England for specialist courses. There is no evidence that there will be an adverse impact on Scottish colleges from the new arrangements, but we are monitoring the position. Further education colleges in Scotland are already eligible for grant-in-aid support from the Scottish Office Education and Industry Department budget for dance and drama activity, and are encouraged to develop provision in response to demonstrated needs and demands. We have no plans at this time to introduce any new arrangements in Scotland.

Departmental Expenditure

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his answer of 14 January 1999, *Official Report*, column *232*, if he will list the expenditure not included in his answer incurred *(a)* by task forces and review bodies, *(b)* by focus groups, *(c)* on market research and *(d)* for publications and publicity; and if he will list the bodies which incurred the expenditure. [71023]

Mr. Dewar *[holding answer 15 February 1999]:* A total of £14,000 was spent on market research and £25,000 on publications and publicity. The expenditure was incurred by the Scottish Office Education and Industry Department (Parents Focus Group); the Scottish Office Agriculture, Environment and Fisheries Department (Rural Water Review); and the Scottish Office Department of Health (Acute Services Review).

Overseas Travel

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his answer of 10 February 1999, *Official Report*, column *280*, if he will estimate the total expenditure on all forms of travel by his Department, its agencies and public bodies for *(a)* 1995–96, *(b)* 1996–97, *(c)* 1997–98, *(d)* 1998–99, *(e)* 1999–2000 and *(f)* 2000–01; and if he will make a statement. [71751]

Mr. Dewar *[holding answer 22 February 1999]:* Travel expenditure incurred by my Department and Executive Agencies is set out in the table. Information relating to other public bodies is not held centrally. Budgets at this level of detail are not yet available for future years.

Year	£
1995–96[1]	3,310,000
1996–97[1]	3,570,000
1997–98[1]	3,916,000
1998–99[2]	3,126,000

[1] Actual
[2] Estimated outturn

From 1 July 1999, this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

Working Time Directive

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment he has made of the effect the Working Time Directive will have on the provision of emergency medical and fire services on the smaller islands of Argyll and Ayrshire. [72262]

Mr. Macdonald *[holding answer 22 February 1999]:* The EU Working Time Directive does not apply at present in the maritime sector and therefore has no impact on the provision of emergency services to the islands.

From 1 July 1999, this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

Hospital Waiting Times

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will estimate outpatient waiting times for the quarter ended December 1998; and if he will make a statement. [74889]

Mr. Galbraith *[holding answer 5 March 1999]:* Provisional figures for the quarter ending 31 December 1998 show that the percentage of patients who received a first outpatient appointment within 9 weeks and 18 weeks following referral by a General Medical Practitioner/General Dental Practitioner was 63.6 per cent. and 88.0 per cent. respectively.

From 1 July 1999, this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

Operations (Cancellation)

Mr. Moore: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will place in the Library figures by *(a)* health board area, *(b)* region and *(c)* Scotland, for the number of operations cancelled on the day of, or the day after, admission to a hospital, and the numbers of those patients not readmitted within a month, by quarter for the last two years. [74996]

Mr. Galbraith *[holding answer 5 March 1999]:* Information on cancellations of hospital admissions at the level of detail requested is not held centrally. Details of cancellations of planned admissions for in-patient and day case treatment for each Health Board in Scotland for the period requested is provided in the table. Information on cancellations of hospital planned admissions is published annually in the NHS in Scotland Annual Report, copies of which have been placed in the Library.

NHS in Scotland: Cancellations of hospital admissions[1] by Health Board: Quarters ending 31 March 1997 to 31 December 1998

	1997				1998			
Health Board	*31 March*	*30 June*	*30 September*	*31 December*	*31 March*	*30 June[2]*	*30 September[2]*	*31 December[2]*
Argyll and Clyde	231	231	134	108	201	242	192	172
Ayrshire and Arran	44	49	49	45	98	42	1	31
Borders	74	97	25	94	56	74	11	86
Dumfries and Galloway	13	13	22	2	62	—	2	21
Fife	303	151	238	218	270	201	152	189
Forth Valley	68	76	80	39	88	57	40	81
Grampian	488	340	301	333	458	489	529	426
Greater Glasgow[3]	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Highland	227	156	220	139	172	204	163	162
Lanarkshire	56	45	21	16	11	54	69	70
Lothian	837	501	474	438	465	510	671	511
Orkney	13	23	—	—	—	—	1	—
Shetland	6	1	10	3	2	1	—	10
Tayside	288	248	232	194	263	211	190	261
Western Isles	4	2	—	—	2	—	5	—
Scotland	2,652	1,933	1,806	1,629	2,148	2,085	2,026	2,020

[1] Cancellations made by hospital of admission of patients from the waiting lists.
[2] Provisional
[3] Information is not available in the Greater Glasgow Health Board area.
Source:
ISD, Scotland

From 1 July 1999, this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

Hospitals (Payphones)

Mr. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will issue instructions to hospitals that normal BT call charges should apply to all payphones within their hospitals. [76150]

Mr. Galbraith: No. The provision of a telephone service for use by patients and visitors, including the choice of provider, is a matter for individual trusts. Detailed guidance on the setting of fees and charges by NHS trusts is contained in the Treasury publication "The Fees and Charges Guide". Where a service is to be provided by a third party, trusts, should ensure best value both for the hospital and the user by seeking tenders from potential operators.

From 1 July, this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

Health Authority Finances

Mr. Moore: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the estimated surplus or deficit of each health authority in 1998–99. [74993]

Mr. Galbraith *[holding answer 5 March 1999]:* The following table provides the information requested for Health Boards and Special Health Boards. The table identifies forecast underspends for each of the Health Boards for 1998–99, and is prepared on a cash basis.

£000

Health Boards	*Underspend*
Argyll & Clyde	920
Ayrshire & Arran	2,000
Borders	610
Dumfries & Galloway	1,140
Fife	0
Forth Valley	855
Grampian	2,065
Greater Glasgow	0

£000

Health Boards	Underspend
Highland	0
Lanarkshire	0
Lothian	5,500
Orkney	0
Shetland	70
Tayside	2,100
Western Isles	0
Total	15,260
State Hospital	0
CSA	1,739
Scottish Council for Post Graduate Medical and Dental Education	1,200
Total	18,199

From 1 July 1999, this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

NHS Trusts

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will estimate the salaries (1) with and (2) without pension contributions for the chief executives and chairmen of each NHS trust in Scotland for the years *(a)* 1999–2000, *(b)* 2000–01 and *(c)* 2001–02. [76144]

Mr. Galbraith: Discussions are currently underway with HM Treasury on revised pay arrangements for general and senior managers. Details of the revised arrangements will be published in the usual way once agreement has been reached. Remuneration for new Trust Chairmen is also under review but is likely to be around £600,000 in total for 28 Trusts in Scotland for each of the years requested; this is approximately £250,000 less than current annual remuneration. Chairmen's remuneration is non-pensionable.

From 1 July 1999, this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish the financial targets set for each NHS trust in Scotland and the surplus or deficit incurred in each year since 1992–93. [76145]

Mr. Galbraith: NHS Trusts in Scotland are required by the NHS in Scotland Management Executive to achieve three financial targets.

These financial targets are to break even on the Income and Expenditure Account, after payment of interest and dividends taking one year with another; to produce a 6 per cent. return on net relevant assets before interest and dividends; and to achieve it's External Financing Limit as set.

The table shows the surplus and deficits (after payment of interest and dividends) incurred by each Scottish NHS Trust in the years (a) 1992–93, (b) 1993–94, (c) 1994–95, (d) 1995–96, (e) 1996–97 and (f) 1997–98. Surplus and deficit figures are not yet available for 1998–99.

The deficits incurred by Trusts often arise as a result of the losses on disposal of fixed assets in-year.

ME Finance: Retained surplus/(deficits) since financial year 1992–93

£000

NHS Trusts in Scotland	(a) 1992–93	(b) 1993–94	(c) 1994–95	(d) 1995–96	(e) 1996–97	(f) 1997–98
Aberdeen Royal NHS Trust	2,707	696	1,466	(240)	469	327
Angus NHS Trust	n/a	n/a	896	151	349	384
Argyll and Bute NHS Trust	n/a	n/a	n/a	732	(197)	373
Ayrshire and Arran Community Healthcare NHS Trust	n/a	1,021	883	81	186	213
Borders Community Health NHS Trust	n/a	n/a	n/a	387	33	113
Borders General Hospital NHS Trust	n/a	n/a	n/a	610	90	(538)
Caithness and Sutherland NHS Trust	n/a	319	319	413	49	7
Central Scotland Healthcare NHS Trust	n/a	975	n/a	(726)	233	79
Dumfries and Galloway Acute and Maternity Hospitals NHS Trust	n/a	n/a	433	746	411	207
Dumfries and Galloway Community Health Services NHS Trust	n/a	n/a	n/a	327	55	101
Dundee Healthcare NHS Trust	n/a	n/a	1,120	276	191	(295)
Dundee Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust	n/a	1,284	990	3,115	1,404	(2,497)
East and Midlothian NHS Trust	n/a	n/a	1,215	267	164	183
Edinburgh Healthcare NHS Trust	n/a	n/a	2,332	516	876	708
Edinburgh Sick Children's NHS Trust	n/a	n/a	230	87	79	61
Falkirk and District Royal Infirmary NHS Trust	n/a	n/a	985	241	(808)	24
Fife Healthcare NHS Trust	n/a	n/a	1,365	(1,085)	(2,369)	2,158
Glasgow Dental Hospital and School NHS Trust	n/a	n/a	n/a	204	48	55
Glasgow Royal Infirmary NHS Trust	n/a	n/a	2,559	611	610	293
Grampian Healthcare NHS Trust	n/a	3,546	2,799	176	(534)	2,530
Greater Glasgow Community and Mental Health NHS Trust	n/a	n/a	1,701	(1,169)	718	(6,675)
Hairmyres and Stonehouse Hospitals NHS Trust	n/a	n/a	625	0	57	5,195
Highland Communities NHS Trust	n/a	n/a	592	259	209	(20)
Inverclyde Royal NHS Trust	n/a	n/a	699	790	531	111
Kirkcaldy Acute Hospitals NHS Trust	n/a	n/a	731	1,013	106	186
Lanarkshire Healthcare NHS Trust	n/a	n/a	n/a	1,373	580	996
Law Hospital NHS Trust	n/a	n/a	877	307	214	2,002

ME Finance: Retained surplus/(deficits) since financial year 1992–93

£000

NHS Trusts in Scotland	*(a) 1992–93*	*(b) 1993–94*	*(c) 1994–95*	*(d) 1995–96*	*(e) 1996–97*	*(f) 1997–98*
Lomond Healthcare NHS Trust	n/a	n/a	n/a	520	98	78
Monklands and Bellshill Hospitals NHS Trust	n/a	904	936	989	497	220
Moray Health Services	n/a	354	139	(83)	198	(89)
North Ayrshire and Arran NHS Trust	n/a	1,593	1,713	1,286	1,350	97
Perth and Kinross Healthcare NHS Trust	n/a	n/a	1,449	247	432	133
Queen Margaret Hospital NHS Trust	n/a	n/a	1,292	361	365	49
Raigmore Hospital NHS Trust	n/a	1,171	815	576	87	171
Renfrewshire Healthcare NHS Trust	n/a	n/a	1,634	402	170	82
Royal Alexandra Hospital NHS Trust	n/a	1,114	860	(458)	601	295
Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh NHS Trust	n/a	n/a	2,850	288	209	194
Scottish Ambulance Service	n/a	n/a	214	826	291	147
South Ayrshire Hospitals NHS Trust	480	727	516	189	122	101
Southern General Hospital NHS Trust	n/a	1,106	1,345	993	(368)	284
Stirling Royal Infirmary NHS Trust	n/a	899	824	216	52	5
Stobhill NHS Trust	n/a	n/a	1,190	346	201	60
Victoria Infirmary NHS Trust	n/a	526	(5,646)	839	(1,762)	5,298
West Glasgow Hospitals NHS Trust	n/a	n/a	2,233	1,194	(4,233)	(430)
West Lothian NHS Trust	n/a	1,612	989	521	206	393
Western General Hospitals NHS Trust	n/a	n/a	1,061	154	163	(901)
Yorkhill NHS Trust	n/a	601	925	722	507	(785)
Total	3,187	18,448	38,156	19,590	2,940	11,683

From 1 July 1999, this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

PFI Project, Greenock

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when the contract will be signed anent the PFI project at Larkfield, Greenock; and if he will make a statement. [76228]

Mr. Galbraith: The Renfrewshire Healthcare NHS Trust is confident that it is within weeks of signing the PFI contract for the facility for Elderly and Young Physically Disabled at Larkfield Road in Greenock.

Waiting Lists

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his answer of 3 February 1999, *Official Report*, columns *657–58*, on waiting lists, how many patients received a first outpatient appointment within (i) nine weeks and (ii) 18 weeks of referral for *(a)* March 1997, *(b)* September 1997, *(c)* March 1998 and *(d)* September 1998. [76119]

Mr. Galbraith: Information on the number of patients who received a first outpatient appointment within nine weeks and within 18 weeks following a General Medical Practitioner/General Dental Practitioner referral during the quarters requested, is provided in the table.

NHS in Scotland: Number of patients who received a first outpatient appointment within 9 and 18 weeks of referral

	Quarter ending 31March 1997	*Quarter ending 30September 1997*	*Quarter ending 31March 1998*	*Quarter ending 30 September 1998*[1]
Within 9 weeks	166,633	173,591	180,054	161,275
Within 18 weeks	214,889	239,326	237,783	224,256

[1] Provisional
Source:
ISD, Scotland

From 1 July 1999, this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

Private Finance Initiative

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if the guidance which excludes clinical services from Private Finance Initiative projects includes clinical staff who do not fall under the term, professions allied to medicine. [76117]

Mr. Galbraith: The services which may be included within Private Finance Initiative projects will be restricted to the provision of facilities management and non-clinical services.

From 1 July 1999, this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND THE REGIONS

Genetically Modified Crops

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he has made of the implications of the precautionary principle enshrined in the Biosafety Protocol for the Government's policy on the planting of *(a)* trial genetically modified crops and *(b)* commercial genetically modified crops. [72575]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 22 February 1999]:* Throughout the recent negotiations on the Biosafety Protocol in Cartagena, the EU maintained its strong support for the inclusion of the precautionary principle in

the preamble to and in the objectives of protocol. This approach is consistent with the European Community legislation controlling the release and marketing of genetically modified organisms and with the Government's general policy on the planting of trial and commercial genetically modified crops. Rigorous scientific risk assessment, carried out as part of the strict regulation of GM crops, identifies appropriate risk management measures to ensure that risks are reduced to a minimum. In the UK, field trials of GM crops may require risk management such as pollen barriers or isolation distances. In respect of the commercial planting of GM crops, the Government support a programme of managed development involving farm scale evaluations with full ecological monitoring. The Government believe that this approach offers sufficient safeguards to ensure that large-scale plantings do not proceed until there is sufficient evidence that a particular crop does not harm the environment.

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions for what reason at the recent Biosafety Protocol meeting in Colombia the UK opposed the creation of an enabling provision to allow countries to take socio-economic factors into account in determining whether or not to import GMOs. [75092]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 8 March 1999]:* The UK, as a Member State of the European Union, broadly supported the text of the Protocol put forward by the Chair of the Working Group to the extraordinary Conference of the Parties which included an enabling provision on socio-economics. The compromise package put forward by the EU in the final stages of the negotiations did not seek to amend that provision.

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list by title the unpublished reports into aspects of genetic modification which are held by his Department. [75100]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 8 March 1999]:* My Department endeavours to publish all the final reports of the research contracts it funds to underpin the assessment of applications for consent to release or market genetically modified organisms. Reports are published after the research contracts are completed and when a satisfactory report has been submitted. Research contractors may also publish papers in peer reviewed scientific journals describing the work funded by my Department.

The following reports have very recently been published:

Safety of Plant Viral Inserts

Investigation of Feral Oilseed Rape Populations

Review of Parasitic Nematodes for Biological Control of Invertebrates

The following reports are currently being printed and will be available shortly:

Environmental Impact of Genetically Modified Crops (Proceedings of a Workshop sponsored by the Department)

Genetically Modified Bioinsecticides

A report on the outcome of monitoring releases of Plant Genetics System's hybrid oilseed rape, which was carried out by the National Institute of Agricultural Botany (NIAB) is being prepared for publication. My Department aims to publish this by July this year.

Copies of all the reports listed above will be made available for the House of Commons Library.

Joan Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what research he has undertaken into the impact on water companies' ability to meet individual pesticide and herbicide limits in drinking water of the application of glufosinate and glyphosate to genetically modified crops. [75901]

Mr. Meacher: The Water Supply (Water Quality) Regulations 1989 prescribe an extremely strict standard of 0.1 microgrammes per litre for individual pesticides. Since 1989 water companies have been obliged to enter into legally binding programmes to install pesticide removal processes whenever water supplies have exceeded the standard.

The pesticide removal programmes have been completed and in 1997, around 99.96 per cent. of all analyses for pesticides complied with the standard.

Glufosinate and glyphosate both degrade rapidly in the environment, but, were they present in water sources, they would be removed by the treatment processes that have been installed.

Joan Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make available the locations of genetically modified trial crops to water companies. [75900]

Mr. Meacher: Water companies may obtain information on the locations of genetically modified crop trials from the statutory public register, held in the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions. Information on the location of trial sites is also available on the Department's website.

Applicants for consent to release genetically modified organisms must advertise locally where the release will take place. This is a public notice in a local newspaper. If the proposed release may have an impact on any controlled waters, then the Environment Agency is notified.

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what measures he has taken to improve the regulation of genetically modified crops. [74097]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 11 March 1999]:* The release of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) is governed by EC Directive 90/220. The European Commission published its proposal to amend the Directive in February 1998 and since then the UK Government have played an active role in negotiating the draft amending Directive. The Commission's proposal seeks to make a number of significant changes to the Directive, such as strengthening provisions on environmental risk assessment and monitoring, streamlining some procedures, ensuring greater transparency and better labelling requirements, and providing for the consultation of EU ethics and scientific committees. The Government have been active in their support for revision of the Directive to ensure full protection for human health and the environment.

In the Government's view the amendment should be taken forward seriously and rapidly. At the Environment Council this week, I intend to press the German Presidency to devote time to this dossier with a view to securing common position at the June Council.

Pending the revision of the Directive, EU Environment Ministers agreed in December 1998 to use the flexibility within the existing Directive to introduce new principles on risk assessment and monitoring. These new requirements, based on provisions in the draft amending Directive, were adopted as a direct result of public concerns about GMOs and the European Parliament's call for action. The new principles on risk assessment and monitoring will allow a clearer picture to be built up of the direct and indirect, and immediate and delayed, effects of GMOs on the environment.

On top of the new EC requirements, my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and I announced before the House of Lords Select Committee on 21 October 1998 that the Government have reached agreement with the plant breeding industry for a managed development programme for herbicide tolerant GM crops. Farm-scale evaluations will ensure that first commercial plantings of herbicide tolerant GM crops will be strictly limited and monitored for ecological effects alongside comparable plantings of conventional crops. The Government are funding ecological studies of the diversity and abundance of plants and invertebrates associated with the management of GM and non-GM crops to test whether there are any significant differences, initially over a four year period. This will assist consideration of what effects GM crops may have on higher species and our agricultural landscape. If ecological monitoring reveals adverse effects then appropriate action will be taken.

Biosafety Protocol

Mr. Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will set out the negotiating position of the UK delegation to the biosafety protocol discussions in Cartagena, Colombia; what support Britain gave to proposals from the Miami Group; and at what stages Britain supported moves which would exempt genetically modified ingredients from the clear labelling and advance notification proposals. [73980]

Mr. Meacher: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to the hon. Member for Lewes (Mr. Baker) on 9 February 1999, *Official Report*, columns *153–54*, which set out the UK's negotiating line for the meeting. The EU maintained its agreed position throughout the negotiations in Cartagena, and the UK remained firmly within that position. The UK, together with European colleagues, attempted to build a bridge between the positions adopted by most developing countries and the Miami Group. The EU did not support any proposals that would have exempted living modified organisms (LMOs) within the scope of the protocol being subject to a requirement for documentation and clear identification. An EU compromise package introduced in the final stages of the negotiations with a view to achieving consensus included a provision enabling the first Meeting of the Parties to decide whether and how the protocol's procedures would apply to the transboundary movement of LMOs for intended direct use as food or feed or for processing. This compromise package received widespread support, but proved unacceptable to the Miami Group.

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions for what reason the UK at the recent Biosafety Protocol meeting in Colombia did not support inclusion of the precautionary principle in the operational articles of the Protocol. [75091]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 8 March 1999]:* The UK goal was to secure reference to the precautionary principle in the Protocol. We therefore strongly supported the EU submission prior to the penultimate meeting on the Biosafety Protocol to include a reference to the precautionary principle in the Preamble, and in the Objective of the Protocol. The latter provides the fundamental underpin for all the provisions of the Protocol.

While these proposals were retained in the draft negotiating text for the Colombia meeting, there was considerable opposition to the inclusion of references to the precautionary principle in the last round of negotiations. In the final stages, the EU put forward a compromise package based on the text put forward by the Chair of the Working Group. The package included retaining a reference to the precautionary approach in the Preamble and in the Objective of the Protocol. In an attempt to achieve consensus, the EU was prepared to agree to delete wording based on the precautionary principle in the article dealing with the decision procedure if the reference to the precautionary principle remained in the Objective and a formulation of it was contained in general principles section of the risk assessment annex. all notifications under the Protocol would have required a risk assessment. Hence, the operational provisions of the Protocol would have been based on the precautionary principle.

Road Safety

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what actions his Department has taken to improve road safety in *(a)* Staffordshire and *(b)* the West Midlands. [74552]

Ms Glenda Jackson: As part of the New Deal for Transport, the Government will be setting new national casualty reduction targets, underpinned by a road safety strategy. These will be published later this year.

It is for Staffordshire County Council and other local authorities in the region to promote and implement, with partners, schemes to improve road safety in their area. Local safety schemes, which are low cost engineering schemes which address known accident blackspots, are a very successful means of reducing accidents, funded through the annual Local Capital Transport Settlement. In 1999–2000 the West Midlands region has been awarded £5.992 million of which £0.450 million has been allocated to Staffordshire. This represents an increase of 18% and 45% respectively over the 1998–1999 settlement year and is expected to save 671 road accident casualties per annum.

The County Council has also been awarded two new transport packages this year, the Tamworth Package and the Safe Routes to School Package. Both of these packages will provide additional measures to improve road safety in the Tamworth area.

Biological Resources

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what is his Department's policy in respect of the forthcoming review of Trade, intellectual property, Food and biodiversity clauses on the protection of biological resources. [74849]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 5 March 1999]:* My Department will work with others involved in the review of the World Trade Organisation's Trade Related aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) Agreement, taking into account emerging experience of the implementation of the Agreement and bearing in mind the needs of existing and future members. We are particularly concerned to ensure that developing countries are allowed sufficient flexibility, within internationally agreed boundaries, to implement IPR regimes appropriate to their individual circumstances.

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions in respect of their impact on the global environment, what assessment his Department has made of the compatibility of Article 27 of Trade, intellectual property, Food and biodiversity and Articles 8, 15 and 16 of the UN Convention on Biological Resources. [74845]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 5 March 1999]:* We consider that the World Trade Organisation's Trade Related aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) Agreement and the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) are compatible, but we need to ensure that they are implemented in a mutually supportive way. My department, in collaboration with others with an interest, will continue to participate in international efforts to clarify the relationship between the CBD and the TRIPS Agreement, including at the inter-sessional meeting to be held under the Convention from 28 to 30 June. Our aim is to safeguard both intellectual property and the world's biodiversity.

Discretionary Grant (Worcestershire)

Mr. Lock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list (i) the names of the beneficiaries of all the discretionary grants awarded by his Department to organisations within Worcestershire during 1998, (ii) their monetary value, (iii) their total value and (iv) the proportion that that total sum comprises of the total sums awarded by his Department in discretionary grants in 1998. [75253]

Mr. Meale: The information requested is not available in the format requested. In 1998–99 the following resources were awarded by the Department.

1. Grants are paid under the Single Regeneration Budget as follows:

Recipient	*Value (£)*	*Scheme*
Hereford & Worcester Chamber of Commerce Training and Enterprise (H&W CCTE)	90,000	Improving Labour Market Flexibility
H&W CCTE	420,000	H & W Job Creation
H&W CCTE	20,000	Ethnic Minorities in Worcester
Malvern Hills	216,800	Malvern Hills Science Park
Redditch	1,286,430	Redditch Community Works
Percentage of West Midlands Regional Total	3.3%	

[1] Of West Midlands SRB total

2. The Department provides for the local authorities under Housing Investment Programme (HIP) allocations and resources under the Capital Receipts Initiative (CRI) to support housing improvements as follows:

Local authority	*HIP (£)*	*CRI (£)*
Bromsgrove	482,000	577,000
Malvern Hills	505,000	0
Redditch	961,000	905,000
Worcester	1,135,000	678,000
Wychavon	552,000	0
Wyre Forest	1,118,000	838,000
Percentage of West Midlands Regional Total	5.7%	4.8%

3. The Cash Incentive Scheme is a scheme designed to assist council tenants or licensees to purchase their own home in the private sector there by releasing their council accommodation for others in housing need.

Local authority	*Cash Incentive Scheme (£)*
Bromsgrove	65,000
Redditch	50,000
Worcester	60,000
Percentage of West Midlands Regional Resources	4.8%

4. The Capital Challenge programme is a 3 year pilot programme begun in 1997–98 to test the challenge/bidding approach to any and all aspects of capital across all services for which local authorities are responsible.

Local authority	*Value (£)*	*Scheme*
Worcester City Council	350,000	Dines Green Community Centre
Worcestershire Council	617,500	Primary School at Warndon
Redditch	550,000	Arrow Valley Environmental Education and Watersports Centre
Percentage of West Midlands Regional Total	5%	

5. Grants are paid to local authorities in Worcester under the Bellwin scheme of emergency financial assistance.

Local authority	*Value (£)*
Wychavon	10,294
Worcester City Council	7,164
Total Bellwin payments for West Midlands in 1998/99	84,540
Percentage of West Midlands Regional Total	21%

6. Transport Supplementary Grant is paid to local highway authorities in England in support of road projects:

Local authority	*Value (£)*
Worcestershire	1,565,000
Total Transport Supplementary Grant for West Midlands	21,984,000
Percentage of West Midlands Regional Total	7%

7. Grants paid through the Housing Corporation to Registered Social Landlords (RSLs):

Approved Development Programme (Social Housing Grant)

£

Registered Social Landlord (RSL)	*Amount of grant paid*
Advance	78,750
Bourneville Village	72,690
Bromford	188,186
Bromford Charitable	65,319
Bromsgrove United	65,975
Droitwich Spa	192,422
Elgar	135,416
Evesham & Pershore	63,414
Guinness Trust	12,808
Harden	118,474
Housing 21	12,641
Jephson Homes	54,855
Sanctuary	52,264
Waterloo	169,332
Worcestershire	224,105
Total	1,506,651

Note:
Percentage of West Midlands Regional Total is not readily available

Supported Housing Management Grant

£

Registered Social Landlord	*Amount of grant paid*
Advance	97,420
Bromford	38,400
Bromford Charitable	13,875
Droitwich Spa	36,900
Elgar	18,000
Evesham & Pershore	38,696
Focus	20,544
Friendship Housing	10,800
Harden	20,156
Midland Area	12,640
Redditch YMCA	46,400
Sanctuary	123,812
Stonham	193,677
Worcestershire	52,368
Total	723,688

Note:
Percentage of West Midlands Regional Total is not readily available

Retail Developments

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make money available to local authorities to help them to enable shopping centres in town and cities to compete equally with designated out-of-town shopping areas. [75277]

Mr. Raynsford: The Government's policy is to encourage retail development in the centre of towns and cities rather than at out of town locations. This was set out in our Response to the Select Committee report on Shopping Centres [Cmnd 3729], which also reaffirmed our commitment to Planning Policy Guidance note 6 (PPG6): Town Centres and Retail Developments. Through our funding of the Association of Town Centre Management and the Civic Trust, we have been assisting local authorities to promote town centre management by preparing and disseminating good practice.

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many *(a)* out-of-town shopping mall and *(b)* superstore planning applications in England have been refused, and on what principal grounds, on appeal in the past year. [75504]

Mr. Raynsford: Planning permission has been refused, on appeal, in respect of two applications for superstores in England, in 1998, primarily on the grounds that they failed the policy tests in PPG6.

Mr. Prior: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) if he will make it his practice to publish lists of *(a)* all outstanding planning permissions for superstores, *(b)* all superstore planning appeals that have been approved in the past five years, with a summary of the reasons for the approval and *(c)* all superstore planning appeals that have been refused in the past five years, with a summary of the reasons for the refusal; and if he will make a statement; [75779]

(2) if he will list all superstore planning appeals that have been *(a)* approved and *(b)* rejected in the last five years; and if he will make a statement; [75688]

(3) if he will list all the outstanding planning permissions for superstores; and if he will make a statement. [75689]

Mr. Raynsford: Most decisions on planning applications for retail developments are taken by local planning authorities. They provide statistical returns on applications which they handle under the general category of "major retail, distribution and servicing". The information requested in respect of appeals is not held centrally over the timescale requested. It is, therefore, not feasible to assemble the information requested, except at disproportionate cost. We have no current plans to publish such lists.

Millennium Compliance

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) if he will make a statement on measures necessary to ensure millennium compliance in the systems for which the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency is responsible; when millennium compliance will be achieved; and what the latest date is by which millennium compliance must be achieved in order to remain fully operational; [75476]

(2) if the systems for which the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency is responsible are millennium compliant. [75475]

Ms Glenda Jackson *[holding answer 8 March 1999]:* Like all other Government Departments and Agencies, the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency submits quarterly reports to CCTA on progress towards millennium compliance. These reports are analysed by the Cabinet Office and from the basis of my right hon. Friend the President of the Council's reports to Parliament. It would not be appropriate for me to anticipate her next statement, but, when it is made, a copy of DVLA's report will be placed both in the Library and on the Internet. Reports will be accompanied by a series of tables that illustrate how well departments and agencies are doing against a number of specific performance criteria.

Housing Finance

Ms Kelly: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to reform housing finance; and if he will make a statement. [75635]

Mr. Raynsford: In December 1998 we issued a consultation paper "A New Financial Framework for Local Authority Housing: Resource Accounting in the Housing Revenue Account" seeking views on proposals for changes to local authority housing finance. The proposals would introduce a form of resource accounting for the Housing Revenue Account (HRA). It is also proposed to remove expenditure on rent rebates from the HRA leaving the account as a landlord account reflecting the cost of providing housing at below market rents. The aim of the proposed New Framework is to make housing accounts easier to understand for both councils and their tenants and to enable better-informed decisions about the management of housing assets. Consultations are not yet complete and there will be an announcement about our plans in due course. A copy of the consultation paper is in the Library.

Carlisle Airport

Mr. Martlew: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he has made of the contribution of Carlisle Airport to the economic development of Cumbria and the Scottish Borders. [75521]

Ms Glenda Jackson: A "North of England Regional Air Services Study" has been commissioned by my Department. It is part of a number of such studies across the UK. The North of England Study is expected to report this summer, so my hon. Friend will understand that I cannot comment at this stage on the contribution of Carlisle Airport to the economic development of the Region or Cumbria and the Scottish borders until the findings of the study are known.

Brown-field Sites

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what statistics his Department collects on the number of brown-field sites in town centres redeveloped for residential use. [75511]

Mr. Raynsford: The Land Use Change Statistics published by my Department provide information on the area of land changing to residential use that was previously developed for urban uses. (Urban uses comprise residential, transport and utilities, industry and commerce, community services, previously developed vacant land and derelict land). Numbers of new dwellings built on previously developed land (excluding conversions of existing dwellings) are also recorded. This information provides statistics for the proportion of new residential development that takes place on previously developed land.

Some previously developed land is located in rural areas. My Department has developed the analysis of land use change to identify separately changes that occurred inside and outside urban areas as defined for the 1991 Census. At present it is not possible to distinguish those land use changes that occurred within town centres, but this might become possible following research under way to define the boundaries of town centres for statistical purposes.

The latest results of the Land Use Change Statistics, together with more information about how they are compiled, were published in the statistical bulletin "Land Use Change in England No. 13", a copy of which is in the House of Commons Library.

Maritime Rescue Subcentres

Mr. Alan Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many watch-keeping staff were in post on 30 September 1998 at Tyne Tees Maritime Rescue subcentre; and what was the *(a)* monthly and *(b)* daily officer incident rate. [75829]

Ms Glenda Jackson: On 30 September 1998 there were 13.5 watch keeping staff in post at Tyne Tees. The *(a)* monthly officer incident rate was 2.84 and *(b)* the daily officer incident rate was 0.09.

A596/A597, Workington

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will include proposals for an improvement at the A596/A597 junction at Workington as a priority scheme under the programme of network enhancement projects. [75414]

Ms Glenda Jackson *[holding answer 10 March 1999]:* I have asked the Chief Executive of the Highways Agency, Mr. Lawrie Haynes, to write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Peter Nutt to Mr. Dale Campbell-Savours, dated 15 March 1999:

The Transport Minister, Glenda Jackson, has asked Lawrie Haynes to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about the improvement of the A595/A597 junction at Workington. I am replying on Lawrie's behalf in his absence.

We have drawn up our programme of Local Network Management schemes for 1999/2000. In doing so we have had to consider competing priorities across the trunk road network. As a result, I am sorry to have to tell you that at present we are unable to include the improvement of the A596/A597 junction in the programme.

As you know, the A596 is one of the trunk routes in Cumbria identified as non-core and which it is proposed to detrunk as part of the Government's integrated transport policy. I understand that you are aware that a delegation from Cumbria County Council and Copeland Borough Council made representations about the

detrunking proposals at a recent meeting with Transport Ministers, Dr. John Reid and Lord Whitty. Those representations are being considered together with others, and a final decision by Ministers on the split of the network into core and non-core routes will be announced as soon as possible.

If the A596 is confirmed as a non-core route to be detrunked then from 1 April 2000 the Agency will only initiate further improvements that it considers necessary to keep the route in a safe and serviceable condition. It will be for Cumbria County council to consider the need for other improvements in the context of their Local Transport Plan. Provisional plans covering the period 2000/01–2004/05 are due to be submitted by the end of this July.

SSSIs

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to take further measures to protect sites of special scientific interest. [76379]

Mr. Meacher: We are further developing proposals put forward in the Government consultation paper, Sites of Special Scientific Interest—Better Protection and Management, taking account of the issues raised in the 562 responses. We will seek to implement legislative measures when Parliamentary time permits, but will also take forward procedural and administrative improvements at the earliest opportunity.

Planning Applications

Mr. Coleman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what percentage of appeals to the planning inspectorate by applicants against decisions taken by *(a)* the London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham, *(b)* the London Borough of Wandsworth and *(c)* the City of Westminster were successful in (i) 1997 and (ii) 1998. [76270]

Mr. Caborn: I have asked the Chief Executive, of the Planning Inspectorate, Mr. Chris Shepley, to write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from David Hanchet to Mr. Iain Coleman, dated 15 March 1999:

As he is away from the office at present, I am writing on behalf of Chris Shepley who has been asked by the Secretary of State to reply to your Question about planning appeals in Hammersmith and Fulham, Wandsworth, and Westminster in 1997 and 1998.

For appeals decided in each year, the percentages allowed were:

Percentage

	1997	*1998*
Hammersmith and Fulham	24	29
Wandsworth	21	33
Westminster	29	35

Mr. Coleman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many planning applications were called in by the Secretary of State in *(a)* the London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham and *(b)* the London Borough of Wandsworth and *(c)* the City of Westminster in (i) 1997 and (b) 1998. [76269]

Mr. Caborn: None in Hammersmith and Fulham, one in Wandsworth in 1997 and one in Westminster in 1998.

Contaminated Land

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the *(a)* acreage and *(b)* location of contaminated land in the County of Durham. [76249]

Mr. Meale: The information requested is not held centrally.

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what advice he has given to local authorities in respect of compiling and maintaining a contaminated land register within their boundaries; and if he will make a statement. [76247]

Mr. Meale: My department will be carrying out further consultations shortly on regulations and statutory guidance necessary to implement the contaminated land regime contained in Part IIA of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 (inserted by section 57 of the Environment Act 1995).

Local authority functions under Part IIA include compilation of a register which will provide details about regulatory action and remediation on land formally identified as contaminated land.

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the local authorities in the Northern Region which hold a detailed contaminated land register; and if he will make a statement. [76248]

Mr. Meale: There is no statutory requirement for local authorities to keep registers of contaminated land. Individual authorities may maintain records about land contamination, but there is no information held centrally about which authorities do so.

South Downs

Mr. Flight: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he expects to publish proposals for the future management of the South Downs; and if he will make a statement. [76370]

Mr. Meacher: We are still looking very carefully at the issues. We hope to announce some conclusions soon.

Packaging Industry

Mr. Bill O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) what discussions he has had with representatives of the packaging industry on the recovery targets set for the packaging industry up to 2001; what assessment he has made of the ability of the industry to achieve such targets; and if he will make a statement; [76215]

(2) when he plans to make a statement on the future operation of the Packaging Waste Recovery Notes System; [76216]

(3) what is his estimate of the number of businesses in the packaging industry that will be exempt from the packaging waste obligations as a result of a change in the financial turnover cut-off threshold to £2 million. [76217]

Mr. Meacher: A consultation paper was published on 30 July 1998 which included proposals to increase the interim business recovery and recycling targets in 1999

and 2000 and over 350 responses were received. The UK packaging recovery rate is expected to have reached approximately 32 per cent. in 1998 and the interim business targets are designed to enable the UK to achieve the mandatory EC Directive recovery and recycling targets in 2001. Industry itself has reported that there was an oversupply of reprocessing capacity in 1998 compared with the targets that had to be met and this was damaging the market. The increase in the interim business recovery and recycling targets should therefore generate the necessary momentum to enable sufficient activity to be carried out to achieve the 2001 targets. A further consideration was the need for sufficient resources to be directed at generating the necessary collection and reprocessing capacity that will be needed to meet targets in 2001. With this additional infrastructure in place, the UK should be able to meet these mandatory targets.

I expect to make a statement about the future operation of the Packaging Waste Recovery Note System very shortly.

The Department's current estimates suggest that some 4,500 smaller businesses will be excluded from the scope of the Regulations as a result of the change to the financial turnover cut-off threshold in 2000.

Pensioners' Housing

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what evidence is provided by the English House Conditions Survey and the Survey of English Housing on the quality of housing of pensioners aged over 80 years in relation to that of other pensioner households. [76099]

Mr. Raynsford *[holding answer 11 March 1999]:* The table from the 1996 English House Condition Survey indicates that pensioners aged over 80 years are much more likely to live in poor quality housing than pensioners below that age. The likelihood of the latter living in poor quality housing is on average not that much different from the population as a whole.

Percentage of pensioners in poor quality homes, by age group

	Percentage of people in each age group: (a) living in		*(b)*
	i. unfit homes[1]	*ii. poor housing*[2]	*without central heating*
Pensionersaged 81+	9	23	18
Pensionersaged 80 or less	5	14	12
all ages	6	13	11

[1] Unfit homes refer to properties assessed as unfit according to the standard defined by Section 604 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989.
[2] Poor housing refers to homes that are either unfit, in substantial disrepair or requiring essential modernisation.

Footpaths

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when the appeal by St. Leonard's and St. Ives Parish Council against the refusal of Dorset County Council to modify the definitive map to add five footpaths at Lions Hill, St Leonard's was made; and on what date he expects it to be determined. [76470]

Mr. Meale *[holding answer 12 March 1999]:* This appeal was received by the Government Office for the South West in January 1997. The determination process has now reached an advance stage and the decision should be issued by the end of this month.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many employees of the Government Office for the South West are allocated to the determination of appeals involving footpaths. [76471]

Mr. Meale *[holding answer 12 March 1999]:* The Government Office for the South West has a team of eight staff dealing with the determination of appeals including rights of way cases.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what is the earliest date of a case involving a footpath appeal which is still awaiting determination by the Government office in Bristol; and how many more recent cases are awaiting determination. [76469]

Mr. Meale *[holding answer 12 March 1999]:* The earliest footpath appeals awaiting determination are a group of nine interlinked appeals which completed the necessary procedural stages in January 1997. There are 21 more such cases awaiting determination.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many right of way appeals are currently outstanding in each of the Government's regional offices. [76468]

Mr. Meale *[holding answer 12 March 1999]:* The number of appeal cases currently outstanding in each of the Government's regional offices is shown in the table.

Regional Office	*No. of appeals*
North West	5
North East	4
Yorkshire and the Humber	10
East Midlands	2
West Midlands	5
Eastern Region	3
South West	53
South East (incl. London)	18
Total	100

Short-haired Bumble Bee

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 17 December 1998, *Official Report*, column *632*, on the short-haired bumble bee, if he will make a statement on the preparation of the plan for the short-haired bumble bee. [76630]

Mr. Meale: An action plan for the short-haired bumble bee was included in *Tranche 2 Action Plans, Volume IV—Invertebrates* which was published by the UK Biodiversity Group on 8 March.

Public Rights of Way

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what *(a)* percentage and *(b)* length of public rights of way

are open to (i) horseriders and (ii) cyclists in each county in England and Wales; and if he will make a statement. [76882]

Mr. Meacher: This information is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

England and Wales have an estimated total of 130,000 miles (209,000 km) of rights of way, of which over 38,000 miles (61,000 km) or 29 per cent. may be used lawfully by horseriders and cyclists.

Planning (Class A3)

Mr. Ian Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will further restrict transfers of business between pubs and restaurants under the A3 planning category. [76086]

Mr. Raynsford *[holding answer 12 March 1999]:* We have no immediate plans to amend Class A3 of the Use Classes Order 1987. However, we have received representations to introduce planning controls for certain changes of use within existing Class A3 and we are currently considering these.

Trading Credit Approvals

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what information his Department collects centrally on local authority bids for trading credit approvals in 1998–99. [76448]

Ms Armstrong *[holding answer 12 March 1999]:* A record of applications for credit approvals outside established programmes, for 1998–99 and other years, is held by my Department.

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 8 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *8*, if he will list the local authorities that made trading credit approval applications in 1998–99 indicating *(a)* the value of each application and *(b)* the purpose for which the trading credit approval was sought. [76447]

Ms Armstrong *[holding answer 12 March 1999]:* Requests by local authorities in connection with Trading Credit Approvals (TCAs) considered in 1998 were:

		£ *million*
Sheffield City Council	Sheffield waste incinerator	17.0
Plymouth City Council	Unrestricted TCAs for self-financing schemes	n/a
Harrogate Borough Council	Upgrading of conference centre facility	6.6

Road User Charges

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make it his policy that the net proceeds from road user charges and the workplace parking levy are treated as additional to central Government funding for transport in London. [76472]

Ms Glenda Jackson: It is already government policy that any revenues from charging schemes brought forward by the Mayor or boroughs will be additional moneys for spending on measures which support the Mayor's transport strategy.

The Greater London Authority Bill will require charging authorities to maintain separate income and expenditure accounts for each charging scheme. These accounts will be published annually. This will guarantee transparency, and make it clear to Londoners that charging revenues are additional moneys.

Sewerage Works (Windermere)

Mr. Collins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if the programme to improve sewerage works announced by the Minister for the Environment on 1 March will include repairs to the sewerage system at Windermere in Cumbria. [76667]

Mr. Meale: The English and Welsh water company improvement programmes announced on 1 March include improvement schemes to be carried out at three North West Water sewage treatment works affecting Lake Windermere; at Windermere, Near Sawrey and Ambleside. These schemes will protect and improve the designated bathing water at Windermere and water quality in the River Rothay.

The Environment Agency is currently investigating recent pollution incidents at Lake Windermere in liaison with North West Water and South Lakeland District Council. The Agency will continue monitoring the situation to see whether additional action is necessary.

Rents (Research)

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what research he has conducted to *(a)* current rent levels and *(b)* market rent levels in each London borough in the past year. [76231]

Mr. Raynsford: The Housing Corporation's January 1999 publication *Guide to Local Rents (Source Research 32)* sets out a comparison of average housing association, local authority and private sector rents in each local authority area, including the London boroughs. A copy has been placed in the House of Commons Library. In addition, my Department routinely collects information on average rents for all authorities for Housing Revenue Account subsidy purposes.

Road Deaths

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many people died in road accidents *(a)* nationally and *(b)* in each region in each of the last three years. [76042]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The number of fatalities in road accidents is shown in the following table:

Fatalities in road accidents: by Government office region and severity: 1995–97

Number

	1995	*1996*	*1997*
England	2,995	3,024	3,001
Scotland	408	358	377
Wales	218	216	221
Northern Ireland	144	142	144
United Kingdom	3,765	3,740	3,743
English Government office regions			
North East	152	157	135
North West/Merseyside	418	389	376
Yorkshire/Humberside	345	324	324
East Midlands	378	329	357
West Midlands	286	319	338
East of England	374	370	350
South East	470	517	508
London	214	251	276
South West	358	368	337

Source:
Road Accidents Great Britain 1997: The Casualty Report

Ministerial Visits

Miss Kirkbride: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 4 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *845*, whether notification of the visit by the Minister for London and Construction to Bromsgrove to the hon. Member for Bromsgrove was made on departmental notepaper. [76763]

Mr. Raynsford: No. As I made clear to the hon. Member in my reply of 4 March, this was a Labour Party campaign visit.

Brit Awards

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list those Ministers in his Department who were present at the recent Brit awards in an official capacity, indicating the organisation acting as their sponsor or host. [76656]

Dr. Reid: Neither I nor any of my Ministerial colleagues in this Department attended the recent Brit awards.

Land (Access)

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will publish the legal advice which his Department has received on whether the plans to provide a statutory right of access to land would create a right to general compensation under the Human Rights Act 1998. [76451]

Mr. Meacher: It is not the practice for the Government to publish legal advice which they receive, and it is not proposed to publish any such advice in this case.

High-sided Vans

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to prohibit high-sided vans from using the outside lane on motorways with three lanes or more in one direction. [76229]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Goods vehicles with a maximum laden weight exceeding 7.5 tonnes are banned from the outside lane of motorways with three or more lanes. We believe a ban by weight is the appropriate measure and have no plans to amend the regulations to apply height restrictions.

Trains (Punctuality)

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will ensure that trains re-timed to arrive later than as shown in the Great Britain passenger railway timetable are included as late trains in the statistics published on punctuality. [76230]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The Franchising Director's office currently publishes information from train operators' Passenger Charters in its Quarterly Bulletin. Charter punctuality information does not normally include trains on Sundays, or trains delayed for reasons outside the control of the industry. This is likely to mean that the majority of trains with extended journeys from planned engineering works or following major incidents are excluded. The Franchising Director is currently consulting on improved public performance measures.

Mayor of London

Ms Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what conclusions he has reached concerning the types of planning application on which the new Mayor for London should be consulted by the local planning authorities as being of potential strategic importance; and if he will make a statement. [77234]

Mr. Raynsford: Under the proposals set out in the White Paper, A Mayor and Assembly for London, and reflected in the Greater London Authority Bill currently before Parliament, London boroughs and the City of London will remain the planning and development control authorities for their areas. However, their Unitary Development Plans must be in general conformity with the Mayor's Spatial Development Strategy. The Mayor must also have a means of representing the broader pan-London view for individual planning applications where issues of genuine strategic importance are concerned. The Mayor will therefore become a statutory consultee for a limited number of applications of potential strategic importance, to be defined in secondary legislation. He or she will also have a fall-back power to direct the refusal of planning permission in these cases where this is considered necessary on strategic grounds. The applicant would then have the normal right of appeal to the Secretary of State, who will also continue to be able to call in applications for his own decision where appropriate.

Last August the Government issued a consultation paper setting out our initial proposals for the categories of development on which the Mayor is to be consulted. A summary of the responses received is being placed in the Library.

Having considered the responses, we have decided that the broad categories set out in the consultation paper will be retained, but with changes to some of the sub-categories and thresholds proposed.

In summary, the categories will be:

(i) Very large scale development including:

(a) major residential developments (over 500 units or 10 ha);

(b) very large new buildings or structures (over 30,000 m^2 in the City of London; 20,000 m^2 in the rest of central London; 15,000 m^2 elsewhere);

(c) tall buildings (25m fronting the Thames; elsewhere—75m in the City of London and 30m in other areas).

(ii) Major new infrastructure projects, including:

(b) mining operations (sites of more than 10 ha);

(c) large new waste facilities (more than 50,000 tonnes capacity);

(d) new transport facilities, i.e., runways, air terminals, heliports, rail or tram lines, bus or coach stations, large freight depots, piers and river crossings on the Thames.

(iii) Applications likely to affect key strategic policies, including:

(c)the loss of housing (more than 200 units) or designated housing land (more than 4 ha);

(d) the loss of land (more than 4 ha) in use or designated for employment purposes;

(e) the loss of land (more than 2 ha) in use or designated as a playing field;

(f) development of more than 1,000 m^2 in the green belt or on designated Metropolitan Open Land;

(g) development affecting a designated strategic view;

(h) Substantial development in locations not identified in the development plan for such uses: (i) residential use (more than 150 units); (ii) commercial uses and other uses likely to generate significant new travel (more than 2,500 m^2);

(i) the provision of more than 200 car=parking spaces for non-residential purposes.

(iv) Any development on a key sit of strategic importance as designated in a consultation direction made by the Secretary of State.

A paper setting out the proposed definitions in more detail, and showing the main changes from the consultation draft, is being placed in the Library, and is available from the Government Office for London.

We believe this package represents an appropriate balance. It will ensure that the Mayor is able to have a say in key planning applications in support of his or her Spatial Development Strategy, whilst recognising that the vast majority of planning applications are properly a matter for the local planning authorities. Setting clear thresholds will provide certainty and minimise the scope for dispute. We expect that between 150 and 250 planning applications out of some 70,000 submitted in Greater London each year will fall into the categories identified above.

The Mayor will be consulted in parallel with other statutory consultees, and will have no power to delay the taking of a decision by the local planning authority. He or she will, however, have a further period of 14 days after the local planning authority has reached a view within which to use the fall-back power of direction.

Subject to Parliamentary approval, it is intended that the Order defining these categories of applications will come into effect when the Mayor begins work in July 2000. It will be subject to review and, if necessary, amendment in the light of experience and following publication of the Mayor's first Spatial Development Strategy.

London Underground

Mr. McNulty: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what progress London Underground has made with their planned Public-Private Partnership. [77233]

Dr. Reid: London Underground are today sending a progress report on the Public-Private Partnership to those who responded to a "market sounding" consultation on the project held last year. The report sets out how the project is to be taken forward, and should help potential bidders prepare themselves before London Underground invite formal expressions of interest. A notice alerting other interested parties to the progress report will appear in the Official Journal. A copy of the report has been deposited in the Library.

Donaldson Report

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will publish Lord Donaldson's report on Salvage and Intervention and their Command and Control; and if he will make a statement. [77085]

Ms Glenda Jackson: I am today publishing Lord Donaldson's report of Salvage and Intervention and their Command and Control and placing a copy of the Government's interim response to each of his 26 recommendations in the Library.

Zimbabwe

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what official visits he, his ministers or officials have paid to Zimbabwe since May 1997; whom they met; and what was discussed. [73462]

Mr. Prescott *[pursuant to his reply, 1 March 1999, c. 517–18]:* There have been no official visits by DETR Ministers to Zimbabwe since May 1997.

There have been three visits by officials:

In June 1997 four Departmental officials, together with delegations from other Government Departments, the Joint Nature Conservation Committee and the Royal Botanic Gardens Kew, visited Harare for the 10th Convention of International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) Conference at which a range of issues concerning trade and endangered species were discussed.

In January 1998 a senior Departmental official represented DETR at an International Workshop on Strategic Approaches to Freshwater Management. The event was attended by some 80 countries, together with NGOs, industry and International agencies. This event was hosted by the Zimbabwe Government with EC support, and helped pave the way for the Commission for Sustainable Development's Sixth meeting at which a formal Decision on Strategic Approaches to Freshwater Management was adopted by CSD, and later endorsed by UNGASS.

Also in January 1998 two Departmental officials visited Zimbabwe's Director of Civil Aviation, Mr. A. Marawa, to discuss the possibilities for extra services to Zimbabwe by British scheduled and charter airlines.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Export Controls

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to his answers of 2 February 1999, *Official Report*, columns *581–82*, what steps he is taking to ensure the recovery of the sums paid in claims by the ECGD to manufacturers but not recovered from defence buyers in *(a)* Algeria and *(b)* Jordan [75809]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 10 March 1999]:* Algeria and Jordan are repaying the debt, arising from ECGD claims payments in respect of civil and military export contracts, under Government to Government Agreements. Both countries are meeting their obligations under the Agreements in full.

Assisted Areas

Mr. Canavan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the representations received by his Department from Scottish local authorities regarding the review of assisted area status. [75915]

Mr. Wills: Representations were received from the following Scottish Local Authorities:

Aberdeen City Council
Aberdeenshire Council
Angus Council
Argyll and Bute Council
Clackmannanshire Council
Dumfries and Galloway Council
Dundee City Council
East Ayrshire Council
East Lothian Council
Edinburgh City Council
Falkirk Council
Fife Council
Glasgow City Council
Highland Council
Inverclyde Council
Midlothian Council
The Moray Council
North Ayrshire Council
North Lanarkshire Council
Orkney Council
Perth and Kinross Council
Renfrewshire Council
Scottish Borders Council
Shetland Islands Council
South Ayrshire Council
South Lanarkshire Council
Stirling Council
West Dumbartonshire Council
West Lothian Council.

Mr. Canavan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he intends to make his recommendations on the review of assisted area status known to (i) the Scottish Office and (ii) the European Commission. [75914]

Mr. Wills: The review of Assisted Area status is being carried out in consultation with other Government Departments including the Scottish Office. Under the European Guidelines a new Assisted Areas map for the UK must operate from 1 January 2000. Changes to the Assisted Areas map must be agreed with the Commission, and they have asked for proposals from Member States by 31 March. Ministers are currently considering which proposals they will put forward.

Debt (Late Payment)

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the response by business to the Late Payment of Commercial Debts (Interest) Act 1998. [76433]

Mr. Wills: I refer the right hon. Member to the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Paisley, South (Mr. Alexander), on 10 March 1999, *Official Report*, columns *261–62*.

Special Representative on the Digital Economy

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is the job description of the Special Representative on the Digital Economy. [76197]

Mr. Wills *[holding answer 12 March 1999]:* The Special Representative on the Digital Economy (the e-Envoy) will have two roles:

1. To spearhead the implementation of the strategy, set out in the Competitiveness White Paper, for:

   a) achieving the Government's goal of making the UK, by the end of this Parliament, the best environment in the world in which to trade electronically

   b) ensuring that UK businesses and consumers fully realise the potential this opens up

2. To advise the Secretary of State and Prime Minister on future development of the strategy. In particular:

   Monitoring progress on implementation of the strategy, and keeping the strategy under regular review in the light of international developments.

   Reviewing existing Government policies and activities relevant to the goals set out at No. 1, with a view to identifying gaps and areas for accelerated effort.

Executive responsibility for implementing the agreed strategy will principally lie with relevant departments, but the e-Envoy will also take on specific functions where agreed by the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and the Prime Minister. In particular, the e-Envoy will act as public figurehead for the Government on e-commerce issues in international discussions; promote the UK as a centre for e-commerce business and investment; and publicly champion e-commerce in the UK, spreading awareness and promoting uptake by businesses and consumers.

Fixed Capital Formation

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is the current rate of fixed capital formation *(a)* nationally, *(b)* in each region and *(c)* in other OECD countries. [76041]

Mr. Wills: The answer is as follows:

(a)

Table 1: Gross fixed capital formation, expressed as a percentage of GDP, in the United Kingdom

Year	*Percentage of GDP*
1997	16.7
1998	17.3

Source:
Office for National Statistics (ONS). Derived from figures in First Release ONS (99) 69

(b) The ONS do not publish estimates of fixed capital formation covering all economic activity on a regional basis. The ONS do publish regional estimates of gross domestic fixed capital formation for a range of industries. The latest figures are for 1995.

Table 2: Gross domestic fixed capital formation, as a percentage of gross domestic product for selected industries, in Standard Statistical Regions in 1995[1]

Region	*Percentage of GDP*[1]
North	15.1
North West	15.9
Yorkshire and Humberside	17.1
East Midlands	13.5
West Midlands	14.4
East Anglia	12.8
South East	16.3
South West	14.0
England	15.4
Wales	17.9
Scotland	14.2
Northern Ireland	18.2
United Kingdom	15.5

[1] Figures cover only Agriculture, hunting, forestry and fishing, Mining, quarrying (inc. oil and gas extraction), Manufacturing, Electricity, gas and water, and Transport, storage and communication

Source:
Office for National Statistics (ONS). Derived from figures in Economic Trends (June and January 1998)

(c)

Table 3: Gross fixed capital formation, expressed as a percentage of GDP in 1997, in OECD countries

OECD member	*Percentage of GDP*
United Kingdom[1]	15.6
Australia	21.5
Austria	24.1
Belgium	17.8
Canada	18.8
Czech Republic	30.7
Denmark	20.1
Finland	16.9
France	17.1
Germany	19.9
Greece	20.0
Hungary	21.0
Iceland	18.8
Ireland	18.7
Italy	16.7
Japan	28.3
Republic of Korea	35.0
Luxembourg	22.4
Mexico	19.6
Netherlands	20.0
New Zealand	19.9
Norway	23.0
Poland	21.2
Portugal	25.1
Spain	20.6
Sweden	13.7
Switzerland	19.6
Turkey	26.4
United States	17.4

[1] Not comparable with equivalent figure in Table 1. The ONS figures in Table 1 are calculated using the new European System of Accounts (ESA 1995) while the OECD figures use an earlier national accounts classification.

Source:
OECD National Accounts 1999 Volume 1

Data Protection

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the measures currently planned to be taken, pursuant to the enactment of Common Position (EC) 8/1999 (1999/c 55/01), with particular reference to *(a)* recitals 8 and 16, *(b)* their costs and *(c)* data privacy. [75709]

Mr. Kilfoyle: I have been asked to reply.

The Common position is that adopted by the Telecommunications Council on 21 December 1998 on a series of guidelines, including the identification of projects of common interest, for trans-European networks for the electronic Interchange of Data between Administrations (IDA). IDA aims to achieve the most efficient and cost effective means of data interchange in support of European Community policies.

The Common position relates to a second phase of IDA that will run for five years from the point of adoption. The first phase ran from 1995–1997 and supported Community policies by the development of networks for the exchange of data related to subjects including agriculture, fisheries, health, statistics, employment and customs matters. The second phase is likely to continue work in some of these areas and other areas where Member States and the European Community identify the need for data interchange.

At this stage, there are no specific proposals on exchange of information related to Recitals 8 and 16 of the Common position text. The proposed budget for the IDA guidelines proposal is estimated as euro 38.5 million for the first three years of the programme.

Any work carried forward under IDA, will take full account of the sensitivity of the data to be passed across a network and the relevant data protection legislation. Appropriate security measures will be taken to protect sensitive data.

SOCIAL SECURITY

National Insurance Contributions

Mr. Pond: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate the increase in revenue to the Exchequer in the financial year 1999–2000 as a result of *(a)* raising the upper earnings limit on employee national

insurance contributions to £602 per week and *(b)* removing the upper earnings limit on employee national insurance contributions altogether. [74396]

Mr. Timms: Estimated additional revenue of some £1.8 billion would be raised in 1999–2000 if the Upper Earnings Limit on employees' Class 1 contributions was increased from its present level to the same level as the threshold of higher rate income tax, which is to be set at £622 a week from April 1999. If the Upper Earnings Limit was removed, the estimated additional revenue raised would be £4.2 billion for that year.

The figures assume that the current 10 per cent. Class 1 contribution rate would apply to earnings above the present Upper Earnings Limit, and that this limit would remain in place for the calculation of employee and employer contracted-out rebates.

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate the number of employees who will pay higher national insurance contributions as a result of the increase of the upper limit in *(a)* the standard rate and *(b)* the contracted out rate of national insurance contributions. [76454]

Mr. Timms: The information is in the table.

Estimated average weekly numbers of employees in Great Britain who will pay more National Insurance Contributions following the increase of the upper earnings limit to £535 per week from April 2000 and to £575 per week from April 2001

	2000–01	*2001–02*
Contracted in employees	1,400,000	1,380,000
Contracted out employees	2,500,000	2,460,000
All employees	3,900,000	3,850,000

Note:
Rounded to the nearest ten thousand
Source:
Government Actuary's Department

Benefit Fraud

Mr. Duncan Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many prosecutions have followed from calls made to the Benefit Fraud Hotline in each month since May 1997; and what the total annual saving arising from the Benefit Fraud Hotline has been since its establishment. [75849]

Mr. Timms: Administration of the Benefit Fraud hotline is the responsibility of Peter Mathison, the Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Iain Duncan Smith, dated 12 March 1999:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about the number of prosecutions which have followed from calls made to the Benefit Fraud Hotline in each month since May 1997; and what the total annual saving arising form the Benefit Fraud Hotline has been since its establishment.

Investigations by the Benefits Agency, which include cases which start as a Hotline referrals, have led to 8,417 prosecutions in the year to date (to the end of January 1999.) Figures for referrals, in each month since May 1997 are provided in the attached table. Figures for the number of these referrals that then result in prosecutions have only been recorded since January 1999.

The total Weekly Benefit Savings achieved by the National Benefit Fraud Hotline since its launch in August 1996 to date (to end of January 1999) is £108.9m.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

National Benefit Fraud Hotline
Number of cases referred to Departmental Solicitors for prosecution in each month since May 1997 following Hotline referrals.

Year	*Month*	*Cases referred for Prosecution*
1997	May	45
	June	71
	July	61
	August	31
	September	6
	October	40
	November	67
	December	12
1998	January	41
	February	25
	March	28
	April	3
	May	65
	June	26
	July	16
	August	87
	September	2
	October	13
	November	50
	December	14
1999	January	8
Total		711

Mr. Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what definitions of high and low suspicion of fraud are used for categorising cases in the Area Benefit Review Programme. [76108]

Mr. Timms: The administration of the Area Benefit Review Programme is the responsibility of Peter Mathison, the Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to my right hon. Friend.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Frank Field, dated 12 March 1999:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about the definitions of high and low suspicion of fraud used for categorising cases in the Area Benefit Review Programme.

The definitions of high and low suspicion are set out in the Governmental Statistical Service Area Benefit Review Results published in November 1998 and you may wish to refer to this document. The published headline figures of fraud and error exclude high and low suspicion of fraud. We are following up specific cases so that those originally classified as high suspicion of fraud can be subsequently confirmed as fraud, re-classified as correct, or remain as high suspicion.

As part of our commitment to improve the administration of the benefit system we have been working to clarify the definitions as published in the above report. The revised definitions are set out below.

Low suspicion of fraud means that the reviewing officer suspects that fraud exists, but the evidence is weak, and benefit entitlement does not change. For example, a customer with a long-term claim appears to be living above their means, but there are no solid grounds for suspicion, and no means of establishing the source of the financing.

High suspicion of fraud means that, on the balance of probabilities, a fraudulent situation exists, but there is insufficient information to prove fraud, and benefit entitlement does not change.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Benefit Interviews

Mr. Duncan Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 2 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *709*, on benefit interviews, whether a claimant will be able to provide the completed claim form by post or by another person delivering it to the relevant agency. [75851]

Angela Eagle: Claim forms delivered by post or by another person will be accepted where the claimant's readiness for work has been reviewed and a decision taken as to whether an immediate work-focused interview is appropriate. If not, we will take steps to contact the claimant to resolve these issues before benefit is put into payment.

Family Resources Survey

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the special analyses, including unpublished tabulations, of the Family Resources Survey which were undertaken by his Department for the Pension Provision Group. [76098]

Mr. Timms: The following analyses of the 1995–96 Family Resources Survey were undertaken for the Pension Provision Group:

Tabulation of the individual incomes of men and women over State pension age.

Tabulation of the incomes of single pensioners.

Tabulation of the average incomes of pensioner units by source and by marital status and gender.

Tabulation of the average incomes of pensioner units by source and by marital status and age under/over 75.

Estimation of the number of benefit units becoming entitled to means-tested benefits were upper capital limits to be removed and tariff income calculated for all capital above the lower capital limit.

Estimations of the numbers of people below State pension age in paid employment in the UK who are currently contributing to SERPS and occupational pension schemes and who have ever contributed to a personal pension scheme, by gender and full-time or part-time employment status.

Bereavement Benefits

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate the average age of those ceasing to receive widowed mother's allowance on the grounds that they no longer have dependent children. [76112]

Angela Eagle: The average age of those ceasing to receive Widowed Mother's Allowance between September 1997 and September 1998 is 51.

Notes:

1. Average age calculated of widows who were in receipt of Widowed Mothers Allowance (WMA) and had a dependent child in September 1997, but by September 1998 were in receipt of Widows Benefit (WB) but no longer had a qualifying dependent child.

2. The average does not include WMA cases that move off WB completely as it may be reasons other than no longer having a dependent child/ren.

3. Excludes Northern Ireland.

Source:

5 per cent. sample of Pension Strategy Computer System.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many new claimants of widow's benefits there were in each year since 1992; and what percentage of those claimants were in each region and nation. [76135]

Angela Eagle: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is in the tables.

Estimated number of recipients of widows benefit per year[1] by country (September 1994 to September 1998[2])

	1994–95	*1995–96*	*1996–97*	*1997–98*
England	30,000	25,880	23,480	19,420
Scotland	3,860	3,320	2,780	2,520
Wales	2,300	2,100	1,160	1,440
Overseas	2,420	2,100	1,540	1,100
All Countries	38,580	33,400	28,960	24,480

Estimated percentages of new recipients of widows benefit per year by country based on table above

%

	1994–95	*1995–96*	*1996–97*	*1997–98*
England	77.7	77.5	81.1	79.3
Scotland	10.0	9.9	9.6	10.3
Wales	6.0	6.3	4.0	5.9
Overseas	6.2	6.3	5.3	4.5
All Countries	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Notes:

1. New widows estimated from 5 per cent. samples of Pension Strategy Computer System between September of each year.

2. Data not available prior to September 1994.

3. Excludes widows who received a Widows Payment lump sum with no succeeding award of Widows Benefit.

4. Excludes Northern Ireland.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate the numbers of those receiving *(a)* widowed mothers allowance and *(b)* widows pension in each region and nation; and how many people (i) claimed widowed mothers allowance for the first time, (ii) transferred from widowed mothers allowance to widows benefit and (iii) claimed widows benefit for the first time in the most recent year for which figures are available. [76113]

Angela Eagle: The information is not available the format requested. Such information as is available is in the Tables.

Number of widows benefit recipients in Great Britain and overseas at September 1998: by country

	Widows pension	*Widowed mothers allowance*	*All*
England	171,560	37,440	209,000
Scotland	24,120	5,100	29,220
Wales	11,360	2,480	13,840
Overseas	13,180	2,960	16,140
All	220,220	47,980	268,200

Notes:

1. Caseload estimate from 5 per cent. samples of Pension Strategy Computer System.

2. Excludes widows who received a Widows Payment lump sum with no succeeding award of Widows Benefit.

3. Excludes Northern Ireland.

Estimated number of widows transferring from widowed mothers allowance to widows pension between September 1997 to September 1998: by country

	Widows pension
England	1,320
Scotland	280
Wales	100
Overseas	40
All	1,740

Notes:

1. Caseload estimated from 5 per cent. samples of Pension Strategy Computer System.
2. Excludes widows who received a Widows Payment lump sum with no succeeding awards of Widows Benefit.
3. Excludes Northern Ireland.

Estimated new recipients of widows benefit between September 1997 to September 1998: by country

	Widows pension	Widowed mothers allowance	All
England	15,020	4,400	19,420
Scotland	1,980	540	2,520
Wales	1,180	260	1,440
Overseas	1,000	100	1,100
All	19,180	5,300	24,480

Notes:

1. New Cases estimated from 5 per cent. samples of Pension Strategy Computer System.
2. Excludes widows who received a Widows Payment lump sum with no succeeding award of Widows Benefit.
3. Excludes Northern Ireland.

State Second Pension

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) which versions of the state second pension, and what assumptions about the dates of take-up, underlie the table on page 105 of the White Paper, Partnership in Pensions (Cm 4179); [76110]

(2) which versions of the state second pension, taken up at what dates, underlie Chart 5 on page 41 of the White Paper, Partnership in Pensions (Cm 4179). [76136]

Mr. Timms: Both Chart 5 on page 41 and the examples given in the table on page 105 of the Green Paper "A new contract for welfare: Partnership in Pensions" are based on the first stage of the proposed State Second Pension. An implementation date of April 2002 was assumed.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what variation there will be between men and women as regards the benefits of the current SERPS and proposed state second pension system set out in the table on page 105 of the White Paper, Partnership in Pensions (Cm 4179). [76109]

Mr. Timms: The examples of pension provision shown on page 105 of the Green Paper "A new contract for welfare: Partnership in Pensions" apply equally to men and women.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will set out the qualifying conditions in terms of income and other factors for availability of the state second pension *(a)* to 2002, *(b)* from 2002 to 2007 and *(c)* after 2007. [76748]

Mr. Timms: No one will qualify for the State Second Pension prior to April 2002, as this is the proposed implementation date. The qualifying conditions for the first stage of the State Second Pension are set out in Chapter 6 of the Green Paper "A new contract for welfare: Partnership in Pensions". The introduction of the second stage of the State Second Pension is dependent on stakeholder pensions becoming established as low-cost, value-for money, funded second pensions. It is expected that, once the second stage is implemented, the qualifying conditions will remain the same.

Pensioners

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate, on the basis of the 1988–89 and 1994 retirement surveys, the proportion of pensioners whose real incomes decline in the five years after reaching state pension age. [76101]

Mr. Timms: This Department does not hold retirement survey data in a format that would allow the information to be produced. The Department commissioned the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) and the Age Concern Institute of Gerontology (ACIOG) to carry out the analysis of the combined 1988–89 and 1994 data. Findings were published in "The Dynamics of Retirement" (1998) DSS Research Report No. 72, The Stationery Office. Converting the data to an appropriate format and producing a reliable analysis would involve disproportionate cost.

Brit Awards

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list those Ministers in his Department who were present at the recent Brit awards in an official capacity, indicating the organisation acting as their sponsor or host. [76653]

Mr. Timms: None of this Department's Ministers attended the Brit awards.

Invalid Care Allowance

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people are currently in receipt of Invalid Care Allowance; and what proportion of carers this represents. [76450]

Mr. Bayley: The administration of Invalid Care Allowance is a matter for the Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency, Peter Mathison. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. David Rendel, dated 12 March 1999:

I am replying to your recent Parliamentary Question asking how many people are currently in receipt of Invalid Care Allowance; and what proportion of carers this represents.

Invalid Care Allowance (ICA) is a benefit for people of working age who are regularly caring for a severely disabled person for at least 35 hours a week. As at 10 March 1999 374,241 people were in receipt of the allowance.

Unfortunately, information about numbers of recipients as a proportion of carers who fulfil the ICA eligibility conditions is not available.

I am sorry I could not, on this occasion, be more helpful.

Pension Case

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he expects the Benefits Agency to begin payment of the retirement pension due to the constituent of the hon. Member for Aylesbury (reference ZW755428A); and if he will make a statement. [76467]

Mr. Timms: The administration of Retirement Pension is a matter for Peter Mathison, the Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. David Lidington, dated 12 March 1999:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking when he expects the Benefits Agency to begin payment of Retirement Pension to your constituent who lives in Aylesbury.

In this case your constituent elected to have their Retirement Pension paid four-weekly by Automated Credit Transfer. The first payment was released timeously to their bank account on 26 February 1999. They were advised of this on the same day.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Disability Living Allowance

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will define the broad-based mechanism to check awards of disability living allowance under the new periodic review system referred to in his letter to hon. Members of 28 January. [76765]

Mr. Bayley: We are determined to ensure that people are receiving the correct amount of benefit. From April 1999, a new fairer system of periodic inquiry into benefit entitlement will commence for existing recipients of Disability Living Allowance (DLA). The process will incorporate lessons already learned and will be evaluated and refined as it develops.

Initially, cases will be selected for inquiry action on a proportional basis across the range of awards to be included. People selected for inquiry action will be asked to complete a detailed questionnaire, based on the current claim form for DLA, either by post or at a home visit. These two methods of approach will be applied evenly across the range of people selected to help identify the best means of approach in individual cases. Once completed, the inquiry form will provide the Benefits Agency (BA) with an up to date picture of the need that the individual has for help with personal care and mobility and allow the BA to determine whether a review of entitlement would be appropriate. This will enable awards to be increased or decreased in line with entitlement. All staff involved in the new processes will receive full training before commencing this new work. The inquiry action will be monitored and evaluated after six months of operation and the findings will be used to continue to improve the process.

Initially, the new system will exclude DLA recipients whose cases were examined by the Benefit Integrity Project (BIP) and those groups of disabled people that were specifically excluded from the action of the BIP. People who are terminally ill and meet the criteria set out in Section 66(2)(a) of the Social Security Contributions and Benefits Act 1992 and people with a fixed period award due to end within the next three years will also not be contacted. Full details are set out at in my Written Answer to the hon. Member for Winchester (Mr. Oaten) on 10 March 1999, *Official Report*, columns *251–52*.

Some disabling conditions, and the needs that they generate, change very little over time whilst ôthers can be very variable in effect and/or degenerative in nature. The BA is therefore working to establish the proper frequency with which individuals should be asked about their current needs, so that, in the future, inquiries can be made at the most appropriate time and new claimants can be advised from the outset when inquiries are likely to be made in their case. This action does not affect the responsibility of all claimants to tell the BA about changes that may affect benefit entitlement.

Wind Chill Factor

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what discussions he has had with the Meteorological Office concerning its proposals to pilot a study of weather stations in Scotland to take account of the wind chill factor in the assessment of cold weather payments; how much such a scheme would cost; and what plans he has to initiate such a scheme. [76146]

Angela Eagle: No discussions have taken place with the Meteorological Office on such a pilot. Nor is it possible to estimate the cost of introducing into the current scheme an allowance for the effects of wind speed because no trigger criterion exists combining it with external air temperature.

A number of formulae are used to calculate the combined effects of air temperature and wind speed on the human body when in the open air (commonly referred to as "windchill"). However, the Building Research Establishment advises that these are not appropriate when assessing heat loss from buildings, because different heat transfer mechanisms apply.

We are committed to tackling the problems associated with vulnerable people keeping warm and have already introduced numerous substantial measures to meet this objective. The most recent ones were announced in the Budget and will provide extra help for pensioners and young children in low income families. They include increasing the level of Winter Fuel Payments for pensioner households to £100 from next Winter--and a substantial increase in the rates of benefit payable in income-related benefits for children under the age of eleven. The Welfare Reform and Pensions Bill proposals will also provide extra help for those in greatest need who have a long-term illness or are disabled.

Taking into account all the measures already introduced we do not believe that amending the Cold Weather Payment scheme would be the most effective way to get help to those who need it most.

NIRS2

Mr. Gareth Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on current progress on the introduction of the new National Insurance Recording System (NIRS2). [77192]

Mr. Darling: My hon. Friend the Minister of State, Department of Social Security, in his written answer on 18 January 1999, *Official Report*, columns *368–70*,

updated the House about progress that the Contributions Agency had made in addressing outstanding issues relating to the introduction of the new National Insurance Recording System (NIRS2). These issues include recording 1997–98 National Insurance Contributions, links between the NIRS2 system and claims for benefit, and wider roll-out of NIRS2 functionality.

Since January the Contributions Agency has worked closely with Andersen Consulting to address these issues. Details of the progress that has been made are set out. Where issues have not yet been fully resolved, the Contributions and Benefits Agencies have endeavoured to minimise their impact on individuals and action is being put in place to identify the best way forward.

In the light of outstanding issues relating to the introduction of NIRS2, it has been necessary to review the Contributions and Benefits Agencies' objectives for the remainder of the year and to re-prioritise activity. To ensure that we receive the greatest benefit from the system capacity, I have decided that the recording of 1997–98 National Insurance Contributions and payment of age-related rebates should be the first priorities. This will minimise the disruption to individuals and ensure that payments to individuals' personal pensions are made. However, a consequence of this decision is that some system backlogs will not be cleared until into the next financial year.

My hon. Friend the Minister of State reported that, at 11 January, 31 million National Insurance contributions for the tax year 1997–98 had been posted. At 14 March 1999, 39 million items had been posted for the year, with 5.8 million items still to be posted. Action is underway to clear these outstanding items swiftly.

The cumulative total of age-related rebate payments paid to occupational and personal pension schemes in respect of individual scheme members in this financial year has increased from £1,411 million on 4 January 1999 to £1,882 million on 1 March. This is over 75 per cent. of the expected net total for the year. (The cumulative total figure includes a compensation element.) Action is underway to clear the outstanding backlog.

The NIRS2 link to Retirement Pensions, Widows Benefit, Jobseeker's Allowance and Incapacity Benefit is being used to process new claims to benefit. Where 1997–98 contributions are not yet recorded, there is a continuing need to make initial awards of Retirement Pension and emergency payments to widows. Initial and emergency awards of National Insurance benefits made since April 1998 will be reviewed following completion of the recording of 1997–98 National Insurance contribution information. The Benefits Agency hopes to begin reviewing these claims from April 1999.

The Benefits Agency continues to calculate entitlement to State Earnings Related Pensions clerically for people who request this. 5,703 such calculations had been completed at 15 March.

By 8 February 1999 a cumulative total of over £415 million of self-employed and voluntary National Insurance contributions had been billed and/or collected through the monthly payment method. In addition, over £286 million had been billed through the quarterly payment method.

New registration facilities for self-employed people who want to pay their contributions by monthly Direct Debit or by quarterly bills are fully operational.

Adult registrations continue to be processed using the NIRS2 on-line facility and plastic National Insurance Number (NINO) cards are being issued. The exercise to process Scottish Juvenile registrations is complete. The full Juvenile Registration facilities were made available on 10 March 1999.

All the work involved is being taken forward through a coordinated plan agreed between the Agencies involved. In order to minimise the impact on customers, we have set up a Benefits Agency taskforce that will take on responsibility for benefit claims affected by the delays. This will give customers a single point of contact by both telephone and post. The taskforce can be contacted, at local call rates, on 08456 010586 between 08.30 and 16.30 Monday to Friday, or customers can write to the taskforce at PO Box 6, Newcastle Upon Tyne, NE98 1XB.

Ministers will keep the House informed of progress.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Early Years Development

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) when he plans to announce approval of the local education authority early years development and childcare plans which were submitted to him last month; [76295]

(2) if he plans to approve all local education authority early years development and childcare plans on the basis of a three tier approval system; and if he will set out those tiers and the criteria used to judge the plans at each level. [76294]

Ms Hodge *[holding answer 12 March 1999]:* There will be three levels of decision: full approval, conditional approval and deferred approval. Full approval will be awarded to plans which broadly meet the criteria set out in Section three of the 'Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership Planning Guidance for 1999–2000.' For plans which meet most of the planning guidance but have some gaps in information, approval will be conditional on the subsequent submission of material to fill the gaps. Where plans do not show that the statutory duty to provide nursery education places for four year olds will be met, where there is clear evidence of a failure in partnership working or where the plan falls well short of meeting the criteria in the planning guidance, approval will be deferred until an acceptable plan is submitted.

I hope to make an announcement by the end of the month.

SATS (Level 6)

Charlotte Atkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many primary school pupils in England were entered for the level 6 SATS papers in 1998 in *(a)* English, *(b)* mathematics and *(c)* science; how many were awarded level 6 in each subject; and what are the comparative figures for (i) 1994, (ii) 1995, (iii) 1996 and (iv) 1997. [75550]

Ms Estelle Morris: The available information is given in the following table:

Level 6 national curriculum test paper—key stage 2

	Number of pupils entered			Number of pupils achieving level 6			
	1998	*1997*	*1996*	*1998*	*1997*	*1996*	*1995*
English	21,689	26,538	34,409	59	484	1,021	192
Mathematics	21,002	23,466	24,492	1,013	837	434	1,545
Science	8,687	8,760	8,076	223	380	122	392

Note:
Information on the number of pupils entered for 1995 is not available, as data were not collected centrally at pupil level

EU Education Council

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will publish the agenda for the forthcoming EU Education Council on 18 March. [77157]

Mr. Mudie: The Education Council provisionally scheduled for 18 March has been cancelled.

Target 2000

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on progress made in introducing the Target 2000 programme of education and training for young people. [76457]

Mr. Mudie: Our manifesto commitment to get all young people on the road to a Level 2 qualification by the year 2000 is being taken forward by our Investing in Young People strategy. A key component of the strategy is the expansion of National Traineeships, as part of the reform of Youth Training. 28,000 people have now started National Traineeships, which build on the success of Modern Apprenticeships and are available in 46 sectors of industry and commerce. A target of 100,000 starts has been set for March 2000.

The strategy is wide ranging and includes piloting of an Education Maintenance Allowance in 12 areas, refocusing of the Careers Service on those most in need, expansion of the New Start strategy, and implementation of the Right to Time for Study legislation.

We expect to develop the strategy further in the light of the forthcoming Social Exclusion Unit report into young people not in education, employment or training.

Nursery Voucher Scheme

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what estimate he has made of the savings resulting from the abolition of the nursery voucher scheme. [74785]

Ms Hodge: The nursery education voucher scheme was replaced in September 1997 by local Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships and Plans which, from September 1998, have guaranteed a free, part-time early education place for all four year olds, for the three terms before compulsory school age, for those parents who want one in the maintained, private or voluntary sectors. The savings which accrued have been allocated to fund the establishment of a pilot scheme of 25 Early Excellence Centres by 2001, of which 17 have already been announced. From September 1999, additional funding will be provided to expand early education places for three year olds.

Special Educational Needs

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment when he expects to publish the outcome of the current consultation exercise on special educational needs; how many responses he has received to that consultation exercise; and if he will publish those responses. [76764]

Mr. Charles Clarke: The Department expects to issue a first draft of a revised Code of Practice on the identification and assessment of special educational needs in the Autumn. There have been over 600 responses to the consultation document issued on 12 January 1999. Under the Code of Practice on Open Government, any responses to the consultation document will be made public on request unless respondents have indicated that they wished their responses to remain confidential.

Environment Taskforce

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many under-25s have been placed with the environment taskforce since its inception; what work the taskforce has carried out; and if he will make a statement. [76439]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Responsibility for the subject of these questions has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its Chief Executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Richard Foster to Mr. David Maclean, dated 15 March 1999:

As the Employment Service is an Executive Agency, the Secretary of State for Education and Employment has asked Leigh Lewis to reply to your question about the number of young people who have participated in the Environment Task Force option of New Deal for 18–24 year olds and what type of work is carried out on it. This is something which falls within the responsibilities delegated to Mr. Lewis as Chief Executive of the Agency. I am replying in his absence.

Up to the end of January, 8,910 young people had started on the Environment Task Force option of the New Deal for 18–24 year olds. This figure is drawn from the latest Government Statistical Service figures to the end of December 1998 and provisional Management Information to the end of January 1999.

Turning to the type of work carried out, there is a wide range of projects which contribute to conserving energy and water and protecting the environment. We have also been keen to offer opportunities that encourage young people to become involved in local community regeneration. Projects have included dealing with housing, forest and park management, and reclamation of derelict or waste land. All projects are assessed against environmental objectives set by the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions. The key criterion, however, is the extent to which they will develop participants' skills, help them into jobs at the end of their time on the option and increase their long term employability.

I hope this is helpful.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Brit Awards

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Minister of State, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will list those Ministers in his Department who were present at the recent Brit awards in an official capacity, indicating the organisation acting as their sponsor or host. [76650]

Mr. Heon: None.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Race Relations Act 1976

18. **Fiona Mactaggart:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he plans to implement his proposals to extend the Race Relations Act 1976 to all public services. [74594]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary announced in his Statement to the House on 24 February 1999, *Official Report*, columns 389–403, on the report of the inquiry into the death of Stephen Lawrence, that the Government accepted the recommendation in Sir William Macpherson's report that the police service should be brought within the Race Relations Act 1976. My right hon. Friend also announced that we intend going further by extending the Act to cover all the public services and that we are developing proposals to that end.

The intention of the Home Secretary is to do so as quickly as possible. Parliamentary time is, of course, limited and the final decision belongs to the Leader of the House.

Criminal Investigations

19. **Mr. Beard:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to review police methods and practices in gathering and interpreting information in the course of an inquiry. [74595]

Kate Hoey: Work is already underway in the Police Service to establish performance standards for the investigation of crime, to be followed and monitored in all forces. The Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) has developed a manual of standards for murder investigations and their Crime Committee is developing models of good practice for all areas of crime investigation.

Domestic Burglars (Sentences)

21. **Ms Christine Russell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to ensure severe punishments for those domestic burglars who are convicted for a third time. [74597]

Mr. Boateng: As we announced on 12 January 1999, *Official Report*, column *159*, we intend to bring into force this December section 4 of the Crime (Sentences) Act 1997. This provides minimum sentences of three years for those convicted for the third time of an offence of domestic burglary.

Stephen Lawrence Inquiry Report

22. **Mr. Lansley:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which of his Department's Ministers and officials saw the Macpherson report between 15 and 23 February; for what purpose; and if he will make a statement. [74598]

Mr. Straw: Details of this kind will need to be established by the independent investigator appointed to investigate the leak of parts of the Macpherson Report. It would not be appropriate for me to comment further at this stage .

28. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the Government's response to the Macpherson inquiry report into the death of Stephen Lawrence. [74604]

Mr. Boateng: The report into the death of Stephen Lawrence was published on 24 February 1999. The Home Secretary made an oral statement on that day, *Official Report*, columns 389–403, and said that he will be publishing an action plan detailing how the Government intend to take forward the recommendations and that there will be a full day's debate on this in due course.

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is *(a)* the name of the independent investigator into the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry leak and *(b)* who is his reporting officer for day-to-day Civil Service work. [76191]

Mr. Straw *[holding answer 12 March 1999]:* The investigator is independent; the question of a reporting officer does not, therefore, arise. It is not the practice to give details of investigators.

Social Exclusion

23. **Ms Perham:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received on the role of the voluntary sector in tackling social exclusion. [74599]

Mr. Boateng: The Government fully recognise the essential role that the voluntary and community sector plays in tackling social exclusion. Many organisations from the sector have unique experience and knowledge of areas of need and opportunity. The Policy Action Teams established to take this work forward include representatives from a range of voluntary organisations.

Witness Protection

24. **Mr. Forth:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will review the policy on the financing of witness protection; and if he will make a statement. [74600]

Mr. Boateng: Formal witness protection arrangements are funded from within existing budgets of individual police forces and, as such, are a matter left to the discretion of Chief Police Officers.

I have no plans to review these arrangements.

Police (Young People)

25. **Caroline Flint:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what *(a)* guidance and *(b)* training is offered to police forces on the policing of young people. [R] [74601]

Kate Hoey: The Home Office has issued guidance, in conjunction with the DfEE, to both police forces and local educational authorities on the application of the truancy provisions of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998. The National Operations Faculty at the Police Staff College, Bramshill, provides training for officers who manage the police input to Youth Offending Teams. The Faculty has recently established a database for use by forces on information relating to the policing of young people with a view to disseminating good policing practice. Individual forces may also provide other training to meet local needs.

Family Support

26. **Mr. Cox:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the Government's policy on supporting families. [74602]

Mr. Boateng: The Government's family policy is set out in the consultation document Supporting Families. The consultation period ends today (Monday 15 March). Work to assess the responses to the consultation exercise is already in hand, and the Ministerial Group on the Family will use the responses to inform the development of its strategy to increase the support available to families.

Police Complaints

27. **Helen Jackson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many times since May 1997 a complaint against a police force has been externally investigated. [74603]

Mr. Boateng: 15 complaints cases were recorded as having been referred to another force for investigation in England and Wales in 1997–98, the latest year for which figures are available. Each case may consist of one or more complaint. This figure does not include investigations involving allegations of criminal or disciplinary offences in which no complaint has been received from a member of the public.

The Government support the recommendation of the Home Affairs Select Committee in its report on police disciplinary and complaints procedures that investigation by an outside force should become a more regular occurrence than it is at present. The new guidance which we will be issuing shortly on police discipline and complaints procedures will encourage chief officers to make greater use of investigating officers from outside forces.

Crime Audits

29. **Ms Beverley Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the crime audits completed to date by local partnerships. [74605]

Mr. Boateng: The audits are a necessary and important step in the formulation of the local crime and disorder reduction strategies—which have to be completed by 1 April 1999. I am encouraged by the commitment I see on the part of the local partnerships to completing the tasks set for them in a timely and effective way.

Criminal Records (Children)

30. **Ms Coffey:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the availability of criminal records of children looked after by one local authority and placed in another local authority area to the local police in that area. [74606]

Mr. Boateng: Details of the criminal records of individuals who come to police notice can be accessed by the police directly from the national criminal records database on the Police National Computer or from local police records.

Asylum Seekers

31. **Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made of the cost of current provision of benefits in kind to asylum seekers. [74607]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The cost of the current provision of benefits in kind to asylum seekers will not be known until after the current financial year. However, we believe that the unit costs which have been set for 1998–99, whilst challenging, are realistic. The unit costs are:

£165 per week for single adults;

£230 per week for families (or £240 per week for families already resident within Inner London);

£400 for unaccompanied children aged 15 and under; and

£200 for unaccompanied 16 and 17 year olds.

37. **Mr. Randall:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people claimed asylum in the United Kingdom during 1998. [74613]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Forty six thousand and fifteen claimed asylum in 1998.

Animal Procedures Committee

32. **Mr. Coaker:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he last met members of the Animal Procedures Committee to discuss progress in reducing the numbers of experiments on animals. [74608]

Mr. George Howarth: I met with members of the Committee on 9 December 1998. We discussed a number of issues including the need to ensure that animals are used only where fully justified: where the benefits outweigh the costs and where there are no alternatives. I would, however, refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Lewes (Mr. Baker) on 11 May 1998, *Official Report*, column *51*—the effectiveness of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 cannot be judged by the overall number of procedures.

Airguns

33. **Mr. Ennis:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to review the current legislation controlling airguns. [74609]

Mr. Boateng: We have no immediate plans to change the law relating to air weapons, but the firearms legislation will be kept under close scrutiny to see if there is anything further which needs to be done to protect the public safety.

Special Constables

34. **Mr. Ruffley:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received regarding the recruitment of special constables; and if he will make a statement. [74610]

Kate Hoey: No representations have been received in respect of the recruitment of special constables.

The government fully support the efforts of police forces to recruit more special constables who bring a level of commitment and local knowledge which is invaluable in policing their own communities.

Illegal Immigrants

35. **Mr. Hawkins:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions he has had with the road transport industry over his plans to levy financial penalties on lorry drivers found guilty of transporting illegal immigrants. [74611]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: I have held a number of meetings with representatives of the Freight Transport Association and the Road Haulage Association, on the proposed penalty prior to the Bill's publication. I will continue to work closely with the industry on the detailed operation of this new penalty.

Police Vehicles (Accidents)

38. **Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people have been *(a)* injured or *(b)* killed since 1990 as a result of an accident involving a police vehicle answering a 999 call. [74614]

Mr. Boateng: Figures dealing solely with responses to emergency calls are not available centrally as statistics collate them together with accidents arising from pursuits. Information has been provided by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary, to whom forces submit statistical returns. Collection arrangements have changed over the period so figures for 1990 to 1993 cover only serious injuries.

Police vehicle accidents arising from responses to immediate calls and pursuits, England and Wales

	Injuries	*Fatalities*
1990	317	24
1991	271	32
1992	300	30
1993	300	34
1994–95	[1]1,830	[1]21
1995–96	[2]2,169	[2]21
1996–97	[2]1,930	[2]15
1997–98	2,123	15

[1] Figures from 3 forces are missing from the total
[2] Figures from 2 forces are missing from the total

Police Officers (Ethnic Communities)

39. **Mr. MacShane:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he is taking to encourage the promotion of police officers from the ethnic communities to senior rank. [74615]

Kate Hoey: Individual targets will be set for each force for the recruitment, retention and progression of ethnic minority officers. We believe that targets coupled with a range of initiatives aimed at removing barriers to progression will inevitably lead over time to more ethnic minority officers in senior ranks.

Animal Experiments

Mr. John Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the reduction in the number of experiments following the ban on the testing on animals of cosmetic experiments and ingredients. [74592]

Mr. George Howarth: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes, South-West (Dr. Starkey), on 15 February 1999, *Official Report*, column 598: an average of about 2,000 animals a year were used in cosmetics testing from 1995 to 1997.

Closed Circuit Television

Mr. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what advice he gives to people installing closed circuit television about issues of privacy, retention of recordings and the need to follow a published code of practice. [74596]

Mr. Boateng: A code of practice for Closed Circuit Television (CCTV) systems is essential to ensure that CCTV is operated with integrity and respect for personal privacy. Public space CCTV systems funded under the Home Office Challenge Competition should comply with the best practice code developed by the Local Government Information Unit.

The Data Protection Act 1998 will provide a framework for the statutory regulation of CCTV systems.

The Data Protection Registrar has started to develop a code of practice, to be issued under her new powers as Data Protection Commissioner. This code will provide guidance to CCTV operators on how to comply with the Act's requirements.

Sex Offender Orders

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many sex offender orders have been *(a)* applied for and *(b)* granted under section 2 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998. [76023]

Mr. Boateng: To date, we are aware of one Sex Offender Order having been granted. No information is held centrally to indicate the number of Sex Offender Orders which have been applied for.

Police (False Information)

Mr. Maginnis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people were charged with wasting police time, other than by making malicious complaints against the police, in each constabulary area in England and Wales during each year from 1996 to 1998. [75904]

Mr. Boateng: There is no offence of making a malicious complaint against the police, but a person may commit an offence under section 5(2) of the Criminal Law

Act 1967 where he or she causes wasteful employment of the police by giving false information to them. Information is available centrally only on the number of people cautioned, prosecuted or convicted for an offence under section 5(2) of the Criminal Law Act 1967.

In 1996 in England and Wales, there were 134 cautions, 60 prosecutions and 44 convictions for an offence under section 5(2) of the Criminal Law Act 1967. In 1997, there were 95 cautions, 71 prosecutions, and 56 convictions for the same offence.

Mr. Maginnis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the number of man/days identified as having been spent in the investigation of *(a)* malicious complaints and *(b)* false information within each constabulary area in England and Wales during each year from 1996 to 1998. [75903]

Mr. Boateng: The information requested is not recorded centrally.

Electoral Registers

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many councils did not have the 1999–2000 electoral register available in *(a)* printed and *(b)* tape or disc form on 16 February; and what requirements there are for councils to make registers available by that date. [76626]

Mr. George Howarth: Information on the availability of the new electoral register for each local council area is not held centrally.

Under the Representation of the People Act 1983, electoral registration officers are required to publish the register not later than 15 February in any year. If any part of a register is not published by this date then, until the day after it is published, the corresponding part of the previous register continues in use. Once published, printed copies are required to be made available to electoral users on request, whilst data copies are to be supplied on payment of the appropriate fee.

Police (South Cumbria)

Mr. Collins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations have been made to him concerning (i) the number of police stations and police officers and (ii) police resources in South Cumbria by *(a)* members of the police and *(b)* hon. Members. [76665]

Mr. Boateng: I have not received any representations specifically about the number of police stations, officers or police resources in South Cumbria. I did, however, receive two representations from hon. Members, one representation from the Cumbria Police Authority and one representation from the Allerdale Borough Council about the police funding allocation for the Cumbria Police Authority in 1999–2000. Only the letter from the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale referred to the number of police stations and police officers.

I also had a meeting with representatives of the Cumbria Police Authority and the Chief Constable on 6 January about the funding settlement for 1999–2000 at which the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale was present.

I understand that the Cumbria Police Authority have approved a budget increase of 2.7 per cent. for 1999–2000.

Prisons (Phones)

Mr. Collins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are *(a)* the costs, *(b)* the purposes and *(c)* the timescale of the contract awarded to BT for new technology phones in prisons; and if he will make a statement. [76664]

Mr. George Howarth: The new prisoner telephone system, which is due to be installed in all prisons in England and Wales by May 2000, has the dual purpose of enabling prisoners to maintain their family ties whilst minimising the risk of misuse. The new system is being provided and maintained at no cost to the Prison Service throughout the duration of the ten-year contract.

WPC Yvonne Fletcher

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to receive the report from the Metropolitan Police on the review of the evidence surrounding the murder of WPC Fletcher. [74874]

Mr. Boateng: The police review of the evidence surrounding the murder of WPC Yvonne Fletcher has taken longer than originally anticipated. I understand from the Metropolitan police, however, that this review will be completed in the near future.

Correspondence

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to reply to the letter from the hon. Member for Walsall, North of 10 February concerning a constituent. [76227]

Mr. Boateng *[holding answer 12 March 1999]:* I have written today on the Home Secretary's behalf to my hon. Friend for Walsall, North.

European Parliamentary Elections

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on *(a)* the counting arrangements and *(b)* the procedures to be adopted in the event of a recount in the elections for the European Parliament, in relation to counting at (i) parliamentary constituency level and (ii) regional centre level. [77127]

Mr. George Howarth: Details of the proposed counting arrangements for European Parliamentary elections were set out in the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Tewkesbury (Mr. Robertson) on 8 March 1999, *Official Report,* column *33.*

Parties and candidates will be entitled to be present at all of the local counts and to ask for a recount. They will also be entitled to be present at the place where the regional returning officer performs the seat allocation calculation and to ask him to repeat the calculation.

Criminal Justice Act 1993

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will implement the measures contained in Part I of the Criminal Justice Act 1993. [76292]

Mr. Boateng *[holding answer 12 March 1999]:* Discussions are currently taking place with Departments most closely interested in the implementation of Part I of the Criminal Justice Act 1993. It is hoped that we will be in a position to bring Part I into force very soon.

Justice and Home Affairs Council

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the outcome of the Justice and Home Affairs Council on 12 March, indicating the position taken by the UK Government on each item discussed. [76200]

Mr. Straw: I will report to the House as soon as possible on the outcome of this Council.

Police (Oxfordshire)

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police officers there were in Oxfordshire in *(a)* March 1997, *(b)* March 1998 and *(c)* March 1999; and how many he estimates there will be in March 2000. [76785]

Mr. Boateng: I understand from the Chief Constable that it is not possible to provide information on the number of police officers in Oxfordshire as the territorial divisions of the Thames Valley Police are not co-terminous with the county boundaries of the three counties that make up the force area.

Information on the number of officers for March 1999 will not be available before the middle of May. Ministers have no direct control over police numbers. Under legislation passed by the previous Government in 1994, it is for the individual chief constables to determine the number of police officers in their force, on the basis of the resources made available to them. It is not, therefore, possible to provide a projection of the force's strength for March 2000.

Numbers of officers in the Thames Valley Police in 1997 and 1998 are set out in the table:

Thames Valley Police

Year	*Number of officers*[1]
31 March 1997	3,695
31 March 1998	3,776

[1] Full-time equivalents

Public Safety Radio Communications Project

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the estimated *(a)* initial capital cost and *(b)* annual running cost of the Public Safety Radio Communications Project in England and Wales; and if he will make a statement. [75701]

Mr. Boateng: The Public Safety Radio Communications Project (PSRCP) is to be delivered as a Private Finance Initiative scheme. British Telecom will be the service provider and, therefore, responsible for the capital infrastructure costs.

I am advised by Police Information Technology Organisation that negotiations for the award of the contract for PSRCP are now entering their final stage. I am, therefore, not able to comment on annual running costs as they are part of the contract negotiations.

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what form of competition took place prior to negotiations starting on the introduction of the Public Safety Radio Communications Project; and what other parties took an interest in providing the communications services required by the Police. [75703]

Mr. Boateng: A full competition was held under European Community rules and three consortia were invited to submit a bid. The Project Definition Study was awarded to Quadrant—a consortium led by British Telecom after the two other consortia withdrew from the competition.

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what contingency plans have been prepared for an alternative to the Public Safety Radio Communications Project. [75702]

Mr. Boateng: A fallback strategy has been produced and is being further developed to assist forces to procure replacement radio systems, either locally or regionally.

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans there are for other emergency services to be included in negotiations on the introduction of the Public Safety Radio Communications Project. [75704]

Mr. Boateng: The Police Information Technology Organisation are negotiating with British Telecom about the introduction of the Public Safety Radio Communications service for the police. They are keeping potential sharers of the service informed of developments.

District Plans (Police Authority Objections)

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department under what statutory authority police authorities may object to local authorities' unitary district plan proposals; and if he will list the occasions on which this has occurred in each of the last five years. [75939]

Mr. Raynsford: I have been asked to reply.

Police authorities, like any other individual, body or organisation, can object to a unitary development plan during the statutory periods set out in the Town and Country Planning (Development Plans) Regulations 1991. Information on organisations making objections is not collected centrally.

2001 Census

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received calling for the inclusion of additional categories in the 2001 census to identify *(a)* race and *(b)* ethnic origin. [74630]

Ms Hewitt: I have been asked to reply.

The Office for National Statistics, along with the other two UK Census Offices, has conducted a lengthy programme of consultation with all user communities on their requirements for questions to be considered in the

2001 Census. This consultation process culminated in the submission by users of business cases setting out the uses and values of Census information for each particular topic. Ministers have now considered the case for a revised ethnic group question in the 2001 Census, and the Government's proposals were published in a White Paper on 4 March [Cm 4253].

During the period of consultation, a total of 154 representations calling for the inclusion of additional categories in the 2001 Census to identify ethnic origin have been received as follows:

108 from MPs and 31 from MEPs, on behalf of the British Sikh Federation, the Kashmiri Workers Association, the Federation of Irish Societies, Cornwall 2000, Cornish Solidarity and 15 from individual members of the public.

Live Animal Imports

Mr. Sawford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prosecutions there were for breaches of the law in respect of live animal imports for each year from 1990 to the latest year for which figures are available. [75846]

Mr. Rooker: I have been asked to reply.

Statistics concerning the number of prosecutions for breach of the law in respect of live animal imports are as follows:

Number of prosecutions for breaches of the law in respect of live animal imports into Great Britain

Year	*Number*
1990	60
1991	99
1992	73
1993	58
1994	79
1995	71
1996	71
1997	54
1998	50

DEFENCE

Gulf War Veterans

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many Gulf War veterans have died since the end of the war in 1991; [62958]

(2) how many service personnel who served in the Gulf War of 1991 have died whilst still serving in HM forces. [62960]

Mr. Doug Henderson *[holding answer 9 December 1998]:* The Ministry of Defence has identified 53,462 members of the UK armed forces who were deployed on Operation GRANBY or to a state in the Gulf region at some time between 1 September 1990 and 30 June 1991. As at 5 March 1999, 381 of these individuals were recorded by the MOD as having died since 1 April 1991, of which 254 were regular personnel recorded as having died whilst still serving in the armed forces. Information received by the MOD in respect of a further 17 Gulf veterans who have been reported as having died is currently in the process of being verified.

Territorial Army

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment his Department has made of the cost of moving a non-infantry TA battalion HQ from South to North Wales. [68478]

Mr. Doug Henderson *[holding answer 1 February 1999]:* No assessment has been made of the cost of transferring a non-infantry TA Regimental Headquarters from South to North Wales. There are no non-infantry TA Battalion Headquarters in the South of Wales.

Compensation

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to publish a consultation document following the review of arrangements for compensating service personnel and their dependants injured or killed during service. [72250]

Mr. Doug Henderson *[holding answer 22 February 1999]:* The joint MOD/DSS review of compensation arrangements for service personnel has proved more complicated than expected and therefore taken longer than we originally planned. We are, however, pressing ahead with the work and we hope to publish a consultation document around the middle of the year.

Defence Agencies (Targets)

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to set targets for the *(a)* Army Training and Recruiting Agency, *(b)* Defence Bills Agency, *(c)* Defence Evaluation and Research Agency and *(d)* Army Base Repair Organisation for the year 1999–2000. [71943]

Mr. Doug Henderson *[holding answer 25 February 1999]:* We expect to set Key Targets for these four agencies by the end of April 1999.

Air Miles

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many air miles have been earned by him and each of his ministers; and how he proposes to use them. [73332]

Mr. Spellar: The Government's policy on the use and disposal of air miles was set out by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 12 January 1999, *Official Report*, column *141*.

Detailed information on any air miles earned by Ministers as a result of official travel is not recorded centrally.

Depleted Uranium

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what continuing research is in progress on depleted uranium under the medical assessment programme; [74718]

(2) for what reason testing for depleted uranium has been omitted from the overt list of standard tests carried out at the medical assessment programme; [74717]

(3) what tests for depleted uranium have been undertaken under the medical assessment programme; and what consent for such testing was sought from those tested. [74719]

Mr. Doug Henderson: The primary purpose of the Gulf veterans' Medical Assessment Programme (MAP) is to investigate the medical complaints of UK Gulf War veterans and, so far as possible, to diagnose what they are suffering from and recommend appropriate treatment, or provide reassurance if no illness is found.

When the MAP was first established in 1993, its first Head, Wing Commander (now Group Captain) Bill Coker, initially carried out those tests he felt necessary on clinical grounds to establish a diagnosis. When the number of patients referred to the MAP increased, he carried out a number of screening tests, similar to those then used by the US Department of Defense's Comprehensive Clinical Evaluation Programme (CCEP), which is broadly equivalent to the MAP. These screening tests did not include a test to detect the presence of uranium because Group Captain Coker had not previously seen any features in patients to indicate that such testing was clinically necessary. The US experience had suggested that the urinary excretion of uranium was only significantly increased in those veterans with retained fragments of depleted uranium (DU). As MOD was not aware of any UK Service personnel who had sustained shrapnel injuries from DU-based ammunition, it was not thought necessary to screen routinely for uranium excretion, although testing could be carried out on a case by case basis if clinically indicated. Any other tests considered clinically appropriate would also be performed, these additional tests varying from patient to patient. This system of investigation was in place at the time of the Royal College of Physicians' (RCP) clinical audit in 1995.

The RCP's subsequent report, published in July 1995, endorsed the MAP's professional independence and integrity and made specific comments on how the Programme could be improved. However, with the exception of a recommendation concerning psychiatric assessments, the RCP did not recommend any changes to the tests and examinations carried out by the MAP.

The baseline tests currently carried out on MAP patients by St. Thomas's Hospital on the MAP's behalf are very similar to those which were in place at the time of the RCP audit in 1995. They are as follows:

Full blood count and sedimentation rate (FBC/ESR)
Full biochemical screen, including renal function tests (urea, electrolytes and creatinine), liver function tests (LFT), calcium and blood sugar
Immunoglobulin analysis
Creatine kinase
Thyroid function tests (TFT)
Serological screening tests
Chest X-ray (CXR)
Ultrasound abdominal scan
Electrocardiogram (ECG)
Urinalysis
Peak-flow lung measurement (to determine the necessity for vitalography)

A management audit of the MAP has recently been conducted, looking at all aspects of patient care and the service provided by the Programme. A final report is in preparation and MOD expects to receive this shortly. We intend that this will be made public in due course. This work will then be followed by a clinical audit which will include a review of the range of tests and examinations currently undertaken at the MAP.

The tests listed are the baseline investigations at the MAP; additional investigations and/or referrals to other consultants/specialists are sometimes required for particular patients. As part of this, any tests which are considered clinically appropriate by the examining MAP physician, which could include those to detect the presence of uranium, are arranged. However, MAP physicians have not so far considered it clinically necessary to conduct tests on any MAP patients to detect the presence of uranium.

Contrary to some recent media reports, the MOD is not conducting testing in relation to the possible exposure of Gulf veterans to DU, secret or otherwise.

On 16 December 1998, *Official Report*, columns *520–22*, I announced that I had asked my officials to collate the information which the Department possesses concerning mechanisms which could be used to test for the presence of uranium in the human body. I expect to publish the results of this work shortly and will make arrangements for copies to be placed in the Library of the House.

The MAP is not a research programme and it is not involved in any research concerning DU. Although the Ministry of Defence is funding a range of studies into aspects of Gulf veterans' illnesses, none of these are specifically aimed at investigating the relationship between possible exposure to DU and the illnesses being experienced by some Gulf veterans.

The Ministry of Defence is well aware that a link has been suggested between DU exposure and Gulf veterans' illnesses. However, this is only one of a number of factors which have been suggested as causes of Gulf veterans' illnesses and, pending further medical and scientific evidence, MOD is keeping an open mind on this issue. MOD would be very interested to see any new relevant information on this subject.

Personnel Strategy

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will set out his Department's Armed Forces Overarching Personnel Strategy. [74651]

Mr. Doug Henderson *[holding answer 4 March 1999]:* A key outcome of the Strategic Defence Review was a widespread recognition of the need for an Armed Forces Overarching Personnel Strategy. We are currently developing this important strategy, which will be a major contribution to improving the joint environment in which the Armed Forces will increasingly work. We will keep the House fully informed as this work matures.

Special Advisers

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the meetings since May 1997 held with representatives of the British defence industry by each of his special advisers. [74642]

Mr. George Robertson *[holding answer 4 March 1999]:* Both special advisers meet representatives of the British defence industry in the course of their duties.

Mr. Bernard Gray has particular responsibilities in relation to defence procurement and industrial policy and is therefore in day-to-day contact with a wide variety of industry representatives.

Government to Government Programme

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Swindon, South (Ms Drown) of 26 January 1999, *Official Report*, columns *173–74*, if he will list the customer Governments which contributed to the cost of project offices for Government to Government programmes, stating in each case the size of receipts; and what the total receipts were in the three previous financial years. [76125]

Mr. Spellar: The customer Governments which contributed to the cost of project offices for Government to Government defence programmes are those of Kuwait, Malaysia and Saudi Arabia. Details relating to the level of contributions made are confidential between Her Majesty's Government and the customer Governments concerned. I am therefore withholding that information under the provisions of Exemption 1 of Part II of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

AWE Aldermaston

Mr. Salter: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he has had with Hunting-Brae over replacing the Pangbourne pipeline with an evaporator following the enforcement notice served on AWE Aldermaston by the Environment Agency. [76018]

Mr. Spellar: The Enforcement Notice served on 9 February made no reference to the Pangbourne pipeline. There is no requirement at present to replace it. However, AWE has for some years been examining the best environmental choices for all its discharges, which includes consideration of evaporators and absorbers and the MOD Compliance Office at Aldermaston have been involved in this work. If, at some point in the future, replacement is considered necessary, AWE, the Ministry of Defence and the Environment Agency will have to be satisfied that any alternative offers environmental advantages over the present system.

Mr. Salter: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will place in the Library a copy of the nuclear installations inspectorate's licence of AWE Aldermaston. [76020]

Mr. Spellar: I have arranged for a copy to be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Trigat

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to sign the Memorandum of Understanding in respect of Medium Range Trigat. [76063]

Mr. Spellar: We are considering whether the UK will participate in the Industrialisation and Production Phase of the collaborative Medium Range TRIGAT programme.

Falklands Military Garrison

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the cost in 1998 of maintaining the Falklands military garrison; and if he will make a statement. [76367]

Mr. Doug Henderson: The outturn cost to the Ministry of Defence of the Falkland Islands Garrison in financial year 1998–99 is expected to be approximately £71 million. This figure relates to the costs incurred by the Commander British Forces Falkland Islands only. It does not include the costs of the RAF airbridge to the Falkland Islands, nor the cost of naval deployments to the South Atlantic. These costs fall to other budgets and are not separately identified.

Ministerial Visits

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the Ministerial visits made to Argentina in 1998. [76366]

Mr. George Robertson: No Ministers from my Department visited Argentina in 1998.

Low-flying Aircraft

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many complaints were received concerning low-flying British military aircraft in 1998. [76266]

Mr. Spellar: 5,102 complaints and inquiries about aircraft operating within the UK Low-Flying System are recorded centrally as having been received by my Department in 1998. These records do not specify the nationality of the aircraft prompting the report and the number of British aircraft concerned could only be identified at disproportionate cost.

JP233 System

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the cost of replacing the Saudi Arabian JP233 system with Paveway 111 bombs; from which budget the money was drawn; at whose request and for what reason the replacement was required; and if he will make a statement. [76278]

Mr. George Robertson: Under the provisions of the Ottawa Convention and the Landmines Act 1998, which came into force on 1 March 1999, the UK cannot continue to support the Saudi Arabian JP233 anti-airfield weapons, which were supplied by the UK under the Al Yamamah project. As explained in a Minute laid before Parliament on 4 February 1999, our offer to destroy Saudi JP233s, to provide 100 Paveway 3s as replacements, and to provide modifications and training to allow the Saudis to operate the new system underlines our commitment to the Ottawa Convention, while maintaining strong relations with a strategically important, friendly country. The estimated cost of these measures is £15–17 million, to be funded by the Ministry of Defence.

Neo-Nazi Groups

Mr. Salter: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on steps taken to curb the activities of neo-Nazi groups reported to have infiltrated sections of the British armed forces. [75987]

Mr. Doug Henderson *[holding answer 11 March 1999]:* Since coming to office we have made very clear our policy on zero tolerance for racism in the Armed Forces. Our priority is for the development of an organisational culture which welcomes racial diversity.

Our policies, applied rigorously and reinforced by strong leadership from the Service Chiefs, are designed to ensure that racism is eliminated.

All personnel, of whatever rank, need to understand that there is no home or hiding place for racist attitudes or behaviour. This must be understood not only by serving personnel but also by potential recruits and society generally. The Armed Forces, as a major institution and public body, are taking a clear stand on this. Prejudice, when encountered, is being challenged. Those who transgress the high standards required are, and will continue to be, dealt with firmly. This will include discharge if appropriate.

It has long been the policy of the Armed Forces that Service life precludes membership of, or support for, groups or organisations whose purpose includes incitement to racial hatred and violence. All three Services already have in place regulations and instruction which give clear guidance to the Chain of Command on the rules, grounds and process governing membership of groups which is incompatible with Service life. This morning, each Service Chief has written to the Command Chain to remind them of the powers and procedures that are available to them and to ensure they are applied in all appropriate circumstances.

We are continuing to place a high priority on robust awareness training in equal opportunities. Racial equality is an integral part of this; and we have made it mandatory for all senior officers of Brigadier and equivalent level and above to receive such training. Training for remaining personnel has also been strengthened and is being kept under constant review to ensure our priorities are fully reflected and brought to the attention of all personnel at every opportunity.

Harrier Jump-jet

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what type of aircraft the Government expects to replace the Harrier jump-jet at the end of its service life. [76088]

Mr. Spellar: As announced in the Strategic Defence Review, a Future Carrier-Borne Aircraft (FCBA) will replace the Royal Navy Sea Harrier and Royal Air Force Harrier from around 2012. A strong contender for FCBA is a variant of the US Joint Strike Fighter (JSF) and the UK is currently participating in the Concept Demonstration Phase. We are also assessing a number of other options including a navalised Eurofighter, Rafale-M, F/A 18E/F and an Advanced Harrier variant.

Brit Awards

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list those Ministers in his Department who were present at the recent Brit awards in an official capacity, indicating the organisation acting as their sponsor or host. [76647]

Mr. George Robertson: I was the only Minister from my Department to attend the Brit Awards this year, and was invited by the British Phonographic Institute. I have recorded my attendance with the Registrar of Members Interests.

Weaponry Gifts

Mr. Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what gifts of weaponry have been made by the United Kingdom Government to *(a)* overseas Governments and *(b)* armed forces since 1 January 1990. [76044]

Mr. George Robertson: According to central records, gifts of weaponry by Her Majesty's Government to overseas Governments and armed forces since 1 January 1990 are as follows:

(a) Overseas Governments:

Australia—Gannet MkT5 aircraft

Belize—Harrier GR3, stores and equipment (which included ammunition)

Canada—FV 433 Abbott, 4 x Ferret scout cars, 2 x Chieftain main battle tanks, and other (unspecified) armoured vehicles

Chile—Harrier GR3 aircraft

Czechoslovakia—Phantom aircraft

Germany—Harrier, Phantom, Hastings aircraft, FV 432 armoured vehicle,

Ferret scout car, 2 x Centurion main battle tanks

Jordan—Hunter aircraft (and spares)

Luxembourg—25 pounder gun

Lebanon—500 x self loading rifles

Norway—Canberra aircraft

Nepal—70 x light machine guns, self loading rifles and light machine guns, ancillaries for light machine gun

Romania and Bulgaria (gifted through the Western European Union)—combat support boats,

Zimbabwe—1000 rounds of ammunition

(b) Armed forces:

Baltic Peacekeeping Battalion—anti-tank weapons

France—AR Martel missiles

Netherlands—rifle

Nepal—15 x Ferret scout cars, Ferret spares

Our records do not show whether an item listed as gifted to an overseas Government was destined for that Government's armed forces. Most of the larger items of equipment shown as gifted to overseas Governments were surplus and were destined for national museums or to museums having official status.

CABINET OFFICE

Press Releases

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office if he will set out the conventions governing the propriety and cost of press releases issued by his Department, its agencies and non-departmental bodies; and what is the total cost of the press releases issued since May 1997. [71474]

Mr. Kilfoyle *[holding answer on 16 February 1999]:* Rules governing the work of the Government Information and Communication Service are laid down in the "Guidance on the work of the Government Information Service", published by the Cabinet Office in July 1997. More specific guidance on the writing and issuing of press releases is given in the "Working Guide for Government Information Officers". Copies of both these documents have been placed in the Libraries of the House.

The cost of press releases by the Cabinet Office and its agencies since May 1997 is approximately £42,500. Details relating to the Central Office of Information can only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office how many press releases have been issued by his Department, its agencies and non-departmental bodies in each of the years 1990 to 1998. [71473]

Mr. Kilfoyle *[holding answer on 16 February 1999]:* The total number of press releases issued by the Cabinet Office and its agencies between 1980 and 1998 was 1,449. This can be broken down as follows:

Year	*Number of press releases*
1998	305
1997	189
1996	218
1995	330
1994	272
1993	47
1992	43
1991	42
1990	3
Total	1,449

The Central Office of Information issued 28 press notices in its own right in 1998. However, records dating further back are not maintained.

Appointments

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office if he will list those people he has appointed to public bodies since 1 November 1998, indicating the positions to which they have been appointed and if they receive remuneration. [76414]

Mr. Kilfoyle: The public bodies for which my right hon. Friend is responsible as Minister for the Cabinet Office and Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster are: the Civil Service Appeal Board; the Better Regulation Task Force; the Advisory Committee on Advertising; and the Advisory Committee for Justice of the Peace in Lancashire, Greater Manchester and Merseyside. The following appointments have been made since the 1 November 1998:

The Better Regulation Task Force

Members

Ms Matti Alderson

Ms Deidre Hutton

Civil Service Appeal Board

Deputy Chairperson

Mr. P. D. Jones

Member, Official Side Panel

Ms S. Brown

Mr. E. McGivern

P. S. Draper

Member, Trade Union Side Panel

Mrs. A. Berney

Mrs. P. Braby

No member of any Cabinet Office Public Body receives a salary. Members of the Civil Service Appeal Board receive a fee per daily attendance.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

British Business

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list the ambassadors for British business with whom she has met, the dates on which she met them, and the topics discussed. [74435]

Clare Short: I have met with the following "ambassadors for British business" on the dates and times indicated:

	Date	*Topics discussed*
Sir David Barnes	02.11.99	Responsible business issues
Sir John Browne	08.07.99	Shared a platform at the speech I gave to the Institute of Directors
Anita Roddick	17.12.97	Fair and ethical trade
Sir Richard Sykes	14.05.99	'Roll Back Malaria'
Adair Turner	17.09.99	Fairtrade
Lord Paul	on a number of occasions, most recently on 15 December 1998	Charitable issues, including education

Electronic Red Boxes

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will name the Ministers in her Department who are regular users of electronic red boxes. [76183]

Clare Short: We have no electronic red boxes.

Zimbabwe

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment she has made of the organisational development project with the Zimbabwe Republic Police. [76281]

Clare Short: This project aims to provide efficient and accountable police services to the people of Zimbabwe, especially the poor and disadvantaged. Recent reviews indicate that it is making good progress. The Zimbabwe Republic Police are already working more closely with local communities in the planning and delivery of improved police services.

Special Advisers

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list the total number of occasions when *(a)* departmental and *(b)* non-departmental special advisers have travelled abroad in an official capacity since 2 May 1997. [76827]

Clare Short: Between 2 May 1997 and 28 February 1999, my Special Advisers have made visits overseas on 12 occasions in an official capacity. All travel complied with the requirements of the Ministerial Code and the Civil Service Management Code.

Commonwealth Development Corporation

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development (1) what progress has been

made in determining the tax treatment of future private investments in the Commonwealth Development Corporation; [76780]

(2) if the details of the tax treatment of future private investments in the Commonwealth Development Corporation will be available to the House before the second reading of the Commonwealth Development Corporation Bill. [76779]

Clare Short: I intend to introduce amendments at Committee stage to the Commonwealth Development Corporation Bill to cover tax provisions.

Brit Awards

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list those Ministers in her Department who were present at the recent Brit awards in an official capacity, indicating the organisation acting as their sponsor or host. [76655]

Clare Short: Neither myself nor the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State attended the Brit awards.

Casa Alianza

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what funding her Department has provided to Casa Alianza in the last five years. [76755]

Clare Short: None.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) pursuant to his answer of 16 February 1999, *Official Report*, column *739*, on Iraq, from whom he received the account of the episode relating to the 16-year-old Iraqi youth; [72887]

(2) when he will reply to the question from the hon. Member for Linlithgow of 22 February, on the episode relating to the 16-year-old Iraqi youth (ref 72887). [75497]

Mr. Fatchett *[holding answers 25 February and 8 March 1999]:* I received the information from my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence.

Nepal

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what representations he has made to the Government of Nepal concerning the disappearance of Mr. Rajendra Dhakal, Chairman of the Forum for the Protection of Human Rights in Grakha District; [76273]

(2) what reports he has received relating to the disappearance of nine passengers following police arrests in Kailai District in Nepal on 4 February; [76272]

(3) what reports he has received of the arrest and alleged torture of Mr. Shaha, President of the District Bar Association and the People's Concern Movement in Nepal; [76252]

(4) what reports he has received relating to killings in the town of Jajarkot in Nepal. [76274]

Mr. Fatchett: We have only very limited knowledge of these specific cases which arise in the more general context of the "People's War" being waged in the mid-Western region of Nepal. We have raised with the Government of Nepal on several occasions our concerns about reports of human rights abuse by the police.

Slovak Nationals

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received concerning the need for Slovak nationals to obtain visas in order to visit the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement. [R] [76262]

Ms Quin: Our decision to introduce visas for Slovak nationals was taken only after careful thought, and as a practical and temporary step to address a practical problem.

Ministers have taken every opportunity to raise the issue with their Slovak opposite numbers. We are pleased that the Slovak Government are determined to tackle the problems which compelled us to take this action.

We review our visa regime at regular intervals. We will lift the requirement as soon as we are confident that the problems which led to the imposition of the visa regime will not reappear.

Sierra Leone

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the arrangements to enable citizens of Sierra Leone to visit the United Kingdom for business or training purposes; and when he expects to resume the issuing of visas to enter the United Kingdom to people applying in Freetown. [76445]

Mr. Fatchett: The British High Commission in Freetown is still closed. Citizens of Sierra Leone seeking a visa to visit the United Kingdom may apply at any British Diplomatic Mission offering a full entry clearance service. For other categories of visa, applicants who would in normal circumstances submit their application in Freetown are required to apply at British Diplomatic Missions in Dakar, Banjul or Abidjan. The security situation in Freetown is being monitored carefully. UK Based staff will return to Post as soon as it is safe to do so. Visa issuing will resume as soon as practicable thereafter.

Senator Pinochet

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs who was informed by the Head of the Latin America and Caribbean Department following his telephone conversation at midday in Friday 16 October 1998, of the nature of his conversation with the Chilean Ambassador concerning Senator Pinochet's travel arrangements. [76430]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: The Head of the Latin America and Caribbean Department informed other FCO officials of his conversation with the Chilean Ambassador on 16 October about Senator Pinochet's travel arrangements.

Pakistan (Human Rights)

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the human rights abuses towards Christians in Pakistan on which he has received reports. [76157]

Mr. Fatchett: We have received several reports of alleged persecution against religious minorities in Pakistan, including Christians. I raised our concerns on this issue with the Minister of Law during my visit to Pakistan in February.

European Commissioners

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make it his policy to place in the Library all new declarations of European Commissioners' interests. [76286]

Ms Quin: Copies of all new declarations of European commissioners' interests will be placed in the Library when they are made available by the Commission.

General Affairs Council

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which EU bodies were instructed at the General Affairs Council of 22 and 23 February to examine EU support for the peace process. [76284]

Mr. Fatchett: The General Affairs Council of 22 and 23 February tasked all EU bodies, including the European Commission and the EU Special Envoy, Ambassador Moratinos, the European Commission, to examine how the EU can continue to support the peace process.

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Leicester, South (Mr. Marshall) of 5 March 1999, *Official Report*, columns *940–42*, on the General Affairs Council, if he will place in the Library a copy of the paper presented by the presidency on work in progress to prepare for entry into force of the Amsterdam Treaty; what was the nature of the discussion on the Schengen Acquis; when the Committee of Permanent Representatives plans to meet to consider the paper; and if he will make a statement. [76369]

Ms Quin: I have arranged for a copy of the Presidency paper to be placed in the Library of the House. There was no detailed discussion of it at the 22 February General Affairs Council. The paper was a report on the existing situation, and there are no plans for further discussion of it.

India (Human Rights)

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the human rights abuse towards Christians in India on which he has received reports. [76156]

Mr. Fatchett: We have received various reports of attacks on religious minorities in India. The following table, giving the number of attacks against Christians in India in 1998 and to 20 February this year, was provided by the Indian Minister of Home Affairs to the Indian Parliament on 24 February. I have raised our concerns with the Indian authorities on several occasions most recently during the visit to London by the Indian Prime Minister's national Security adviser, Mr. Mishram, on 20 January.

	January 1998 to December 1998			*January 1999 to 20 February 1999*		
States	*Number of incidents*	*Number of persons killed*	*Number of persons injured*	*Number of incidents*	*Number of persons killed*	*Number of persons injured*
Andhra Pradesh	1	—	—	—	—	—
Arunachal Pradesh	1	—	—	—	—	—
Bihar	4	1	2	1	—	—
Dedar & Nagar Haveli	1	—	1	—	—	—
Delhi	1	—	—	—	—	—
Gujarat	48	—	23	13	—	—
Haryana	1	—	—	—	—	—
Kerala	6	—	—	4	—	11
Karnataka	1	—	—	—	—	—
Madhya Pradesh	3	—	—	3	—	—
Maharashtra	9	—	—	1	—	1
Orissa	3	—	—	4	3	2
Punjab	1	—	—	—	—	—
Tamil Nadu	3	—	6	2	—	—
Uttar Pradesh	2	—	5	2	—	—
West Bengal	—	—	—	1	—	—
Total	85	1	37	31	3	14

Chilean Embassy

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on how many occasions over the period 14 to 15 October 1998 representatives from the Chilean Embassy contacted his Department's representatives in London. [76431]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: While we do not keep comprehensive records of telephone calls, we are not aware of any contact between representatives of the Chilean Embassy and the FCO on 14 October. For details of the conversation with the Chilean Embassy on 15 October, I refer the right hon. Member to my replies to the hon. Member for Windsor (Mr. Trend) on 25 January 1999, *Official Report*, column *149*, and 1 February 1999, *Official Report*,

columns 496–97, and to my reply to the hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs. Gillan) on 10 February 1999, *Official Report*, columns 294–95.

Malta

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which Ministers are planning to pay an official visit to Malta in the next four months. [76429]

Ms Quin: I plan to pay an official visit to Malta during the first week in May.

James Miles and Paul Loseby

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what sentences were imposed on James Miles and Paul Loseby at the time of the trial and at the time of the appeal. [76426]

Mr. Fatchett: James Miles and Paul Loseby were each sentenced to four years imprisonment at trial which was increased to five years at appeal. The Public Prosecutor has appealed against the five year sentence and the case is currently with the Supreme Court.

Sanctions Policy

Ms Ryan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the Government's policy is on sanctions; and if he will make a statement. [77194]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: The Government have recently completed a wide-ranging review of its sanctions policy. All Whitehall Departments with an interest in sanctions were involved in the review.

As a result, the Government have decided to launch a new policy of better targeted "smarter" sanctions. This will sharpen the focus and effectiveness of sanctions whilst trying to minimise their impact on ordinary people, including children, and on our own commercial and economic interests.

Apart from the threat of or use of force, which will remain essential in the more extreme cases, sanctions are the only coercive measure available to the international community to respond to challenges to international peace and security. The review concluded that they will remain an important tool of our foreign policy.

The review also concluded, however, that better targeting would be likely to enhance the effectiveness of international sanctions and minimise the risk of harm to ordinary people. A range of sanctions, of varying type and severity, is available and different measures may be selected depending on particular circumstances. Comprehensive sanctions should be reserved for cases where the objective is to isolate and contain a very serious transgressor.

The review concluded that although the circumstances in which sanctions are imposed vary from case to case, there are a number of broad principles that should normally be followed. Sanctions should:

be targeted to hit the regime, rather than ordinary people.

include exemptions to minimise the humanitarian impact on innocent civilians.

have clear objectives, including well-defined and realistic demands against which compliance can be judged, and a clear exit strategy.

have effective arrangements for implementation and enforcement by all states, especially be neighbouring countries.

avoid unnecessary adverse impact on UK economic and commercial interests.

The review also agreed a revised set of inter-Departmental procedures for the efficient imposition, amendment, and lifting of sanctions, as well as for their enforcement and monitoring. These will further improve co-ordination between Whitehall Departments on sanctions issues.

I shall keep the House informed of current sanctions and their scope on a yearly basis. All new sanctions or any amendments to existing sanctions will be announced at the time. We shall shortly be laying in the Library of the House a list of all sanctions imposed by the UK. An updated version will be laid in the Library annually (or more frequently if policy changes require a revision).

Yemen

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what contact the British Embassy in Yemen has had with human rights groups in the past year; and if he will make a statement. [76203]

Mr. Fatchett: Our Embassy in Sana'a has provided modest financial support for human rights organisations operating in Yemen. It has assisted with inward and outward visits by MPs and other officials, including projects run by the Westminster Foundation for Democracy, to help improve good government. We have also provided assistance in training judges and related officials on national and international human rights law and its application in the court-room. We are looking to continue similar cooperative projects in the future.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Government of Yemen concerning human rights and cases of kidnapping. [76204]

Mr. Fatchett: We regularly raise our concerns about human rights issues with the Yemeni Government. I refer my hon. Friend to my previous answer (76203) and the answer I gave him on 1 March 1999, *Official Report*, column 606. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has also raised with the Yemeni Prime Minister, our concerns about the incidence of kidnapping in Yemen, especially where UK nationals have been involved.

European Citizenship

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his Department's interpretation of the expression "true European citizenship" in Recital 6i of COM(98)0331-C4–0511/98–98/0197(COD); and if he will make a statement on his Department's policy on this matter. [76432]

Mr. Charles Clarke: I have been asked to reply.

The European Commission's proposals for an action programme for youth from the year 2000 include the objective of promoting active citizenship among the young people of Europe. The Government are participating positively in negotiations with other Member States on the content of the new programme.

TREASURY

Passported Benefits

Mr. Webb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer to which passported benefits recipients of *(a)* working families tax credit and *(b)* disabled persons tax credit will be entitled. [71500]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 16 February 1999]:* The Government are committed to ensuring that Working Families Tax Credit and Disabled Persons Tax Credit recipients who need it continue to receive the help provided by passported benefits through for example, the NHS Low Income Scheme, the Social Fund Maternity and Funeral Payments, the Home Energy Efficiency Scheme and legal advice and assistance.

Green Transport

Mr. Baker: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what research his Department has carried out on the effects of the taxation of employee' benefits from green transport plans; and if he will make a statement. [74854]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 5 March 1999]:* Inland Revenue and Treasury officials have had discussions about the present tax rules with officials at the Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions, who are in the lead in carrying out the research concerning green transport plans referred to in the Integrated Transport White Paper.

Alcohol Smuggling

Mrs. Dean: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what measures he will take to make up for the loss of revenue caused by the smuggling of alcohol. [75491]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 8 March 1999]:* Customs and Excise estimate that the revenue lost from the smuggling of alcohol in 1998 was £220 million, which is a little over 2 per cent. of total alcohol revenue receipts. Revenue leakage caused by smuggling and fraud is a factor that the Chancellor of the Exchequer takes into account when taking his Budget decisions.

The Government take all excise smuggling very seriously and are committed to tackling the problem. A comprehensive set of measures resulting from recommendations made in the Alcohol and Tobacco Fraud Review is currently being implemented.

Mortgage Lending (Code of Practice)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will make a statement concerning the lending practices of The Money Store, Kensington and other non-status lenders; [74194]

(2) if he will investigate the effect *(a)* Private Label, *(b)* The Mortgage Operation and *(c)* other mortgage packaging companies have on the customer's choice of product; [74195]

(3) if he will put forward legislation to ensure that the fees that non-status lenders and mortgage packaging companies pay to lenders are disclosed. [74196]

Mr. Love: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what monitoring his Department is undertaking regarding compliance with the industry code of mortgage lending practice; what percentage of lenders and intermediaries now subscribe to the code; what future consultation is planned with the industry regarding the impact of the code; and if he will make a statement. [74178]

Ms Hewitt: All aspects of the mortgage market will be taken into account when considering whether mortgage advice should be regulated under the Financial Services and Markets Bill.

Church Buildings (VAT)

Mr. McDonnell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received on the proposal to exempt from VAT payments works to church buildings. [75171]

Ms Hewitt: Treasury Ministers have received numerous letters asking for a zero rate of VAT for repairs to church buildings. Repairs to all existing buildings have always been standard rated. Under the provisions of the sixth VAT directive we cannot introduce a new zero rate.

Stamp Duty Reserve Tax

Mr. Burnett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimates he has made of the loss of stamp duty reserve tax on cross-border mergers and take overs for the tax year 1998–99 through United Kingdom companies creating bearer shares denominated in foreign currency which are put into a depositary or clearance system. [74126]

Ms Hewitt: The proposed measure announced on 29 January to close a Stamp Duty Reserve Tax loophole relating to cross-border takeovers and mergers by UK companies is intended to protect the revenue from shares and other securities which is provisionally estimated to be £2.6 billion in 1998–99.

Mr. Burnett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the gross yield from stamp duty reserve tax for the tax year 1998–99. [74127]

Ms Hewitt: Net receipts from stamp duty (including stamp duty reserve tax) on transactions of shares and other securities are provisionally estimated to be £2.6 billion in 1998–99.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Select Committee Reports

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if *(a)* she, *(b)* civil servants in her Department or *(c)* special advisers in her Department have (i) had sight of drafts of select committee reports, in whole or in part, or (ii) been informed of conclusions of select committee reports prior to their publication by the select committees. [75878]

Marjorie Mowlam: I refer the right hon. Member to the answer given by the Prime Minister to the hon. Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire) on 1 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *531*. There have been no instances of members of Select Committees giving me, or my ministerial colleagues, drafts of Select Committee reports, or of parts of reports including their conclusions, before publication. Nor to the best of my knowledge have there been any occasions on which members of Select Committees have given such material to civil servants or special advisers in my Department. This excludes embargoed copies of reports issued under House of Commons Standing Order 116.

Prisoners

Mr. MacKay: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what powers she has to halt the early release of prisoners convicted of scheduled offences within the meaning of the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Acts 1973, 1978, 1991 and 1996. [70138]

Mr. Ingram: The early release of prisoners following the Belfast Agreement takes place in accordance with the provisions of the Northern Ireland (Sentences) Act 1998. Under that legislation, the Secretary of State must specify any organisation which she believes is concerned in Northern Irish terrorism, or in promoting or encouraging it, and has not established or is not maintaining a complete and unequivocal ceasefire. Prisoners who support a specified organisation are not eligible for early release.

In addition the Secretary of State has the discretion under the Act to make an order suspending the operation of the whole scheme. Whether to make such an order would require my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State, to make a judgment in the round, taking into account all relevant factors pertaining at the time.

WALES

Hepatitis C

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many people in Wales are currently suffering from hepatitis C; and of these, how many have contracted the condition as a consequence of receiving contaminated blood products in the course of NHS treatment. [75561]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: It is not known how many people in Wales are currently suffering from hepatitis C. However, data are available on newly diagnosed cases reported from laboratories although cases may not be identified until years after the infection is acquired. 1,030 newly identified cases of hepatitis C were reported to Communicable Disease Surveillance Centre Wales (CDSC) from laboratories in Wales between 1995 and 1997. Of these 28 were reported where blood transfusion or blood product receipt was a possible risk factor (although other risk factors may have also been present). The Haemophilia Society reports that there are 105 people infected with hepatitis C through their National Health Service treatment with blood products. A number of NHS patients other than haemophiliacs will have acquired hepatitis C infection.

Following the transfer of functions, this issue will be a matter for the National Assembly.

Mixed-sex Hospital Wards

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many mixed-sex wards there are in NHS hospitals in Wales; and if he will make a statement. [76213]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: The information requested is not collected centrally.

Following the transfer of functions, this issue will be a matter for the National Assembly.

National Assembly

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement about the intended use of Crickhowell House following the completion of the permanent Assembly building. [76220]

Mr. Michael: Crickhowell House will continue to provide the permanent accommodation for the majority of Assembly Members and their direct support staff once the new building is available for use. It will also continue to house a significant number of Assembly staff and officials, including the support staff of the Cabinet Secretariat and Office of the Presiding Officer.

The temporary debating chamber has been designed to have a secondary use, and in conjunction with the adjacent space will provide an excellent facility for conferences, seminars, broadcasting, meetings and training events. The temporary committee rooms will help satisfy the expected demand for additional meeting rooms.

Following the transfer of functions, these issues will be a matter for the National Assembly.

Dental Services

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the difference between the public expenditure estimate for general dental services in Wales in 1997–98 and the cost outturn. [75321]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: The public expenditure estimate for gross general dental services in Wales for 1997–98 was £75.1 million and the cost outturn was £76.9 million, a difference of £1.8 million.

Following the transfer of functions, this issue will be a matter for the National Assembly.

Source:

Welsh Office Departmental Report 1998–99 and Appropriation Account 1997–98.

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many adults have been seen by dentists under NHS regulations in each health authority area in each of the last three years for which figures are available. [75325]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: Information on the number of adult courses of dental treatment paid for under NHS regulations is given in the following table. It should be noted that one adult may have more than one course of treatment during a year.

Adult courses of dental treatment

Health Authority	*1995–96*[1]	*1996–97*	*1997–98*
Bro Taf	—	323,151	342,422
Dyfed Powys	—	200,078	209,149
Gwent	—	247,599	260,096
Morgannwg	—	276,136	286,479
North Wales	—	309,824	347,795
Wales	1,349,622	1,356,788	1,445,941

[1] Data for current Health Authority areas are not available prior to their re-organisation on 1 April 1996

Following the transfer of functions, this issue will be a matter for the National Assembly.

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what changes by health authority area have taken place in dental registrations of *(a)* children and *(b)* adults since the introduction of the 15 month registration period. [75332]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: The 15 month registration period was introduced in September 1996 and information on the percentage of the population registered with a dentist for NHS care for each quarter from that date to September 1998 is given in the following table. Prior to September 1996 the registration period for adults ran for two years from the date of registration or re-registration; the registration period for a child ran from the date of registration or re-registration to the 31 December of the following year.

The introduction of the 15 month period for adults and action by the Dental Practice Board to remove duplicate registrations, has led to a decrease in the number of adult registrations in all Health Authorities.

The main effect of the introduction of the 15 month period for child registrations has been to remove the seasonal effect resulting from the lapse of all child registrations at the end of each year. This last occurred in December 1997 and since that date the pattern of registrations has levelled out in all Health Authorities.

Percentage of population registered with a dentist for NHS care

	Bro Taf	*Dyfed Powys*	*Gwent*	*Morgannwg*	*North Wales*	*Wales*
Adults						
30 September 1996	52.0	48.9	52.7	63.8	46.8	52.5
31 December 1996	51.4	48.1	52.2	63.8	47.3	52.2
31 March 1997	51.4	46.9	52.4	63.9	48.2	52.3
30 June 1997	51.3	46.4	52.4	64.1	48.8	52.3
30 September 1997	51.7	46.5	52.2	64.3	49.6	52.6
31 December 1997	51.7	47.2	52.8	64.8	51.4	53.3
31 March 1998	48.7	44.2	50.3	62.0	48.9	50.6
30 June 1998	46.5	41.8	48.4	59.3	47.6	48.5
30 September 1998	43.9	39.7	46.6	56.7	45.9	46.4
Children[1]						
30 September 1996	60.9	59.6	62.8	73.3	60.0	63.0
31 December 1996	62.1	61.4	65.0	75.5	62.1	64.8
31 March 1997	54.9	54.2	57.1	67.0	55.9	57.5
30 June 1997	58.7	57.7	61.1	71.8	60.1	61.5
30 September 1997	61.6	60.0	63.6	74.3	62.9	64.2
31 December 1997	64.1	62.5	66.2	76.4	66.3	66.8
31 March 1998	56.9	55.8	59.3	69.0	59.9	59.9
30 June 1998	57.2	55.3	59.6	68.6	60.5	60.0
30 September 1998	56.8	54.8	59.6	68.1	60.8	59.8

[1] Aged 17 or under

Following the transfer of functions, this issue will be a matter for the National Assembly.

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what percentage of treatments requiring prior approval from the Dental Practices Board was submitted to dental reference officers for further examination in each of the last three years; what percentage was refused; and what was the *(a)* shortest, *(b)* longest and *(c)* average time taken to consider these submissions. [75310]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: Information for 1995–96 is not available.

In 1996–97, 6 per cent. of prior approval applications in England, Wales and the Isle of Man were referred to dental reference officers for further investigation and 71 per cent. of these patients were seen ie 4 per cent. of the total number of applications. In 1997–98, 9 per cent. were investigated further and 56 per cent. of patients were seen ie 5 per cent. of the total number of applications.

Of those patients seen in 1996–97, the dental officer had a fundamental disagreement with the treatment plan in 0.47 per cent. of cases and had a major disagreement in 4.72 per cent. of cases. For patients seen in 1997–98, there was a fundamental disagreement in 0.38 per cent. of cases and a major disagreement in 3.48 per cent. of cases. However, refusal to give approval takes place only after further consultation at the Dental Practice Board.

In 1996–97, the quickest approval was given in 45 days, the average time taken was 85 days, and the longest time taken was 138 days. In 1997–98, the equivalent periods were 46, 97 and 124 days respectively.

Following the transfer of functions, this issue will be a matter for the National Assembly.

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement about current audit and peer review projects for general dental practitioners; what assessment he has made of their effectiveness, value for money and prospects for further development; and what plans he has for additional financial support. [75312]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: A Peer Review scheme for general dental practitioners (GDPs) in Wales was introduced as a pilot in September 1991. The pilot scheme has been twice reviewed by outside consultants, and on each occasion it was concluded that the scheme was a valuable initiative. The latest review in June 1996 reported favourably on the cost effectiveness and benefit for patients.

The Peer Review scheme and Audit for GDPs is well established. An Assessment Panel composed of representatives from the dental profession and the Welsh Office, is responsible for the funding, probity, training and development in Wales.

Details concerning the budget for Peer Review in 1999–2000 will not be known until the end of March. Funding for dental audit will fall within the Clinical Governance remit of Local Health Groups which all have dental membership on their boards.

Following the transfer of functions, this issue will be a matter for the National Assembly.

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he expects to receive the report of the Health Authorities' Chief Executives' Group on oral and maxillofacial services in South Wales. [75315]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: The South Wales Health Authorities' review of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery Services is expected to be completed by October. The conclusions of the report will be for health authorities to consider and take forward.

Following the transfer of functions, this issue will be a matter for the National Assembly.

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what percentage of all types of dental treatment in each of the last three years was referred to a dental reference officer for scrutiny; and what percentage was declared to be *(a)* of poor quality and *(b)* invalid. [75317]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: Information for 1995–96 is not available. Of courses of treatment scheduled for payment for England, Wales and the Isle of Man in 1996–97 and 1997–98, about 0.5 per cent. and 0.6 per cent. respectively were referred to a dental reference officer for scrutiny.

Of those patients seen, the Dental Officer had a major or fundamental disagreement with the treatment in 1.75 per cent. of cases in 1996–97 and 1.37 per cent. of cases in 1997–98. These percentages cover both poor quality and invalid treatments. The Dental Officer was unable to comment in 3 per cent. of cases seen in 1996–97 and 4 per cent. in 1997–98.

Following the transfer of functions, this issue will be a matter for the National Assembly.

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement about the problems of providing satisfactory dental services in rural areas and the steps taken to deal with them since 1 April 1998. [75327]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: I recognise that, in the more rural parts of Wales, patients who are not registered with a dentist can sometimes find it difficult to obtain NHS dental treatment close to home.

Stage 2 of the Welsh Office dental initiative, launched on 10 July 1998, introduced more flexible conditions specifically designed to address the particular problems being encountered in rural parts of Wales. It offers the possibility of enhanced levels of grant aid for dentists who want to open new part-time or branch practices in certain areas where this would be the best way of meeting local needs.

Following the transfer of functions, this issue will be a matter for the National Assembly.

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what changes have taken place, by health authority area, in child dental registrations since June 1996; and what steps he has taken to encourage the registration with a general dental practice of children up to five years of age. [75331]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: The information requested is as follows:

Health authority	30 June 1996 Number	30 June 1996 Percentage	30 September 1998 Number	30 September 1998 Percentage
Bro Taf	102,012	57.7	100,975	56.8
Dyfed				
Powys	59,450	57.0	56,965	54.8
Gwent	81,648	60.4	80,728	59.6
Morgannwg	79,872	70.5	76,968	68.1
North Wales	85,050	57.7	89,408	60.8

Changes introduced in September 1996 brought the child registration system in line with the adult system, with both running for a period of 15 months from the date of registration or re-registration. Prior to this child registrations ran from the date of registration or re-registration to the 31 December of the following calendar year, which created a seasonal pattern in registrations. The change was fully effective by the end of December 1997 but care should be taken when comparing data from different times of the year where one quarter was prior to September 1996 as data are not strictly comparable.

Despite general improvements in the oral health of the population, and of children in particular, there are considerable regional variations. Even in areas where the prevalence of tooth decay is low, there remain pockets of disease frequently related to social deprivation. The Department has developed a targeted incentive scheme to increase the registration of children in their early years. This will deliver enhanced fees to dentists for registered patients aged 5 and under who live in specified areas.

Following the transfer of functions, this issue will be a matter for the National Assembly.

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of the need for facilities for dento-alveola surgery. [75319]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: None. Dento-alveolar surgery is mostly carried out within the facilities of primary dental care. Dento-alveolar surgery requiring more specialist treatment is provided by Hospital Dental Services based in District General Hospitals and it is for Health Authorities to assess local need for such facilities.

Following the transfer of functions, this issue will be a matter for the National Assembly.

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what estimate he has made of the number of dentists required in each health authority area to provide a satisfactory level of service. [75323]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: It is a matter for local health authorities to satisfy themselves of the adequacy of dental manpower in light of local needs. Health Authorities are free to make a case for Welsh Office grants to attract new general dental practitioners, subject to funding being available and criteria being met.

Following the transfer of functions, this issue will be a matter for the National Assembly.

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales following the publication of the Poswillo Inquiry, how many general dental practitioners underwent training in anaesthesia and equipped their practices to comply with the appropriate recommended safety levels; and what contribution the Welsh Office made towards this training. [75328]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: In 1992, £0.5 million was made available in Wales to assist the delivery of the exacting standards of the Poswillo Report wherever general anaesthesia, sedation were being provided.

The funding was available for:

Community and Hospital Dental Services: £310,000

Postgraduate Dental Education Facilities: £80,000

General Dental Services: £105,000

Resuscitation Manuals: £5,000.

As far as I am aware, no general dental practitioner in Wales underwent the postgraduate training for Non-Consultant Anaesthetists organised under the syllabus agreed by the Royal College of Anaesthetists, and the Faculties of Dental Surgery and General Dental Practitioners. A one-off uniform grant of £7,000 was available for individual practitioners or practices who were able to meet certain specified criteria, but there were no eligible applications. The resuscitation manuals were distributed to every NHS dental practice and to vocational trainees.

Following the transfer of functions, this issue will be a matter for the National Assembly.

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has for the development of community dental services. [75320]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: It is a matter for each Health Authority to determine, in the light of local circumstances, the appropriate level of Community Dental Service provision for its area.

The Welsh Office dental initiative, first launched in 1995, enables Welsh Health Authorities to offer grant aid for Community Dental Service expansion. To date, grant aid has been awarded for 13 additional posts in the CDS.

Following the transfer of functions, this issue will be a matter for the National Assembly.

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many dentists are employed by NHS trusts in their community dental services; how many children were treated in the last year for which figures are available in each trust; and how many treatments were made in each trust. [75322]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: The information is given in the following table:

Community dental service 1997–98

NHS trust	(a) Dentists	(b) Children treated	(c) Total treatments
Cardiff Community Healthcare	9.2	3,842	19,288
Carmarthen and District	1.3	459	2,509
Ceredigion and Mid Wales	2.3	2,959	9,004
Clwydian Community Care	15.9	5,014	45,043
Glan-y-Mor	8.8	6,022	20,492

Community dental service 1997–98

NHS trust	(a) Dentists	(b) Children treated	(c) Total treatments
Gwent Community	13.2	7,244	26,072
Gwynedd Community	5.6	4,920	16,442
Llandough Hospital and Community	4.1	2,977	10,977
Llanelli Dinefwr	3.6	2,521	7,256
Pembrokeshire and Derwen	4.6	3,176	13,892
Powys Health Care	5.9	2,688	10,005
University Dental Hospital	20.1	17,100	50,071

(a) Whole-time equivalent of dentists working in the community dental service at 30 September 1997 (excluding locums).

(b) First contact in the financial year for children aged 15 or under.

(c) Total contacts, all ages. May include examination only.

Following the transfer of functions, this issue will be a matter for the National Assembly.

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the impact of differences between health authority areas in the average number of dental registrations per dentist on dental health; and what steps have been taken to reduce such differences. [75326]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: A variety of factors determine the average list size of general dental practitioners, including the fact that as independent contractors, they can tailor list sizes according to their working practices and business requirements.

Current information on dental disease levels in the adult population is not presently available but surveys of children aged 5, 12 and 14 are regularly carried out by the British Association for the Study of Community Dentistry. Current information available from those surveys shows no correlation between list sizes and disease levels.

The Welsh Office is committed to improving the health and well being of the population of Wales and to reducing inequalities in health status. The primary aim of the Welsh Office dental initiative has been designed to address those inequities both in the provision of NHS services and in the dental health of the population.

Following the transfer of functions, this issue will be a matter for the National Assembly.

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what percentage of fees paid to dentists was deducted to cover allowable expenses; and what was the *(a)* average, *(b)* highest and *(c)* lowest income recorded for dentists in each of the last five years for which figures are available. [75311]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: The calculation of General Dental Practitioners' average earnings and expenses follow the convention established for the Dental Rates Study Group (DRSG)[1] of focusing on a subset of principal dentists who have been under contract for the previous year without substantial breaks in service. The information about dentists' expenses is derived from a confidential survey of a sample of dentists' practice accounts, undertaken by the Inland Revenue. Only DRSG principals are included in the sample.

Expenses, as a percentage of gross earnings, for General Dental Practitioners (in Great Britain) for the period 1991–92 and 1994–95 were:

1991–92: 54.0

1992–93: 53.9

1993–94: 55.7

1994–95: 54.6.

For the combined year 1995–96 and 1996–97 results from a survey of non-associate dentists indicate that, for all GDS dentists, expenses as a percentage of gross earnings would be around 56.8 per cent., the rise from 1994–95 reflecting in part the treatment of capital allowances.

The other information requested is not readily available on a Wales only basis and I will write to my hon. Friend as soon as possible.

[1] The Dental Rates Study Group comprises representatives of Health Departments and the dental profession. Its main responsibility is to make recommendations on dentists' fees after taking into account practice expenses.

Following the transfer of functions, this issue will be a matter for the National Assembly.

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the dental practice incentive scheme and the extent to which it has led to an increase in *(a)* the number of general dental practitioners and *(b)* the number of adults and children being seen and treated under NHS regulations. [75314]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: The primary aim of the scheme was, and still is, to enable Health Authorities to attract new NHS dentists into those parts of Wales where they were most needed.

Grants have already been paid for 33 new practices and 29 expanded practices. There are also another 3 practices and 7 expanding practices for which grant offers have been made.

The number of dentists working in the General Dental Service in Wales is at an all-time high of 955—a 9 per cent. increase since September 1995 when the scheme was first launched.

The number of courses of treatment for adults increased from 1.35 million in 1995–96 to 1.45 million in 1997–98. Comparable data for children are not available.

Following the transfer of functions, this issue will be a matter for the National Assembly.

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many treatments requiring prior approval from the Dental Practices Board were submitted in each of the last three years; how many were refused; and what was the *(a)* shortest, *(b)* longest and *(c)* average time taken to consider these requests. [75318]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: The number of prior approval applications, which relate to England, Wales and the Isle of Man, received by the Dental Practice Board and the number of these referred for investigation is as follows:

	Prior approval applications	*Number referred*
1995–96	548,753	[1]—
1996–97	548,741	33,126
1997–98	554,584	49,833

[1] Not available

The number of applications referred in 1995–96 is not available.

The shortest time for dealing with applications was one day.

The longest time for approval was:

Days

	Referral not required	*Referral required*
1995–96	138	[1]—
1996–97	35	138
1997–98	45	124

[1] Not available

The average time for approval was:

Days

	Referral not required	*Referral required*
1995–96	5	[1]—
1996–97	6	85
1997–98	5	97

[1] Not available

Following the transfer of functions, this issue will be a matter for the National Assembly.

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of the advantages of dentists participating in information management and technology programmes; and what financial support he intends to provide for such in-service development. [75329]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: The Welsh Office will be publishing a Strategic Framework for Information Management and Technology for Health Care and Health Improvement in Wales in mid-March.

66 per cent. of NHS general dental practitioners in Wales are already linked electronically to the Dental Practice Board, (DPB), and utilising information management and technology systems. Grants of £900 are available from the DPB to dentists, intending to establish electronic links, for the purchase of suitable computer systems.

The Directors of Dental Public Health for each of the Welsh Health Authorities, with advice and financial support from the Welsh Office, commissioned the Dental Public Health Unit of the University of Wales College of Medicine to carry out a project to assess the information technology requirements of the Community Dental Service in Wales. The recommendations from the project report will be considered within the provisions of the Strategic Framework.

Following the transfer of functions, this issue will be a matter for the National Assembly.

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list, by health authority area, dental practices *(a)* which accept all NHS patients, *(b)* whose NHS lists are closed, *(c)* which accept additional family members only on NHS lists and *(d)* which accept children for NHS treatment only if parents are private patients. [75333]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: The information requested is not held by the Welsh Office. Each Health Authority maintains a list of practices with contracts to provide NHS dental services within its area. These authorities are best placed to provide the most up-to-date information to any patient who needs advice on the current acceptance policies of local practices.

Following the transfer of functions, this issue will be a matter for the National Assembly.

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what estimate he has made of the number of dentists that need to be trained in Wales to ensure *(a)* the maintenance of the present level of service and *(b)* that his dental health targets are met. [75324]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: Long-term requirements for the numbers of medical and dental staff are modelled at a UK level and both the Department of Health and the Welsh Office receive advice on staffing in Dentistry from the Advisory Group in Medical and Dental Education, Training and Staffing (AGMETS). This Group brings together members of the professions and their regulatory bodies, the academic and research communities, the higher education sector, NHS and patients representatives as well as Welsh Office and Department of Health officials.

Within Wales the Dental Sub-Committee of our national advisory committee—the Medical and Dental Manpower and Education Committee (MeDMEC)—has set as its priority the examination of manpower in primary dental care. The Welsh Office has also funded a research project to investigate factors affecting the recruitment and retention of dentists which is to be carried out by the Postgraduate School of the University of Wales College of Medicine. This work will result in a robust assessment of the needs of the Principality as well as providing information from the situation in Wales to assist wider considerations at UK level.

Following the transfer of functions, this issue will be a matter for the National Assembly.

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of the cost of clinical waste collection and water service charges for general dental practices; to what extent these costs are accounted for in the payments made to dentists for NHS work; and what plans he has to make changes to the reimbursement of dentists in respect of these costs. [75330]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: Information about dentists' expenses, including those referred to in this question, is derived from a confidential survey of a sample of dentists' practice accounts, undertaken by the Inland Revenue. These expenses are taken into account in determining the fee scale and include the costs of clinical waste collection. There are no plans to change this arrangement.

Following the transfer of functions, this issue will be a matter for the National Assembly.

Water Fluoridation

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement about the impact of *(a)* the fluoridation of water and *(b)* the cessation of fluoridation of water in Anglesey on the dental health of children; and what studies his Department has conducted on the impact of fluoridation and of the withdrawal of fluoridation on the general health of the population. [75316]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: The topping up of water supplies with fluoride to one part per million reduces tooth decay in young children by at least 50 per cent. and confers lifelong oral health gains. Since the cessation of fluoridation in Anglesey, tooth decay in young children there has increased by 168 per cent.

Respondents to the Welsh Office Green Paper "Better Health, Better Wales", published in May 1998, were overwhelmingly in favour of fluoridation. The Welsh Office is considering the responses in conjunction with other health departments which have undertaken similar consultation exercises.

Following the transfer of functions, this issue will be a matter for the National Assembly.

Psychiatric Care (Children)

Mr. Livsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many children in Wales have been admitted to psychiatric care for each year since 1992. [76907]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: Information on the number of in-patient admissions for children (aged under 16) for psychiatric care is given in the following table. It should be noted that a child may have been admitted more than once during the period.

In-patient admissions[1]

Year	*Amount*
1992	574
1993	480
1994	444
1995	444
1996	481
1997	483

[1] Data are coded by International Classification of Diseases (ICD)-9 until March 1995 and by ICD-10 thereafter. The codes included are: ICD-9:317 to 319, ICD-10:F70 to F79 (mental retardation), ICD-10:F80 to F89 (disorders of psychological development) and ICD-9:290 to 316, ICD-10:F00 to F69 and F90 to F99 (all other psychiatric/mental illness).

Following the transfer of functions, this issue will be a matter for the National Assembly.

Mr. Livsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what evaluation his Department has undertaken of *(a)* individual social services department's policy and *(b)* individual psychiatric services in relation to children excluded from school in the last five years. [76903]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: An analysis of children's services plans of Welsh local authorities (1997) identified weaknesses in planning for unmet needs, though some authorities had set targets in relation to children excluded from school.

The Welsh Office is funding, through the Welsh Office of Research and Development (WORD), a project in Swansea which is evaluating strategies for reducing school exclusion.

In its response to Sir William Utting's report of the Children's Safeguards Review, the Government undertook to issue guidance on school exclusion and pupil support relevant to looked after children. Local Education Authorities will also have to set targets for reducing school exclusions as part of their education strategic plans which are to come into effect from 1 September 1999.

The Government's proposals for the reform of children's services include objectives to ensure that children in need and those looked after obtain maximum benefit from educational opportunities.

The Welsh Office is developing a Strategy for Child and Adolescent Mental Health services, with the help of an Advisory Group. The needs of children excluded from school will be taken into account in developing this Strategy.

Following the transfer of functions, this issue will be a matter for the National Assembly.

Health Authorities (Debts)

Mr. Livsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish for each area and health authority in Wales the level of total debt *(a)* in cash terms and *(b)* as a percentage of income. [76921]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: I will write to the hon. Member as soon as possible and place a copy of my reply in the Library of the House.

Residential Care Homes

Mr. Livsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many people in Wales are in residential care homes in the most recent year for which figures are available in the *(a)* 16 to 64, *(b)* 65 to 74, *(c)* 74 to 84 and *(d)* 85 years and over age groups; and in each of those categories if he will list the numbers funded by (i) the local authority on a means tested basis, (ii) the individuals themselves and (iii) the Department of Social Security through presented rights. [76906]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: The numbers of people in residential care homes in Wales at 31 March 1998 are shown in the following table.

Age group	*Local authority homes*	*Independent homes*	*All homes*
16–64 years	522	1,544	2,066
65–74 years	562	965	1,527
75–84 years	1,711	3,009	4,720
85 and over	2,390	4,664	7,054
Age unknown	7	218	225

Although information on sources of funding is requested from each home, it does not cover all residents. Excluding residents whose source of funding is not known, the proportions of people receiving support from each different source are shown in the following table. A more detailed age breakdown is not available.

Percentage

Age group	*Local authority*	*Private means*	*DSS preserved rights*
Under 65 years	44	7	49
Over 65 years	49	28	23

Following the transfer of functions, this issue will be a matter for the National Assembly.

NHS Trusts

Mr. Livsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the *(a)* M1 management costs, *(b)* M2 management costs and *(c)* management consultancy costs (i) in total and (ii) as a percentage of income for each NHS trust in Wales for the last five years. [76920]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: *(a)(b)* Figures for M1, which consist of salary costs of only the more senior managers, together with the costs of management consultancy and M2, which adds in the salary costs of all other staff who work in corporate management function of NHS trusts, are available for 1995–96 to 1997–98. Prior to the introduction of the M1 and M2 measures, figures are given for "management costs".

(c) Information on management consultancy costs is not held centrally.

The information is given in the following tables.

	1997–98				*1996–97*			
NHS trusts	*M1(A) Total £000*	*M1 Percentage of total income(C)*	*M2(B) Total £000*	*M2 Percentage of total income*	*M1 Total £000*	*M1 Percentage of total income*	*M2 Total £000*	*M2 Percentage of total income*
Bridgend & District	2,695	3.01	3,785	4.22	2,412	2.87	3,477	4.13
Cardiff Community	1,949	3.11	3,022	4.82	1,935	3.23	2,949	4.92
Carmarthen & District	1,312	2.99	1,849	4.21	1,243	2.98	1,766	4.24
Ceredigion & Mid Wales	979	3.77	1,433	5.52	913	3.56	1,323	5.15
Clwydian Community Care	2,390	3.47	3,423	4.97	2,360	3.55	3,444	5.18
Derwen	—	—	—	—	913	3.74	1,314	5.38
East Glamorgan	1,515	2.84	2,552	4.78	1,480	2.87	2,449	4.75
Glan Clwyd	1,935	2.76	2,965	4.23	1,902	2.78	2,995	4.37
Glan Hafren	3,414	2.62	5,346	4.10	3,079	2.50	5,059	4.12
Glan Y Mor	2,149	2.90	2,879	3.89	2,060	2.80	2,686	3.65
Gwent Community	1,981	3.19	2,579	4.15	2,128	3.48	2,682	4.39
Gwynedd Community	1,518	2.82	2,131	3.95	1,558	2.95	2,171	4.11
Gwynedd Hospitals	2,009	3.02	2,829	4.26	2,001	3.07	2,890	4.43
Llandough Hospital	2,085	3.11	3,429	5.12	2,166	3.37	3,536	5.50
Llanelli Dinefwr	934	2.75	1,437	4.23	875	2.61	1,358	4.05
Mid Glamorgan Ambulance	672	6.74	776	7.78	626	6.73	710	7.63
Morriston Hospital	2,190	2.57	3,657	4.30	1,847	2.37	3,300	4.23
Nevill Hall	1,401	2.92	2,301	4.79	1,317	2.82	2,158	4.62
North Glamorgan	2,037	3.24	2,835	4.51	1,870	3.03	2,750	4.46
North Wales Ambulance	722	5.08	1,047	7.37	661	4.79	1,063	7.71
Pembrokeshire	—	—	—	—	1,785	3.98	2,565	5.72
Pembrokeshire & Derwen (F)	2,758	3.99	3,785	5.48	—	—	—	—
Powys Healthcare	1,700	3.82	2,465	5.53	1,663	3.70	2,480	5.52
Rhondda Healthcare	1,349	3.86	1,797	5.14	1,292	3.93	1,717	5.23
South East Wales Ambulance	841	4.44	1,182	6.24	1,015	5.52	1,808	9.84
Swansea	1,677	2.45	2,254	3.29	1,598	2.50	2,168	3.39
University Dental Hospital of Wales	304	3.31	421	4.58	266	2.96	395	4.40
University Hospital of Wales	5,678	3.00	7,320	3.87	5,603	2.99	7,431	3.96
Velindre Hospital	689	3.72	969	5.23	712	4.11	1,037	5.99
West Wales Ambulance	653	5.07	751	5.83	624	5.07	787	6.39
Wrexham Maelor	1,779	2.79	2,401	3.76	1,631	2.67	2,327	3.81
Total	51,315	3.11	73,620	4.46	49,535	3.10	72,795	4.56

NHS trusts	1995–96 M1 Total £000	1995–96 M1 Percentage of total income	1995–96 M2 Total £000	1995–96 M2 Percentage of total income	1994–95 (D)(E) Total £000	1994–95 (D)(E) Percentage of total income	1993–94 (D)(E) Total £000	1993–94 (D)(E) Percentage of total income
Bridgend & District	1,942	2.81	2,824	4.09	1,558	2.43	1,635	2.69
Cardiff Community	2,115	3.63	2,977	5.12	—	—	—	—
Carmarthen & District	1,241	3.06	1,701	4.20	1,207	3.19	1,133	3.06
Ceredigion & Mid Wales	911	3.79	1,324	5.50	831	3.59	790	3.48
Clwydian Community Care	2,399	3.66	3,390	5.17	2,385	3.72	3,205	5.27
Derwen	976	4.25	1,383	6.02	955	4.25	—	—
East Glamorgan	1,316	2.59	2,280	4.48	1,678	3.54	—	—
Glan Clwyd	1,729	2.77	2,824	4.52	1,702	2.94	1,865	3.37
Glan Hafren	3,017	3.14	5,079	5.29	2,633	2.82	2,824	3.10
Glan Y Mor	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Gwent Community	2,278	3.78	2,847	4.72	2,699	4.70	2,567	4.57
Gwynedd Community	1,684	3.36	2,279	4.55	1,636	3.42	—	—
Gwynedd Hospitals	1,944	3.18	2,957	4.83	1,982	3.28	—	—
Llandough Hospital	2,442	4.09	3,847	6.44	2,520	5.00	2,698	5.89
Llanelli Dinefwr	872	2.74	1,314	4.14	812	2.62	1,024	3.38
Mid Glamorgan Ambulance	617	7.15	800	9.27	1,002	12.86	—	—
Morriston Hospital	1,795	2.43	3,051	4.14	1,609	2.59	—	—
Nevill Hall	1,377	3.17	2,174	5.01	1,463	3.59	—	—
North Glamorgan	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
North Wales Ambulance	623	4.78	982	7.54	516	4.20	—	—
Pembrokeshire	1,863	4.32	2,564	5.94	1,873	4.46	2,053	4.95
Pembrokeshire & Derwen (F)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Powys Healthcare	1,668	3.86	2,453	5.67	1,882	4.90	2,301	5.50
Rhondda Healthcare	1,189	3.73	1,514	7.74	993	3.40	—	—
South East Wales Ambulance	1,691	9.32	2,116	11.66	1,054	6.00	661	4.11
Swansea	1,442	2.43	1,963	3.31	1,233	2.27	1,426	2.73
University Dental Hospital of Wales	230	2.71	346	4.07	—	—	—	—
University Hospital of Wales	5,388	3.23	7,231	4.33	—	—	—	—
Velindre Hospital	722	5.22	960	6.94	619	5.85	—	—
West Wales Ambulance	558	5.08	716	6.52	—	—	—	—
Wrexham Maelor	1,670	2.89	2,352	4.08	1,881	3.50	1,664	3.39
Total	45,699	3.40	66,248	4.92	36,723	3.60	25,846	3.93

(A) M1—Management costs as defined in the guidance issued by the Audit Commission in 1995 and 1996.
(B) M2—Management and Administration costs as defined in the guidance issued by the Audit Commission in 1995 and 1996.
(C) Total income—Comprises income from activities and other operating income of NHS trusts.
(D) M1 and M2 data were not recorded in NHS trust annual accounts prior to 1995–96.
(E) Management cost figures as quoted in PQ 875/95/96.
(F) On 1 April 1997, Pembrokeshire NHS Trust and Derwen NHS Trust merged to form the Pembrokeshire and Derwen NHS Trust.
Source:
Audited Annual Accounts of NHS Trusts from 1993–94 to 1997–98

Following the transfer of functions, this issue will be a matter for the National Assembly.

Mr. Livsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will provide up to date information on termination payments made by NHS trusts or health authorities in Wales to *(a)* chief executives and *(b)* general and senior managers including the numbers and amounts. [76908]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: The information requested is not held centrally.

Following the transfer of functions, this issue will be a matter for the National Assembly.

NHS Advertising Cost

Mr. Livsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much the NHS spent on advertising costs in each region in Wales in each year since 1993–94. [76904]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: This information is not collected centrally.

Following the transfer of functions, this issue will be a matter for the National Assembly.

European Structural Funds

Mr. Livsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much *(a)* Objective 1 and *(b)* Objective 2 money is forecast to come to Wales from Europe in each of the next five years; and whether the total amount of matched funding will be drawn from existing Welsh Office budgets. [76918]

Mr. Michael: As the hon. Gentleman well knows, the European Commission has not yet agreed the level of resources to be made available to the UK and consequently Wales for its new Structural Funds programmes. The Government will review the distribution of EC receipts when the sums involved are known.

Mr. Livsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many times he has met Treasury officials and ministers during the last six weeks to discuss matched funding for *(a)* Objective 1 and *(b)* Objective 2. [76919]

Mr. Michael: Ministers and officials are in regular dialogue on all matters of policy, including those referred to.

NHS Surplus Properties

Mr. Livsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list *(a)* for the last five years all those surplus NHS properties in Wales that realised more than £100,000 when sold and *(b)* for the next five years all those surplus NHS properties which he expects will realise more than £100,000. [76926]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: The information requested is given as follows:

List of Surplus NHS Properties that realised more than £100,000 when sold.

1993–94

St. Cadocs Hospital—Land for highway improvement
No. 1 Clase Drive, Morriston
No. 6, 10, 22, 24 Clase Drive, Morriston
Norton Villa Clinic, Swansea
Park Beck, Swansea
St. David's Hospital, Brecon
Mill House, Abergavenny
Taffs Well Health Centre, Cardiff
Cefni Hospital site, Anglesey
91, Gorwel, Llanfairfechan
Coed Du Hospital, Flintshire
"Romano" (House), Wrexham
Fforestfach Health Centre, Swansea
Mount Pleasant Hospital, Swansea
Hill House Hospital, West Glamorgan
Parc Hospital, Bridgend

1994–95

Abercynon Health Centre
Computer Centre, Velindre Road, Cardiff
Blackmill Hospital, Bridgend
Llanelli General Hospital site
Land at Lluesty Hospital, Flintshire
Wrexham War Memorial Hospital
Pool Park Hospital, Denbighshire
Garth Angharad Hospital, Dollgellau
William Nicholl Home (part), Cardiff

1995–96

Narbeth Health Centre, Pembrokeshire
William Nicholl Home (remainder)

1996–97

Coryton Crescent, Cardiff
Pen-y-Fai, Bridgend
"The Laurels", Bronllys, Brecon
Energlyn Hospital, Caerphilly

1997–98

Ty Bronna, Cardiff
Y Bwthyn, Bridgend
Llynfi Hospital, Maesteg
Brynhyfryd Hospital, Forden, Powys

List of Surplus NHS Properties which are on the open market and are expected to realise more than £100,000 when sold.

Property name

Ely Hospital, Cardiff
Lansdowne Hospital, Cardiff
St. David's Hospital, Cardiff
Prince of Wales, Rhydlafar
Llys Maldwyn Hospital, Powys
Mid Wales Hospital, Talgarth
Brynyneuadd Farm, Conwy
North Wales Hospital, Denbigh
St. David's Site, Bangor.

Following the transfer of functions, this issue will be a matter for the National Assembly.

Mr. Livsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list *(a)* for the last 10 years how much money was realised from the sale of surplus properties by the NHS in Wales, *(b)* for the next 10 years how much money he estimates will be realised from the sale of surplus properties by the NHS in Wales and *(c)* who holds the proceeds of such sales. [76924]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: *(a)* The list for the last 10 financial years of money realised from sale of surplus properties is as follows:

	£
1997–98	1,292,290.91
1996–97	3,476,827.34
1995–96	4,632,554.78
1994–95	5,153,481.48
1993–94	5,248,581.69
1992–93	6,424,523.95
1991–92	2,868,401.31
1990–91	1,587,358.47
1989–90	5,474,541.85
1988–89	1,789,803.35

(b) The money estimated to be realised from sale of surplus properties in the next 10 financial years is approximately £30 million.

(c) Until 1994–95 most of the proceeds of sale were returned to Health Authorities. Since then the normal procedure is for sale proceeds to be retained by the Welsh Office and used to part fund the All Wales Capital Programme. Health Authority and Trusts may retain the receipt for a related capital development on production of a sufficiently convincing business case. Following the transfer of functions, this issue will be a matter for the National Assembly.

Clinical Negligence Claims

Mr. Livsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many clinical negligence claims in Wales were settled by individual trusts in the last year. [76922]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: The information is not centrally available in the format requested. However, the numbers of cases for those losses categories which can contain clinical negligence claims are in the following table.

NHS trust	Category 5 Compensation under legal obligation	Category 7(b) Clinical negligence with advice	Category 7(d) Other clinical negligence and personal injury	Total
Bridgend and District	0	88	0	88
Cardiff Community	0	1	1	2
Carmarthen and District	0	15	0	15
Ceredigion and Mid Wales	0	6	0	6
Clwydian Community Care	1	1	1	3
East Glamorgan NHS	2	9	6	17
Glan Clwyd	27	0	0	27
Glan Hafren	0	47	3	50
Glan y Mor	0	0	0	0
Gwent Community	1	0	0	1
Gwynedd Community	0	0	0	0
Gwynedd Hospitals	0	3	0	3
Llandough Hospital	0	4	0	4
Llanelli Dinefwr	0	9	0	9
Mid Glamorgan Ambulance	45	0	0	45
Morriston Hospital	0	7	0	7
Nevill Hall	0	13	0	13
North Glamorgan	4	3	0	7
North Wales Ambulance	0	0	0	0
Pembrokeshire/Derwen	1	16	0	17
Powys Healthcare	0	0	0	0
Rhondda Healthcare	0	13	0	13
South East Wales Ambulance	61	4	0	65
Swansea	0	42	0	42
University Dental Hospital	2	0	0	2
University Hospital of Wales	0	14	2	16
Velindre Hospital	0	0	0	0
West Wales Ambulance	0	27	27	54
Wrexham Maelor	0	21	21	42
Total	144	343	61	548

Notes:
1. Categories 5 and 7(d) may contain cases other than clinical negligence.
2. Category 5 comprises claims paid under court order or settlement.
3. Category 7(b) includes claims paid on the basis of legal advice.
4. The data presented are based on cases approved in the financial year and payments may have been made in previous financial years.

Source:
Annual accounts of NHS trusts 1997–98

Following the transfer of functions, this issue will be a matter for the National Assembly.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Livsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if he will list the amount as a percentage of their special transitional grant for the last five years spent by each local authority in Wales in the independent sector; [76910]

(2) if he will list the amount spent on home care by each local authority in Wales as a percentage of their special transitional grant for the last five years. [76911]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: In Wales the Care in the Community initiative was not funded through a special transitional grant, as it was in England, but was instead distributed as part of the revenue support grant settlement. The distribution of the additional resources was identified as part of the settlement announcement each year and are given in table 1. The amounts spent by each local authority on personal social services in the independent sector are given in table 2. The latest available information on home care expenditure for each local authority in Wales is given in table 3.

Table 1: distribution of the additional resources made available in each local government settlement for care in the community

£000

	1993–94	1994–95	1995–96	1996–97	1997–98	1998–99
County councils						
Clwyd	6,830	9,173	7,269	—	—	—
Dyfed	4,627	5,953	4,728	—	—	—
Gwent	5,548	7,193	5,716	—	—	—
Gwynedd	3,543	4,476	3,545	—	—	—
Mid Glamorgan	5,081	6,289	4,996	—	—	—
Powys	1,597	2,009	1,596	—	—	—
South Glamorgan	4,916	6,264	4,981	—	—	—
West Glamorgan	5,371	7,094	5,626	—	—	—
County/county borough councils						
Isle of Anglesey	—	—	—	608	462	494
Gwynedd	—	—	—	1,143	897	920
Conwy	—	—	—	1,087	856	935
Denbighshire	—	—	—	868	688	731
Flintshire	—	—	—	1,083	830	941
Wrexham	—	—	—	1,007	769	898
Powys	—	—	—	1,125	877	887
Ceredigion	—	—	—	631	494	489
Pembrokeshire	—	—	—	944	733	800
Carmarthenshire	—	—	—	1,652	1,299	1,343
Swansea	—	—	—	2,037	1,574	1,685
Neath Port Talbot	—	—	—	1,311	1,036	1,093
Bridgend	—	—	—	1,081	835	917
The Vale of Glamorgan	—	—	—	908	691	790
Rhondda, Cynon, Taff	—	—	—	2,312	1,807	1,766

Table 1: distribution of the additional resources made available in each local government settlement for care in the community

£000

	1993–94	1994–95	1995–96	1996–97	1997–98	1998–99
Merthyr Tydfil	—	—	—	574	444	435
Caerphilly	—	—	—	1,367	1,051	1,158
Blaenau Gwent	—	—	—	634	490	533
Torfaen	—	—	—	692	530	615
Monmouthshire	—	—	—	666	522	560
Newport	—	—	—	1,107	846	920
Cardiff	—	—	—	2,387	1,833	2,092
Total	37,514	48,449	38,457	25,224	19,565	21,000

Table 2: the amounts spent by each local authority on personal social services in the independent sector

£000

	1993–94	1994–95	1995–96	1996–97	1997–98	1998–99
County councils						
Clwyd	4,142	11,184	17,179	—	—	—
Dyfed	4,442	8,852	11,418	—	—	—
Gwent	3,740	n/a	17,086	—	—	—
Gwynedd	n/a	6,372	6,277	—	—	—
Mid Glamorgan	2,125	5,926	11,369	—	—	—
Powys	2,290	n/a	5,394	—	—	—
South Glamorgan	7,204	15,169	19,477	—	—	—
West Glamorgan	3,156	10,356	13,614	—	—	—
County/county borough councils						
Isle of Anglesey	—	—	—	3,240	3,904	3,647
Gwynedd	—	—	—	5,633	7,533	8,645
Conwy	—	—	—	5,557	5,443	5,692
Denbighshire	—	—	—	5,817	5,534	5,469
Flintshire	—	—	—	4,112	7,204	7,962
Wrexham	—	—	—	4,178	4,625	5,043
Powys	—	—	—	6,799	7,112	6,019
Ceredigion	—	—	—	3,383	4,086	3,232
Pembrokeshire	—	—	—	4,269	4,763	7,404
Carmarthenshire	—	—	—	6,907	7,706	8,111
Swansea	—	—	—	10,903	11,370	13,283
Neath Port Talbot	—	—	—	5,959	7,479	7,912
Bridgend	—	—	—	3,810	4,613	5,292
The Vale of Glamorgan	—	—	—	2,578	5,874	4,509
Rhondda, Cynon, Taff	—	—	—	9,150	7,557	11,021
Merthyr Tydfil	—	—	—	1,663	2,610	2,238
Caerphilly	—	—	—	5,053	5,734	6,583
Blaenau Gwent	—	—	—	2,442	4,100	4,243
Torfaen	—	—	—	3,743	3,457	4,131
Monmouthshire	—	—	—	3,810	5,312	6,281
Newport	—	—	—	7,116	8,433	9,521
Cardiff	—	—	—	18,239	18,027	21,280
Total	[1]	[1]	101,784	124,352	142,476	157,518

[1] incomplete data

Table 3: Local authority expenditure on home care and home help[1]

£000

	1992–93	1993–94	1994–95	1995–96	1996–97
County councils					
Clwyd	4,979	5,250	8,808	10,570	—
Dyfed	3,579	3,523	5,438	6,294	—
Gwent	7,014	7,461	11,106	13,513	—
Gwynedd	3,587	3,981	5,962	686	—
Mid Glamorgan	9,350	10,683	18,142	18,871	—
Powys	1,799	2,103	2,494	2,354	—
South Glamorgan	3,398	4,315	8,112	9,987	—
West Glamorgan	7,078	6,978	8,905	9,084	—
County/county borough councils					
Isle of Anglesey	—	—	—	—	2,059
Gwynedd	—	—	—	—	3,621
Conwy	—	—	—	—	3,509

Table 3: Local authority expenditure on home care and home help[1]

£000

	1992–93	1993–94	1994–95	1995–96	1996–97
Denbighshire	—	—	—	—	2,669
Flintshire	—	—	—	—	2,689
Wrexham	—	—	—	—	2,734
Powys	—	—	—	—	3,052
Ceredigion	—	—	—	—	1,202
Pembrokeshire	—	—	—	—	2,084
Carmarthenshire	—	—	—	—	3,668
Swansea	—	—	—	—	6,255
Neath Port Talbot	—	—	—	—	4,074
Bridgend	—	—	—	—	4,313
The Vale of Glamorgan	—	—	—	—	3,048
Rhondda, Cynon, Taff	—	—	—	—	10,145
Merthyr Tydfil	—	—	—	—	,3542
Caerphilly	—	—	—	—	4,407
Blaenau Gwent	—	—	—	—	2,797
Torfaen	—	—	—	—	2,757
Monmouthshire	—	—	—	—	1,893
Newport	—	—	—	—	2,654
Cardiff	—	—	—	—	8,281
Total	40,784	44,294	66,967	73,478	80,265

[1] Information for 1992–93 and 1993–94 is for home care related to the elderly and physically/sensory disabled adults. Information for 1994–95 onwards also includes home care for children and their families, the learning disabled and adults with mental health needs

Elderly People (Abuse)

Mr. Livsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of the level of abuse of elderly people in difficult care environments in the last five years. [76905]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: Identification and monitoring of abuse of older people in care and their protection are the responsibility of local and health authorities in Wales. Information is not held centrally on this. We have established a multi-agency working group, including senior police representatives, to make recommendations on the protection of all vulnerable adults including older people. The policy and practice guidance which will be the outcome of this work will be for the National Assembly to consider.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Livsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list those firms that have bid for private finance initiative deals in Wales; which of these bids were successful; and to what the bids related. [76923]

Mr. Hain: The Department does not hold information, other than for its own Private Finance Initiative (PFI) projects, on firms that bid for PFI deals in Wales. The Department does hold information on PFI deals once they have been signed, and this information can be summarised as follows:

Project	*Successful bidder*
Welsh Office IT Network	Siemens Business Systems[1]
Welsh Office A55 (Anglesey)	UK Highways (Tarmac, Laing and Hyder)[2]
Community Hospital at Chepstow	Consortium led by King Sturge and Co.
Staff Residential Accommodation at the new Royal Glamorgan Hospital	Charter Housing
Day Surgery/Endoscopy Unit at Nevill Hall Hospital, Abergavenny	Chiltern Securities
Sterile Services Unit at the University Hospital of Wales	Sterile Services International
Main Entrance and Concourse at the University Hospital of Wales	Healthgate Ltd. (formerly Rockeagle (Health) Ltd.)
Car Parking Facilities at the University Hospital of Wales	Britannia Impregilo/APCOA

Other bidders were:
[1] ICL
[2] Autolink, Road Management Group and Connect

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Genetically Modified Crops

Mr. Gray: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement about the commercial plantation of herbicide tolerant genetically modified crops. [74691]

Mr. Rooker: No commercial plantings of genetically modified herbicide tolerant crops will take place in 1999. The Government are determined to ensure that these crops do not harm the environment. We have therefore reached agreement with the industry on a programme of managed development starting this spring, whereby the first field-scale plantings of the crops will be strictly limited and monitored for ecological effects alongside conventional varieties.

Tetcott and South Tetcott Hunt

Angela Smith: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what sums his Department contributed for the installation of incinerators at the Tetcott and South Tetcott Hunt kennels. [75524]

Mr. Morley: This Department, together with the EU, has provided funds for the purchase and installation of incinerators at Tetcott and Kilkhampton under the English LEADER II Community Initiative Structural Funds

programme. Both projects were submitted by the North Tamar Business Network Group Limited; one of the local groups though which the LEADER programme is being implemented in the South West. The projects are designed to help farmers reduce costs for the collection and disposal of fallen stock in the North Tamar area. The Tetcott project received funding of £3,750 from each of MAFF and the EAGGF. The Kilkhampton project received funding of £5,084 from each of MAFF and the EAGGF.

Rabbits

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in how many research projects, since research on this subject began, *(a)* ferrets and *(b)* shot guns have been considered as a method of rabbit control; and what general conclusions were reached. [75626]

Mr. Rooker: Since 1991–92, the Ministry has funded three research projects which have incorporated information on ferrets and shot guns as methods for rabbit control. The projects involve one research group, whose contracts have been extended for fixed periods following reviews of their work. The information on ferrets and shot guns includes results from research funded by other organisations. This research found that, for ferrets, rabbit populations were reduced by no more than 35 per cent. and, for shot guns, by only 30 per cent. Details for MAFF research for the period prior to 1991–92 could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how much his Department has spent on research on rabbits in each year since 1969; and how many research projects have been funded in that period. [75630]

Mr. Rooker: Information on expenditure on rabbit research from 1991–92 to 1998–99 was provided by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary on 18 June 1998, *Official Report*, column *324*. The estimate provided in that answer for 1998–99 has been revised to £572,000. Details for the period prior to 1991–92 could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the (i) cost, (ii) start date, (iii) planned completion date and (iv) objectives of the research studies *(a)* developing a visual scaring device to deter rabbits, *(b)* developing a rabbit management system, *(c)* developing a method for assessing the size of rabbit population and *(d)* rabbit behaviour and population dynamics at fenced hot spots; and in the case of *(a)* what devices have been considered to date. [75624]

Mr. Rooker: The information is as follows:

(a) Developing a visual scaring device to deter rabbits.

(i) £114,000 (total).

(ii) 1 April 1998.

(iii) 31 March 2001.

(iv) To produce and test a prototype scaring device based on a light beam and adapted to prevent the development of habituation by rabbits.

The research is at early stage. Research to date has involved assessing the response of rabbits to light beams to provide a baseline against which to measure the effectiveness of anti-habituation techniques.

(b) Developing a rabbit management expert system.

(i) £619,000 (total).

(ii) 1 April 1998.

(iii) 31 March 2002.

(iv) To produce yield loss models to calculate the losses caused by rabbits to spring barley and grass and to obtain additional data on rabbit populations to incorporate into an expert system.

(c) Developing a method for assessing the size of rabbit populations.

(i) £154,000 (total).

(ii) 1 April 1998.

(iii) 31 March 2001.

(iv) To develop a method under controlled conditions for assessing rabbit abundance.

(d) Rabbit behaviour and population dynamics at fence hot-spots.

(i) £217,000 (total).

(ii) 1 April 1998.

(iii) 31 March 2001.

(iv) To determine the effects of erecting fencing on rabbit population dynamics and ranging behaviour.

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many research projects have been undertaken by his Department, and at what total cost, *(a)* on the effects of rabbit fencing in preventing crop damage by rabbits, *(b)* to determine effective methods of rabbit control, *(c)* to investigate the breeding habits of rabbits and *(d)* to examine the effects on population levels of allowing rabbits to breed unchecked; and what conclusion they reached in each case. [75628]

Mr. Rooker: *(a)* Six since 1991–92 at a cost of £869,000. This figure relates to whole project costs rather than the proportions of projects specifically addressing fencing. The results of research completed to date have been summarised in an advisory leaflet for landowners and occupiers; a copy of the leaflet has been placed in the Library of the House.

(b) Ten since 1991–92 at a cost of £1.3 million. This figure includes research on fencing. Reports on the results from these projects, where not already covered by my answer of 3 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *792*, have been placed in the Library of the House; their project numbers are:

VC0204

VC0207

VC0208

Where projects have been extended, only the latest report has been placed in the Library.

(c) & *(d)* Three since 1991–92 at a cost of £390,000. These projects cover the development of mathematical models to identify cost-effective rabbit control strategies; they are therefore also included in the cost given in *(b)*. Information on breeding habits and population levels is included in the models to achieve the primary aim of the research relating to rabbit control strategies. The conclusions were given in my answer on 3 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *792*.

Details for the period prior to 1991–92 could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the cost of the research project, developing humane, environmentally acceptable and cost-effective methods of rabbit control; and what assessment it made of the use of ferrets as a means of rabbit control. [75623]

Mr. Rooker: This project has now ended and the total cost was £479,000. An assessment of the use of ferrets for rabbit control was not included.

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many research projects have been undertaken by his Department which have involved predicting the effects of various rabbit populations on crops. [75627]

Mr. Rooker: Since 1991–92, the Ministry has funded seven projects involving prediction of the effects of various rabbit populations on crops; these have now all ended. They consisted mainly of the work of one research group whose contracts have been extended for fixed periods following reviews of the research.

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the cost of the research project, irreversible immunocontraception for the control of wild rabbits; and what was the proposed delivery method of the contraceptive. [75625]

Mr. Rooker: The cost was £178,000. The delivery method under consideration for the species-specific immunocontraceptive was an oral bait. Work is continuing on this topic under the project: "Antigen delivery systems for the control of wild rabbits". If an immunocontraceptive is developed, it will have to be approved under the Medicines Act 1986 and careful consideration will need to be given to all the issues surrounding its use.

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment his Department has made from the research which it has funded of the effects on (i) crops and (ii) young woodlands from a nearby rabbit population which is *(a)* light and *(b)* heavy. [75629]

Mr. Rooker: (i) This topic was covered in the completed research project: "Predicting damage to crops by rabbits". The results are being refined in the project: "Developing a rabbit management expert system". Details of this project are contained in my answer to the right hon. Member's question, ref.75624.

(ii) This completed research has been assessed as part of the Ministry's normal review process. Results from MAFF's research on farm woodlands is made available to farmers. The research was also publicised at a symposium in York on 8 October 1998 addressing MAFF R&D on farm woodlands since 1987. The symposium was attended by organisations with interests in farm woodlands as well as advisers and farmers.

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what synopsis his Department has prepared of the conclusions of the research into the *(a)* effectiveness and *(b)* cost of legal methods of rabbit control; and if he will place a copy in the Library. [75622]

Mr. Rooker: A single synopsis has not been produced. However, three advisory leaflets based on the results of the Ministry's research on fencing and other control techniques have been produced for landowners and occupiers. Copies have been placed in the Library of the Hosue.

Live Animal Imports

Mr. Sawford: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many checks were carried out in respect of live animal imports at British ports of entry in each year from 1990 to the latest year for which figures are available. [75845]

Mr. Rooker: Council Directive 90/425/EEC of 26 June 1990 (as amended) abolished systematic veterinary checks on live animals at internal European Community frontiers. It provides instead for a system of checks at points of origin and random spot checks at points of destination.

Council Directive 91/496/EEC (as amended) concerns veterinary checks on imports entering the Community from third countries and requires that consignments enter the European Community only through an approved Border Inspection Post (BIP). At the Border Inspection Post they must be subjected to documentary, identity, and physical checks before entering free circulation within the Community.

Statistics concerning the number of veterinary checks carried out at Border Inspection Posts (third country imports only) are readily available for 1994 to 1998. Records for earlier years are not available in a form which would permit the extraction of corresponding figures without disproportionate cost.

Year	*Number of veterinary checks on consignments carried out at border inspection posts*[1] *(third country imports)*
1994	6,797
1995	6,550
1996	4,805
1997	7,238
1998	8,826

[1] Based on the number of border crossing certificates issued.

EU Milk Quotas

Mr. Sawford: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what the annual European Union milk quota was for British farmers for each year from 1990 to the latest year for which figures are available. [75838]

Mr. Rooker: The total annual European Union milk quota allocation for the UK for each quota year (which runs from 1 April to 31 March) from 1989–90 to 1998–99 is as follows:

	000 litres
1989–90 and 1990–91	14,359,836
1991–92 and 1992–93	14,084,716
1993–94 and 1998–99	14,166,936

Animal Feed Exports

Mr. Sawford: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what quantity of meat and bonemeal and other high-protein feed products was exported from Britain in each of the last three years of a type which would currently be illegal if used for animal feed in Great Britain. [75837]

Mr. Rooker: Such feed products are not separately identified in official Overseas Trade Statistics.

Within the UK the feeding of mammalian meat and bonemeal to all farmed livestock and the feeding of any mammalian protein (with certain specific exceptions) to ruminants is prohibited. Since February 1996 the State Veterinary Service has conducted a feed sampling programme to monitor compliance with these controls. Two breaches of the feed control legislation have been identified though neither case involved the export of prohibited material.

In addition mammalian meat and bonemeal of UK origin, and animal feed containing it, is included in the EU export ban which came into force in March 1996. No breaches of this ban have been detected.

Bovine Tuberculosis

Charlotte Atkins: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the current research projects funded by his Department to discover the cause of, and possible remedies for, tuberculosis in cattle. [75830]

Mr. Rooker: In addition to the randomised badger culling trial designed by the Bourne Group, the Ministry is currently funding the following research projects:

Understanding the causes of herd breakdown:

A spatial analysis, using GIS, of risk factors associated with TB incidents in cattle herds in England and Wales.

Bovine TB in badgers and the risks to cattle: a spatial analysis.

Modelling badger populations, the epidemiology of natural infection with Mycobacterium bovis, the risk of spread to cattle and the consequences of control.

DNA fingerprinting of samples from badger culling trial.

The effect on the viability of Mycobacterium bovis of freezing samples prior to culture testing.

An assessment of the validity of the current necropsy protocol to detect tuberculous lesions in the badger.

NVL (no visible lesion) tuberculous badger: pathology, immunology and epidemiology.

Evaluating the effectiveness of currently available strategies to reduce herd breakdown:

Badgers and bovine tuberculosis: a proactive strategy for the control of bovine TB in badger populations.

Analysis of European badger (Mycobacterium meles) population dynamics and social organisation in a population naturally infected with Mycobacterium bovis.

The consequences of perturbation caused by badger removal for the control of TB in cattle: a study of behaviour.

Perturbation study (culture and serology for Mycobacterium bovis).

An ecological and epidemiological study of a badger population naturally infected with Mycobacterium bovis.

An epidemiological and ecological study of a badger population naturally infected with Mycobacterium bovis (laboratory support project).

Longitudinal study of natural Mycobacterium bovis in badgers.

Assessment of the humaneness, efficacy, usability and non-target risk of leg-cuffs for capturing badgers.

Developing improved strategies to reduce herd breakdown:

Development of vaccine candidates for protection of badgers against infection with Mycobacterium bovis.

The development of animal models to test candidate vaccines for Mycobacterium bovis in badgers.

Blood tests to distinguish vaccinated from TB infected cattle: Interferon assay to improve diagnostics in reactors.

The research programme for 1999–2000 has been reviewed in the light of the recommendations of the Krebs report and a research requirement document was published in April 1998. Research will be focused on understanding the causes of outbreaks of bovine TB and developing improved strategies to reduce the number of outbreaks, especially by creating a cattle vaccine. For details of the research projects for 1999–2000 I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to our hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew) on 10 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *300*.

Mr. Luff: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of *(a)* the likelihood of the UK's dairy beef herds losing their TB-free status and *(b)* the implications such a development would have for UK agriculture; and if he will make a statement. [76290]

Mr. Rooker *[holding answer 12 March 1999]:* The officially tuberculosis-free (OTF) status of an individual bovine herd within Great Britain is suspended if an animal in that herd reacts positively to a tuberculin test or if, for any other reason, a veterinary inspector suspects that an animal in that herd is infected with tuberculosis.

The EU legislation (Directive 64/432/EEC), as it currently applies, does not provide for member states, or regions of member states, to obtain OTF status. Certain member states and regions have been exempted from the routine herd testing requirements of the Directive by virtue of a Commission Decision, although they have not been granted OTF status as such. This exemption has never applied to any part of the UK.

Amendments to the Directive, which were agreed during the last UK Presidency and will come into effect from 1 July 1999, provide for member states and regions to apply for OTF status. Outside such areas, the Directive allows cattle from herds with OTF status to be eligible for intra-Community trade provided that they are subject to a tuberculin test, with negative results, either 30 days before or 30 days after movement.

Similar testing requirements applied to live cattle entering intra-Community trade from Great Britain prior to 27 March 1996.

Farming White Paper

Mr. Sawford: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he expects to produce a White Paper based on the results of the Future of Farming consultation. [75839]

Mr. Rooker: My officials are in the process of analysing the results of the consultation exercise on Agenda 2000/CAP Reform. These include some 17,000 responses from individual farmers, more detailed comments from a range of organisations and the reports of consultation meetings held across the country. We shall be publishing the results as part of a further consultation paper in the Spring.

Select Committee Reports

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if *(a)* he, *(b)* civil servants in his Department or *(c)* special advisers in his Department have (i) had sight of drafts of select committee reports, in whole or in part, or (ii) been informed of conclusions of select committee reports prior to their publication by the select committees. [75883]

Mr. Rooker *[holding answer 10 March 1999]:* I refer the right hon. Member to the answer given by the Prime Minister to the hon. Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire) on 1 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *531*.

There have been no instances of members of select committees, giving me, or my ministerial colleagues, drafts of select committee reports, or parts of reports including their conclusions, before publication. Nor, to the best of my knowledge, have there been any occasions on which members of select committees have given such material to civil servants or special advisers in my Department. This excludes embargoed copies of reports issued under the House of Commons Standing Orders.

Whales

Angela Smith: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if the Government support the planned joint proposal by Australia and New Zealand to the International Whaling Commission for a whale sanctuary in the Southern Pacific; and if the Government will be actively seeking support from other International Whaling Commission countries for the proposal. [76025]

Mr. Morley: The UK Government strongly support the current International Whaling Commission (IWC) moratorium on commercial whaling and the existing whale sanctuaries. We are opposed to all forms of whaling other than some limited subsistence whaling by indigenous people, and would like to see a permanent, comprehensive international ban on whaling introduced.

We are keen to develop ways of further these objectives and of improving the conservation of whales. We are therefore in favour of the proposal being developed jointly by Australia and New Zealand for a South Pacific Whale Sanctuary, and will strongly support any firm proposal for such a sanctuary that is submitted to the IWC.

Countryside Stewardship Scheme

Mr. Paice: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what the total budget for the Countryside Stewardship Scheme is in each of the next three years in England. [76093]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 11 March 1999]:* The total budget available in the 1999–2000 financial year for the Countryside Stewardship including the main scheme, the Arable Stewardship Pilot Scheme and the Upland Experiment is estimated to be over £32 million. This includes payments to farmers, scheme monitoring costs and the work of the Farming and Rural Conservation Agency (FRCA) and not MAFF administrative costs. Figures for 2000–01 and 2001–02 are not yet available.

Mr. Paice: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many applications were received in England during 1998 to join the Countryside Stewardship Scheme; what area of land they represented; how many were approved; and what area of land they represented. [76095]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 11 March 1999]:* The number of applications received for the Countryside Stewardship Scheme in 1998 was 2,445. Of these, 1,290 agreements have been offered to date, covering an area of 21,919 ha of land. Data on the area of land covered by applications which were rejected or deferred are not recorded.

Mr. Paice: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the total area of farmland in England covered by the Countryside Stewardship Scheme; and what is the area covered by the scheme within the less favoured areas and its proportion of the total LFA area. [76091]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 11 March 1999]:* The total area of land currently under the Countryside Stewardship Scheme in England is 161,896 ha, virtually all of which is managed agriculturally.

The area covered by the scheme in the Less Favoured Areas is approximately 55,500 ha which is 3 per cent. of the total area of LFA.

Quarantine

Mr. Lepper: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he expects to announce proposals on reform of quarantine law. [76221]

Mr. Rooker: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mr. Chope) on 5 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *946*.

Birds (Poisoning)

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if his Department has recorded the number of predatory birds killed by poison in the United Kingdom in the last five years. [76756]

Mr. Rooker: MAFF co-ordinates the Wildlife Incident Investigation Scheme which monitors the effects of pesticides on wildlife. The figures are taken from the annual publication, 'Pesticide Poisoning of Animals—Investigations of Suspected Incidents in the UK'.

This information gives details only of incidents involving pesticides, not all types of poisons. These figures represent incidents where pesticides have been identified by analysis, but which are not necessarily the cause of death.

Year	*Number of pesticide related incidents involving birds of prey and owls*
1993	34
1994	38
1995	31
1996	42
1997	21

Note:
In addition one incident of an owl poisoned by a veterinary medicine has been recorded.

Brit Awards

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list those Ministers in his Department who were present at the recent Brit awards in an official capacity, indicating the organisation acting as their sponsor or host. [76654]

Mr. Nick Brown: None.

Badgers

Mr. McNulty: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he has appointed an external auditor for the randomised badger culling trial. [77232]

Mr. Rooker: In its report of July 1998 to Ministers, the Independent Scientific Group on TB in cattle recommended that an external auditor be appointed to check field operations. Cresswell Associates, Environmental Consultants of Stroud, Gloucestershire, have now been appointed to carry out this work until November 1999. Audit work after that date will be the subject of a further invitation to tender.

HEALTH

Capital Allocations (London)

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health on what basis the Regional Office for London will be allocating the general allocation for capital; and if he will list the amount to be allowed to each London health authority. [75134]

Mr. Denham: The basis for capital allocations is in accordance with the priorities set out in Health Service Circular 1998/214. Initial capital allocations to National Health Service trusts and health authorities are set out in the table. Further allocations will be made throughout the year following approval of business cases.

Initial capital allocation 1999–2000: London Regional Office

Trust/health authority (HA)	*£000*
Barnet Community Healthcare	791
BHB Community Health Care	1,481
Bromley Hospitals	1,720
Camden and Islington Community Health Services	1,470
Chelsea and Westminster Healthcare	4,365
City and Hackney Community Services	861
Croydon Community	240
Ealing Hospital	1,458
Enfield Community Care	850
Forest Healthcare	2,883
Great Ormond Street Hospital for Children	1,800
Greenwich Healthcare	2,760
Guy's and St. Thomas's	22,760
Hammersmith Hospitals	7,840
Haringey Health Care	1,188
Harrow and Hillingdon Healthcare	538
Havering Hospitals	2,915
Hillingdon Hospital	1,707
Homerton Hospital	4,988
Hounslow and Spelthorne Community and Mental Health	656
King's Healthcare	3,800
Kingston and District Community	890
Kingston Hospital	1,320
Lewisham Hospitals	1,720
London Ambulance Service	4,400
Mayday Healthcare	1,360
Moorfields Eye Hospital	938
Newham Community Health Services	815
Newham Healthcare	3,771
North Middlesex Hospital	1,395
Oxleas	631
Pathfinder	730
Queen Mary's Sidcup	1,160
Ravensbourne Priority Health	409
Redbridge Healthcare	3,227
Riverside Community Healthcare	523
Royal Free Hampstead	4,059
Royal National Orthopaedic Hospital	931
St. George's Hospital	3,600
St. Mary's Hospital, Paddington	3,239
Tavistock and Portman	296
Teddington Memorial Hospital	40
Royal Brompton and Harefield	2,651
Royal Hospitals	7,365
Royal Marsden	1,754
Whittington Hospital	2,239
Tower Hamlets Healthcare	1,358
University College London Hospitals	4,394
West Middlesex University Hospital	3,659
Barking and Havering HA	50
Barnet HA	50
Bexley and Greenwich HA	50
Brent and Harrow HA	50
Bromley HA	50
Camden and Islington HA	50
Croydon HA	50
Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow HA	50
East London and the City HA	50
Enfield and Haringey HA	50
Hillingdon HA	50
Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster HA	50
Kingston and Richmond HA	50
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham HA	200
Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth HA	50
Redbridge and Waltham Forest HA	50
Broadmoor Hospital	1,441

Notes:

1. Above list excludes Trusts potentially involved in mergers.

2. Above excludes additional allocations from A&E and Waiting List Capital Modernisation Funds, together with contribution from general allocation which will be used to supplement the money from the Modernisation Fund.

Waiting Lists

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will estimate how many people in each health region are currently waiting for an appointment with a consultant following referral by a general practitioner; if he will provide a breakdown of the length of time for which those people *(a)* have already waited and *(b)* are expected to wait; and if he will list for each region the waiting time being given to new entrants to this waiting list for (i) ear, nose and throat, (ii) trauma and orthopaedic, (iii) general surgery, (iv) ophthalmology and (v) gynaecology consultants. [75041]

Mr. Denham: Available information on waiting times for first outpatient appointments following general practitioner written referral is shown in the table. Information on expected waiting times is not available centrally.

Number of patients in England waiting for first outpatient appointments following a general practitioner written referral, for the quarter ended 31 December 1998

Region	Number who had been waiting 13 to 25 weeks	Number who had been waiting 26 plus weeks
Northern and Yorkshire	36,569	17,764
Trent	35,903	20,784
Anglia and Oxford	34,480	14,850
North Thames	54,606	20,841
South Thames	40,305	15,005
South and West	35,109	17,283
West Midlands	31,366	11,353
North West	54,880	26,534
England	323,218	144,404

Note:
Figures derived from waiting times form QM08 completed by National Health Service trusts each quarter.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people were waiting for hospital treatment in the Mid Essex Hospital Trust area in *(a)* October 1998, *(b)* November 1998, *(c)* December 1998 and *(d)* January 1999. [72888]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 25 February 1999]:* Mid Essex Hospital National Health Service Trust's total waiting list was 11,832 at 31 October 1998; 11,347 at 30 November 1998; 11,359 at the end of December 1998; and 11,172 at the end of January 1999.

Medical School Places

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what is the capacity for expansion of existing medical schools to accommodate the additional medical places required by the NHS; and if he will make a statement; [75455]

(2) what assessment he has made of the Medical Workforce Standing Advisory Committee evaluation of the capacity for clinical positions for students at existing medical schools; and if he will make a statement. [75453]

Mr. Denham: The third Medical Workforce Standing Advisory Committee report did not include a detailed evaluation of the scope for the expansion of student intake at existing medical schools.

The Government have announced that medical school intake in the United Kingdom will be increased by about 1,000 places by the year 2005, to about 6,000. Because of the current distribution of medical school places, the increase will principally affect student intake in England and Wales.

In England, all universities and their National Health Service partners have been invited to submit proposals for a share of the increase in medical student intake by 12 March 1999. The Joint Implementation Group appointed to oversee the increase will consider all proposals, and make recommendations to the Higher Education Funding Council for England, which will announce the allocations later in the year.

Professional Regulation

Ms Moran: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what statutory protection is provided to the patients of (i) paramedics, (ii) chiropodists, (iii) physiotherapists, (iv) clinical psychologists, (v) occupational therapists and (vi) speech therapists in *(a)* the National Health Service and *(b)* the private sector; and what plans he has to introduce measures to provide additional protection. [75224]

Mr. Denham: Chiropodists, physiotherapists and occupational therapists are regulated under the Professions Supplementary to Medicine Act 1960. It is an offence to pretend to be registered under that Act. In addition, employment in the National Health Service is restricted to those who are registered under the Act. We plan to replace the Act with new legislation to improve public protection, including restricting the use of common professional title to registered practitioners wherever they work.

NHS employment of speech and language therapists is restricted to members of the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists. NHS employment of paramedics is restricted to those who have a qualification accredited by the Institute of Health Care Development. We are currently considering petitions to extend the 1960 Act to these two professions.

NHS employment of clinical psychologists is restricted to those who are members of the British Psychological Society. It is for the profession to develop proposals for statutory regulation.

South-west Health Authorities (Funding)

Sir Peter Emery: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) for what reason the South West Health Authorities will receive 3 per cent. increase on previous funding instead of the announced funding figure of 4 per cent. for the year 2000; [74430]

(2) if he will take action to ensure that funding for health care in the South West is maintained at 4 per cent. [74432]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 8 March 1999]:* For 1999–2000 the national average real terms increase was 4 per cent.

We use a weighted capitation formula to determine each health authority's fair share target of available resources. Health authorities which already receive more than the formula suggests is their fair share received less than the average increase. Seven of the eight health authorities in the South West were in this position. In 1999–2000 the region as a whole received 1.4 per cent., or £4.3 million more than the formula suggests is their fair share.

Medicines Control Agency

Mr. Gill: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish the names of the members of the Medicines Control Agency together with a list of their financial interests and research funding. [75726]

Ms Jowell: The Medicines Control Agency (MCA) is a Departmental agency and is accountable direct to Ministers. The staff of the agency are civil servants and are subject to all the normal civil service employment rules, including those covering financial and research interests. The names of senior MCA management and scientific staff can be found on the agency's Website.

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the membership of the Medicines Control Agency, indicating for each member their *(a)* terms of employment, *(b)* consultancies, *(c)* research funding and *(d)* shareholdings in pharmaceutical companies. [75950]

Ms Jowell *[holding answer 11 March 1999]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply given today to the hon. Member for Ludlow (Mr. Gill).

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to implement the recommendations of the Medicines Control Agency to extend its remit to cover *(a)* health products and *(b)* nutritional supplements; and if he will make a statement. [75951]

Ms Jowell *[holding answer 11 March 1999]:* We have no plans to extend the remit of the Medicines Control Agency.

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to expand the remit of the Medicines Control Agency to enable it to ban vitamin and other supplements to diet; and if he will make a statement on the composition and background of the members of the Medicines Control Agency. [76760]

Mr. Hutton: We have no plans to extend the remit of the Medicines Control Agency (MCA) or to ban vitamins and other dietary supplements. The MCA is an agency of the Department and is accountable direct to Ministers. The staff of the agency are civil servants and are subject to all the normal civil service employment rules, including those covering financial and research interests. The names of senior MCA management and scientific staff can be found on the agency's Website.

Nurses (Violence)

Mr. Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of violent incidents against nurses in accident and emergency wards were attributable to *(a)* substance and *(b)* alcohol abuse in the last five years for which figures are available. [75953]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 11 March 1999]:* Information on the number and specific causes of violent attacks on nursing staff is not available centrally. National Health Service trusts and health authorities collect information locally.

North Essex Health Authority

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he plans to provide a substantive answer to the questions tabled by the hon. Member for West Chelmsford on 22 February, on figures published by the North Essex Health Authority and his Department (Refs. 73118, 73119 and 73120). [76205]

Mr. Denham: I replied to the hon. Member's questions on 12 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *410*.

Chronic Fatigue Syndrome

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of (i) the availability of services within the NHS for sufferers of ME/CFS and (ii) the adequacy of the present arrangements for commissioning social services. [76475]

Mr. Hutton: The National Health Service provides a considerable number of services to which people suffering from Chronic fatigue syndrome/myalgic encephalomyelitis (CFS/ME) have access, and such patients are seen within a wide range of hospital specialties. The recently established CFS/ME Working Group will produce guidance aimed at improving the quality of this care and treatment. We have consistently emphasised the importance of close partnership between the NHS and local authorities to plan and commission services and have set in hand a number of initiatives, including legislative change, to strengthen this.

Children (Employment)

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to introduce legislation to bring ILO Convention 138 relating to children's employment into UK law; and if he will make a statement. [76202]

Mr. Hutton: An announcement of the results of the review of the ratification of International Labour Organisation Convention 138 will be made in the near future.

Hospitals (Phones)

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will issue instructions to hospitals that normal BT call charges should apply to all payphones within their hospitals. [76149]

Mr. Denham: None. The provision of a telephone service for use by patients and visitors, including the choice of provider, is a matter for individual trusts. Detailed guidance on the setting of fees and charges by National Health Service trusts is contained in Her Majesty's Treasury publication "The Fees and Charges Guide". Where a service is to be provided by a third party, trusts should ensure best value both for the hospital and the user by seeking tenders from potential operators.

Dental Services

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the number of dentists that need to be trained in England to ensure *(a)* the maintenance of the present level of service and *(b)* that his dental health targets are met. [75438]

Mr. Denham: On 31 March 1998 there were 19,711 dentists practising in the National Health Service in Great Britain, an increase of 2.6 per cent. on the year before. Numbers of dental students are also at a record level. In the 1997–98 academic year there were 3,929 undergraduate dental students in medical schools, an increase of 2 per cent. on the 1996–97 year.

A sub-group of the Dental Advisory Group on Medical Education and Training, which has been established to consider future workforce requirements, will hold its first meeting on 10 June 1999. Its discussions will be informed by our forthcoming dental strategy.

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the need for facilities for dento-alveolar surgery. [75442]

Mr. Denham: Dento-alveolar surgery is mostly carried out within the facilities of primary dental care. Dento-alveolar surgery requiring more specialist treatment is provided by the hospital dental services. It is for health authorities to assess local need for such facilities.

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the cost of clinical waste collection and water service charges to general dental practices; to what extent these costs are accounted for in the payments made to dentists for NHS work; and what plans he has to make changes in the reimbursement of dentists for these particular costs. [75437]

Mr. Denham: Information on the cost of clinical waste collection and water service charges is not available centrally. As independent contractors, general dental practitioners are responsible for meeting all their own practice expenses. The fees payable to general dental practitioners reflect this fact. We have no plans to change this at present.

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many treatments requiring prior approval from the Dental Practice Board were submitted in each of the last three years; how many were refused; and what was the *(a)* shortest, *(b)* longest and *(c)* average time taken to consider these requests. [75435]

Mr. Denham: The number of prior approvals received by the Dental Practice Board which cover England, Wales and the Isle of Man and the number of these referred for investigation is given in the table.

	Prior approval applications	*Number referred*
1995–96	548,753	not available
1996–97	548,741	33,126
1997–98	554,584	49,833

The number of applications referred in 1995–96 is not available. The shortest time of dealing with the applications was one day.

Longest time for approval—referral not required

Year	*Days*
1995–96	38
1996–97	35
1997–98	45

Longest time for referral

Year	*Days*
1995–96	not available
1996–97	138
1997–98	124

Average time for approval—referral not required

Year	*Days*
1995–96	5
1996–97	6
1997–98	5

Average time for referral

Year	*Days*
1995–96	not available
1996–97	85
1997–98	97

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what estimate he has made of the number of dentists required in each health authority to provide a satisfactory level of service; [75439]

(2) if he will make a statement about *(a)* the availability of dental services in rural areas and *(b)* the steps being taken to improve access to dentists in rural areas. [75426]

Mr. Denham: Health authorities have responsibility for monitoring the oral health and general dental services (GDS) in their area. If a health authority is concerned about the level of GDS provision in its area, it may ask the Secretary of State for Health to use his powers under Section 56 of the NHS Act 1977, to approve the funding of proposals submitted under the Investing in Dentistry initiative, which we launched in September 1997, or, where appropriate, seek approval to employ a salaried dentist(s).

The Personal Dental Services scheme (PDS) was set up under the NHS (Primary Care) Act 1997 to address local service problems and tailor services to meet local need, including in rural areas. PDS enables dentists and National Health Service trusts, working with health authorities, to develop and pilot new ways of delivering NHS dentistry. The first wave of pilot schemes began in October 1998.

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was *(a)* the public expenditure estimate and *(b)* the cost outturn for general dental services in England in 1997–98. [75427]

Mr. Denham: General Dental Services (GDS) is not cash limited, so there is no set annual budget. The original vote provision and final expenditure in the GDS in England is shown in the table.

General Dental Service: 1997–98 Expenditure

£ million

England	*Gross expenditure*	*Net expenditure*
Provision made in main estimate	1,405.8	1,021.5
Outturn	1,349.3	959.1

Gross expenditure includes all fees and allowances payable to general dental practitioners, which cover their income and practice expenses, together with supplementary cost such as employers' superannuation contributions, payments of salaried dentists who provide GDS care in certain localities, and refunds to patients who incorrectly paid dental charges. Net expenditure shows costs after taking into account all dental charges collected from patients.

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement about current audit and peer review projects for general dental practitioners,

setting out *(a)* his assessment of their effectiveness and value for money and *(b)* his future plans for such projects. [75430]

Mr. Denham: As our consultation paper *A First Class Service* indicated, participation of doctors and dentists in clinical audit schemes is central to our strategy for improving the quality of health care. Local audit and peer review advisory panels assess dental schemes and those dentists who participate are required to prepare resumes of their experience. A recent analysis of a sample of these reports showed that 89 per cent. of dentists viewed the process positively and 63 per cent. had acquired knowledge with a direct, beneficial impact on patient care. We have allocated £1.5 million for these schemes in 1999–2000 and have no plans to change the current arrangements.

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will list by health authority area the average number of dental registrations per dentist; if he will make a statement on the impact on dental health of differences in the average number; and what measures are being taken to reduce such differences; [75534]

(2) how many adults have been seen by dentists under NHS regulations in each health authority area in each of the last three years for which figures are available. [75533]

Mr. Denham: The table gives, by health authority (HA), the number of registered dental patients on 31 January 1999 as compared to the number of General Dental Service (GDS) dentists at 31 December 1998. Differences in these numbers between HAs will reflect differences in the level of commitment of dentists to the GDS (lower registrations per dentist are likely to indicate a lower level of commitment to the GDS by the dentists involved) and other factors. Figures on the number of adult patients seen by GDS dentists are not available.

General Dental Service: Number of patient registrations[1] per dentist[2,3] by health authority

England

	Health authorities
England	1,363
Avon	1,184
Barking and Havering	1,390
Barnet	663
Barnsley	1,996
Bedfordshire	1,255
Berkshire	1,070
Bexley and Greenwich	1,237
Birmingham	1,626
Bradford	1,605
Brent and Harrow	1,036
Bromley	833
Buckinghamshire	985
Bury and Rochdale	1,610
Calderdale and Kirklees	1,786
Cambridge and Huntingdon	1,442
Camden and Islington	779
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	1,351
County Durham	1,850
Coventry	1,615
Croydon	1,039
Doncaster	1,875
Dorset	1,425
Dudley	1,728
Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow	781
East Kent	1,284
East Lancashire	1,547
East London and The City	1,002
East Norfolk	1,400
East Riding	1,894
East Surrey	964
East Sussex, Brighton and Hove	1,192
East and North Hertfordshire	1,344
Enfield and Haringey	1,102
Gateshead and South Tyneside	1,514
Gloucestershire	974
Herefordshire	1,292
Hillingdon	1,274
Isle of Wight	1,540
Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster	555
Kingston and Richmond	793
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham	1,169
Leeds	1,380
Leicestershire	1,726
Lincolnshire	2,229
Liverpool	1,570
Manchester	1,192
Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth	974
Morecombe Bay	1,366
Newcastle and North Tyneside	1,490
North Cheshire	1,831
North Cumbria	1,472
North Derbyshire	1,588
North Essex	1,439
North Nottinghamshire	1,943
North Staffordshire	1,679
North West Anglia	1,498
North West Lancashire	1,578
North Yorkshire	1,433
North and East Devon	1,239
North and Mid Hampshire	1,380
Northamptonshire	1,983
Northumberland	1,527
Nottingham	1,604
Oxfordshire	967
Portsmouth and South East Hampshire	1,373
Redbridge and Waltham Forest	1,261
Rotherham	1,777
Salford and Trafford	1,584
Sandwell	1,620
Sefton	1,719
Sheffield	1,707
Shropshire	1,362
Solihull	1,343
Somerset	1,540
South Cheshire	1,333
South Derbyshire	1,591
South Essex	1,424
South Humber	2,051
South Lancashire	1,391
South Staffordshire	1,752
South and West Devon	1,251
Southampton and S W Hampshire	1,423
St. Helens and Knowsley	1,569
Stockport	1,571
Suffolk	1,703
Sunderland	1,926
Tees	1,791
Wakefield	2,033
Walsall	1,858
Warwickshire	1,368
West Hertfordshire	1,095
West Kent	1,108
West Pennine	1,685
West Surrey	980
West Sussex	1,164

General Dental Service: Number of patient registrations[1] per dentist[2,3] by health authority

England

	Health authorities
Wigan and Bolton	1,780
Wiltshire	1,164
Wirral	1,497
Wolverhampton	2,001
Worcestershire	1,447

[1] Adult and child patients registered at 31 January 1999
[2] Includes Principals, Assistant and Vocational Dental Practitioners at 31 December 1998
[3] Excludes Community, Salaried and Hospital dentists

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Health in each of the last three years what percentage of all types of dental treatments was referred to a dental reference officer for scrutiny; and what percentage was declared to be *(a)* of poor quality and *(b)* invalid. [75433]

Mr. Denham: In 1996–97 and 1997–98 about 0.5 per cent. and 0.6 per cent. respectively of courses of treatment scheduled for payment for England, Wales and the Isle of Man were referred to a dental reference office for scrutiny. Of those patients seen, the dental officer had a major or fundamental disagreement with the treatment in 1.75 per cent. of cases in 1996–97 and 1.37 per cent. of cases in 1997–98. Information for 1995–96 is not available. These percentages cover both poor quality and invalid treatments. The dental officer was unable to comment in 3 per cent. of cases seen in 1996–97 and 4 per cent. in 1997–98.

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many dentists are employed by each NHS trust in their community dental services; how many children were treated in the last year for which figures are available in each trust; and how many treatments were made. [75440]

Mr. Denham: The information requested has been placed in the Library.

Table 1 gives the number of child patients, aged 15 years and under, seen for treatment by the community dental service (CDS) by health authority (HA) in England during the financial year 1997–98. The activity for each Trust is allocated to the HA for which the work is carried out. Table 1 also includes information on the number of episodes of care for children aged 15 years or under. An episode of care is a series of face to face contacts with a member of the CDS to complete a treatment plan.

The number of CDS dentists on 30 September 1997 is given in Table 2 by HA in England based on the location of the NHS trusts.

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of treatments requiring prior approval from the Dental Practice Board was submitted to dental reference officers for further examination in each of the last three years; what percentage was refused; and what was *(a)* the shortest, *(b)* the longest and *(c)* the average time taken to consider these submissions. [75434]

Mr. Denham: 6 per cent. of prior approval applications in England, Wales and the Isle of Man were referred to dental reference officers for further investigation in 1996–97 and 71 per cent. of these patients were seen, for example, 4 per cent. of the total number of applications. In 1997–98, 9 per cent. were investigated further and 56 per cent. of patients were seen, for example, 5 per cent. of the total number of applications. Information for 1995–96 is not available.

Of those patients seen in 1996–97, the dental officer had a fundamental disagreement with the treatment plan in 0.47 per cent. of cases and had a major disagreement in 4.72 per cent. of cases. For patients seen in 1997–98, there was a fundamental disagreement in 0.38 per cent. of cases and a major disagreement in 3.48 per cent. of cases. However, refusal to give approval takes place only after further consultation at the Dental Practice Board.

In 1996–97 the quickest approval was made in 45 days, the average time taken was 85 days and the longest time taken was 138 days. In 1997–98 the quickest approval was made in 46 days, the average time taken was 97 days and the longest time taken was 124 days.

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of dentists' earnings was made up of non-NHS work in each of the last five years for which figures are available. [75313]

Mr. Denham: Information on non-National Health Service dental earnings is not collected. However, an annual Inland Revenue Survey gives information on the total gross earnings (i.e. including both NHS and private work) of General Dental Service (GDS) dentists, allowing a comparison with total gross GDS earnings. This indicates that the percentage of GDS dentists' earnings made up of non-GDS work over the last five years has been in the order of:

1991–92: 4 per cent.

1992–93: 5 per cent.

1993–94: 10 per cent.

1994–95: 14 per cent.

1995–96 and 1996–97 combined about 25 per cent.

The percentage estimate for the combined year 1995–96 and 1996–97 is not on the same basis as the estimates for the earlier years. The total gross earnings were obtained from a special data collection covering non-associate dentists only and the accounting years eligible for inclusion in the survey were less restrictive.

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the value of dentists participating in information management and information technology programmes; and what plans he has to provide financial support for such in-service development. [75535]

Mr. Denham: 10,983 National Health Service general dental practitioners in England and Wales are already linked electronically to the Dental Practice Board (DPB). Grants of £900 are made by the DPB, when dentists first establish electronic links to them, to assist with the purchase of suitable computer systems.

The value of information management and technology for dentists is one of the issues that will be considered by the team appointed to carry out an evaluation of Personal Dental Services pilots.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list those firms which have bid for NHS private finance initiative deals for each of the last five years; and which of those bids were successful. [76487]

Mr. Denham: Details of individual Private Finance Initiative (PFI) schemes with a capital value of less than £10 million are not available centrally. Information is given in the table on the consortia selected to bid for the scheme and the successful consortium for those schemes with a capital of over £10 million which have reached financial close.

Name of Trust	*Consortia Selected to Bid*	*Successful Bidder*
Norfolk and Norwich	(1) Octagon (2) AMEC (3) Wimpey/Serco/Impregillo	Octagon
Dartford & Gravesham	(1) Costain Construction (2) Pentland Healthcare Group (3) Trafalgar House Construction (4) United Healthcare	Pentland Healthcare Group
Bromley	(1) United Healthcare (2) Healthcare Management Group (3) Swan Hill	United Healthcare
Wheelhouse	(1) Metier Healthcare (2) Symonds Group and General Healthcare Group Plc	Metier Healthcare
Calderdale	(1) Tarmac (2) Swan Hill (3) Kier (4) Catalyst	Catalyst
Carlisle Hospital	(1) Health Management Carlisle (2) Swan Hill (3) Laing	Health Management Carlisle
South Buckinghamshire	(1) Domino Equipping Solution (2) M Howard Consultants (3) Hemax Healthcare (4) Martin James Medical (5) United Healthcare	United Healthcare
South Manchester	(1) Consort Healthcare (2) Healthcare Group (3) Wimpey Healthcare (4) South Manchester Healthcare Ltd	South Manchester Healthcare Ltd
North Durham	(1) Bovis (2) Consort Healthcare (3) Kier/Iss (4) Laser (5) Swan Hill Development	Consort Healthcare
Greenwich	(1) Trafalgar House (2) TBV (Subsidiary of Tarmac)	Trafalgar House (Bought out by Kvaerner plc)

Psychiatric Services (Children)

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what evaluation his Department has undertaken of the policies of *(a)* local authority social services departments and *(b)* NHS psychiatric services in respect of children excluded from school. [76479]

Mr. Hutton: The Department has made no such evaluation. The Department is, however, working closely with the Department for Education and Employment to encourage joint local initiatives to help tackle school truancy and exclusion.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many children have been admitted to NHS psychiatric care in each year since 1992. [76482]

Mr. Hutton: The table shows the estimated number of admissions, under the child and adolescent psychiatry specialty to National Health Service trusts in England from 1991–92 to 1997–98.

Estimated admissions under a child and adolescent psychiatry specialty by age to NHS trusts, 1991–92 to 1997–98
England

	Age on admission					
	0–4	*5–9*	*10–14*	*15–19*	*20 and over*	*Total*
1991–92	140	470	1,040	750	430	2,840
1992–93	130	610	1,070	780	420	3,010
1993–94	230	560	1,410	810	80	3,090
1994–95	200	740	1,480	900	60	3,380
1995–96	110	290	710	810	90	2,010

Estimated admissions under a child and adolescent psychiatry specialty by age to NHS trusts, 1991–92 to 1997–98
England

	Age on admission					
	0–4	*5–9*	*10–14*	*15–19*	*20 and over*	*Total*
1996–97	50	240	620	700	260	1,860
1997–98	70	270	600	630	220	1,780

Notes:
1. Data have been rounded
2. Data for 1996–97, 1997–98 are provisional, no adjustments have yet been made for shortfalls in data (i.e. the data are ungrossed)
Source:
Department of Health

NHS Training and Expenditure

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what data his Department collects on expenditure on NHS training and education, and its availability; and if he will make a statement. [76483]

Mr. Denham: The Department collects comprehensive expenditure information on non-medical education and training and medical education and training funded from the national levies. Expenditure information has been published annually in each of the levy accountability reports commencing with the 1997–98 financial year.

Doctors (Complaints)

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will ensure that a patient making an allegation to the General Medical Council about the conduct of a doctor will have automatic access to all relevant notes and correspondence. [76759]

Mr. Denham: This is a matter for the General Medical Council.

NHS Charges

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health by what percentage NHS charges for *(a)* sight tests, *(b)* glasses, *(c)* travel to hospital, *(d)* dental treatment and *(e)* prescription have risen since December 1998. [76757]

Mr. Denham: Prescription charges and charges for dental treatment have not risen since December 1998. There are no charges for National Health Service sight tests (which will be available to everyone aged 60 or over from 1 April) or for travel to hospital. Children and people on low incomes are eligible for NHS spectacle vouchers which they may use to buy glasses of their choice.

For changes from 1 April, I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to my hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Gerrard) on 25 February 1999, *Official Report*, columns *429–30*.

Brit Awards

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list those Ministers in his Department who were present at the recent Brit awards in an official capacity, indicating the organisation acting as their sponsor or host. [76646]

Mr. Hutton: None.

Pasteurised Eggs

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to revise or reissue guidance on the use of pasteurised eggs. [76652]

Mr. Hutton: We advised caterers to use pasteurised egg in uncooked egg dishes over ten years ago. That advice continues to be disseminated by the Department in advice published by the Chief Medical Officer in 1997, for example. There are no plans, at present, to revise this guidance.

Nursing Vacancies (Oxfordshire)

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many vacant nursing places there are at *(a)* The Oxford Radcliffe Hospital NHS Trust, *(b)* Nuffield Orthopaedic Centre NHS Trust, *(c)* Radcliffe Infirmary NHS Trust, *(d)* Oxfordshire Community Health NHS Trust and *(e)* Oxfordshire Mental Healthcare NHS Trust; and what the corresponding figures were 12 months ago. [76762]

Mr. Denham: The information requested is not available centrally.

The hon. Member may wish to contact chairs at the trusts for further details.

Clinical Negligence

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list by NHS region the number and value of clinical negligence claims settled by individual trusts, for each of the last five years. [76488]

Mr. Denham: The information requested is not available.

Departmental Policies

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what systems he has in place to ensure that policies being developed by his Department are subject to a crime impact *(a)* assessment and *(b)* audit and are not likely to lead to enhanced criminal opportunities. [72681]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 24 February 1999]:* I refer the right hon. Member to the answer given by the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, my hon. Friend the Member for North Warwickshire (Mr. O'Brien), on 24 February 1999, *Official Report*, columns *311–12*.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 16 March 1999

DEFENCE

Appointments

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list those people he has appointed to public bodies since 1 November 1998, indicating the positions to which they have been appointed and if they receive remuneration. [76420]

Mr. Spellar: The names, positions of those appointed or reappointed to the MOD Non-Departmental Public Bodies (NDPB) by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence or officials on his behalf since 1 November 1998 are as follows:

Royal Naval Museum

Vice Admiral Sir Barry Wilson, Chairman of the Board of Trustees, nil remuneration

Royal Navy Submarine Museum

Rear Admiral Anthony Hoddinott, Member of the Board of Trustees, nil remuneration

RAF Museum

Marshall of the RAF, Sir Michael Beetham, Chairman of the Board of Trustees, nil remuneration

Defence Scientific Advisory Council

(Members of the Register are paid on a daily basis)

Mr. G. R. Belbin, Member of the Register

Mr. J. R. Holloway, Member of the Register

Mr. D. G. Money, Member of the Register

Mr. D. M. Clunie, Member of the Register

Mr. D. J. Q. Carter, Member of the Register.

In addition, in this period a reappointment was made by the Lord Chancellor to the Advisory Committee on Conscientious Objectors (a MOD NDPB): Mrs. R. Nugee, Member, remuneration is per meeting.

European Defence Policy

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what discussions he has held with the non-NATO members of the European Union on the future of European defence policy; and if he will make a statement; [76261]

(2) what discussions his Department has had with the countries associated with the Western European Union on the future of the WEU and the European Union. [76265]

Mr. George Robertson: We have invited all our Partners and Allies, including all countries associated with the Western European Union and non-NATO members of the European Union, to join us in thinking afresh about how to strengthen both European defence capabilities and the European Union's Common Foreign and Security Policy. This initiative has been very positively received, and I look forward to continuing the discussions with my colleagues over the coming months.

External Consultants

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the names of external consultants indicating the fees agreed in each case and nature of studies undertaken since 2 May 1997. [74745]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 4 March 1999]:* Full details of consultancy engagements since 1 May 1997 could be provided only at disproportionate cost. However, I can confirm that, in financial year 1997–98, the total expenditure on external consultancy by the MOD was £148.1 million involving more than 3,000 separate consultancy appointments and, in the first half of this financial year, £62.8 million involving over 1,000 appointments. Details of this expenditure is placed in the Library of the House annually.

The work undertaken by external consultants since May 1997 has included specialist input to procurement programmes and support to a number of Department efficiency initiatives, including market testing, the introduction of Resource Accounting and Budgeting, the review of the Department's UK estate and the development and implementation of SMART procurement.

Heathlands

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) when his Department expects to complete management plans for its sites containing lowland heathland in accordance with section 5.1.6 of the costed habitat action plan for lowland heathland in the United Kingdom Biodiversity Steering Group report; [76495]

(2) how many sites owned by his Department hold more than 10 hectares of lowland heathland; how many of these sites are notified as sites of special scientific interest; and how many have management plans with specific targets for the maintenance and re-creation of lowland heathland agreed with the statutory nature conservation agencies; [76494]

(3) what is the extent of lowland heathland owned by his Department; and what proportion of the United Kingdom total of lowland heathland this constitutes; [76493]

(4) what sums his Department has allocated to bring lowland heathland habitats on its land into favourable nature conservation condition since May 1997; [76498]

(5) how much of the target for the re-establishment of lowland heathland in the United Kingdom that was published in 1995 in the United Kingdom Biodiversity Steering Group report his Department has achieved on its land to date; and how much it is planning to achieve on its land by the year 2005; [76496]

(6) what assessment he has made of the nature conservation condition of heathlands owned by his Department; how many of these sites were considered to be in favourable condition; and how many were in an unfavourable condition at the last assessment. [76497]

Mr. Spellar: The information requested is not held centrally and in order to provide a full response it will have to be collated from disparate sources around the country, making reference as necessary, to the statutory

conservation bodies. I will write to the hon. Member once this process has been completed and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Armed Forces (Recruitment)

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make it the policy of Her Majesty's Government to support the Optional Protocol to the UN Convention on Human Rights to raise the age of recruitment to the armed forces to the age of 18 years. [74308]

Mr. Doug Henderson: The UK has played, and will continue to play, a full and active part in negotiations on the Optional Protocol to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. We consider our current recruiting and deployment policies to be in line with the principles that are being sought internationally. We recruit only volunteers into the Armed Forces, and then only with the written consent of parents/guardians in the case of personnel aged under 18. The Services provide young people with a rewarding and challenging career, together with the opportunity to develop skills and civilian recognised qualifications in a wide range of trades and occupations.

Indonesia

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the Memorandum of Understanding signed in November 1991 by the British and Indonesian Governments is still in force; when it was last revised; and what assessment he has made of the benefits the Memorandum of Understanding has resulted in for British Governments. [76114]

Mr. Spellar: The MOU signed by the MOD with the Government of the Republic of Indonesia in 1991 made provision for UK MOD support to the sale to the Indonesia Navy of the Royal Fleet Auxiliary Green Rover. All arrangements provided for under the terms of the MOU have now been completed and the MOU is, to all intents and purposes, no longer in force. I understand that the MOU has achieved its aim of ensuring the efficient conduct of business over this sale.

Operation Desert Storm

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many people under the age of 18 years were in active service during Operation Desert Storm. [75015]

Mr. Doug Henderson: I will write to my hon. Friend and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

HMS Vengeance

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on what date HMS Vengeance is expected to start contractors' sea trials; what was the original planned date; and if he will make a statement. [76234]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 15 March 1999]:* HMS Vengeance is due to start Contractor's Sea Trials later in the year. The exact date is classified for reasons of physical security. The currently planned date is later than the original, due to the need to replace components found to be defective during system testing at the shipbuilding. The components have now been changed and the submarine's systems are performing well.

RAF Logistic Support Services

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many people are currently employed by the RAF Logistic Support Services and how many there were at its establishment; on what date it published its report for the year 1997–98; and what was the cost of production of the report. [76617]

Mr. Doug Henderson: This is a matter for the Chief Executive of the Logistics Support Services Agency. I have asked the Chief Executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from P. Rawson to Mr. Mike Hancock, dated 16 March 1999:

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about the number of people employed by the RAF Logistics Support Services and the production date and cost of its report for the year 1997–98 as this matter falls within the areas of responsibility of the Chief Executive of Logistics Support Services Agency. The Chief Executive, who is away on business, has agreed the content of this reply.

On Agency vesting in December 1996, the established strength of Logistics Support Services was 1201 personnel; the current establishment is 1107.

Logistics Support Services was not directed to produce an Annual Report for 1997–98 and therefore incurred no costs. The first published report and accounts will be for 1998–99.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Crown Prosecution Service

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Attorney-General if he will make a statement on progress in implementing the recommendations of the Glidewell review of the Crown Prosecution Service. [77020]

The Attorney-General: I refer the right hon. Member to my written answer on 30 November 1998, *Official Report*, column *67*, to my hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson), which set out the interim response of the Government to the Review of the Crown Prosecution Service. On that day I placed in the Library of the House a chart setting out the position in relation to each recommendation.

The Crown Prosecution Service and other Departments with responsibility for criminal justice matters have continued work on consideration and implementation of the Report. The most significant recent steps have been the appointment by the Director of Public Prosecutions of Chief Crown Prosecutors and Area Business Managers for each of the proposed 42 areas of the Crown Prosecution Service, which will come into being in April 1999. As I told the House on 30 November 1998, I expect to put a full response to the Review of the CPS before the House by the end of June.

PRIME MINISTER

Security and Intelligence Service

Jacqui Smith: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement about the Staff Counsellor for the Security and Intelligence Services. [76586]

The Prime Minister: Sir Christopher France GCB has served as Staff Counsellor for the Security and Intelligence Services since April 1995. He will retire from this post on 31 March 1999 and I express the Government's gratitude to him for the way in which he has fulfilled the duties of this very sensitive post. Sir John Chilcot, GCB who was Permanent Under-Secretary of State at the Northern Ireland Office until 1997, will succeed him as Staff Counsellor from 1 April 1999.

Iraq (Medical Goods)

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his letter to the hon. Member for Linlithgow of 9 March, if he will examine the UN's procedures in relation to the distribution of medical goods to meet humanitarian needs which have arrived in Iraq since the end of 1996; and what assessment he has made of the memorandum from the Under Secretary of the Iraqi Foreign Office on this subject, a copy of which has been sent to him. [76781]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 15 March 1999]:* According to the terms of the Memorandum of Understanding between the Government of Iraq and the United Nations on implementation of the "oil for food" programme, it is Iraq, not the UN, which is responsible for the distribution of medical supplies in central and southern Iraq. Iraq's record on distribution is woeful. According to the UN Secretary General's latest report of 22 February on the implementation of "oil for food", over half the medicines and medical supplies which have arrived in Iraq since the start of the "oil for food" programme have accumulated in warehouses. These supplies are worth over $275 million. The Secretary General also noted that the quantity of medical equipment in warehouses was "alarmingly high".

This issue is one which will no doubt be considered by the panel established by the UN Security Council on 30 January to assess the humanitarian situation in Iraq. We would support proposals from the panel to increase the role of the UN in distributing medical supplies in central and southern Iraq in the interest of getting these supplies to the Iraqi people.

It should be noted that in the northern governorates, where distribution is carried out by UN agencies, no problems in the distribution of medical goods were noted in the Secretary General's report.

The Iraqi Memorandum is an unconvincing attempt by Iraq to divert responsibility for the distribution problems in the centre and south onto others.

President-elect Obasanjo

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Prime Minister what communication he has had with the President-elect of Nigeria. [76964]

The Prime Minister: Following the elections on 27 February I sent a message of congratulations and a letter to President-elect Obasanjo.

My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary met President Obasanjo in Nigeria on 10 March. We look forward to welcoming him to Britain soon.

Select Committees (Leaked Documents)

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 9 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *169*, on leaked documents, if *(a)* he, *(b)* civil servants in his Department or *(c)* special advisers in his Department have (i) had sights of drafts of select committee reports in whole or in part, from any civil servant, special adviser or Minister or (ii) been informed of conclusions of Select Committee reports by any civil servant, special adviser or Minister prior to their publication by the select committees. [76743]

The Prime Minister: In my answer of 9 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *169*, what I say about members of Select Committees is equally true as regards civil servants, special advisers or Ministers.

ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND THE REGIONS

Leaded Petrol

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 27 January 1999, *Official Report*, columns *253–54*, on leaded petrol, what estimate his Department has made of the costs of the *(a)* engine adjustments and *(b)* lead replacement petrol to motorists. [72327]

Dr. Reid: Lead replacement petrol is expected to become widely available by the end of this year, enabling those motorists that currently use leaded petrol—estimated at approximately 5.3 million—to switch seamlessly to this fuel without any engine adjustments and, hence, no additional associated costs.

Indeed, of these 5.3 million motorists, it is estimated that some 0.7 million could make immediate savings on their fuel bills by switching to ordinary premium unleaded petrol now. A further 2.3 million could do so with timing adjustments to their engines costing in the order of £50.

The remaining 2.3 million vehicles will need lead replacement petrol or, alternatively, separate additives to provide lubrication to critical engine parts. However, most of these vehicles can have engine modifications that would permit them also to save on running costs by using premium unleaded petrol. Such modifications, which are typically £200-£400 for a small family car, but higher for more sophisticated or specialist vehicles, would be offset by subsequent savings on running costs.

Council Tax Benefit

Mr. Coleman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what representations he has received since the introduction of the changes to the regulations relating to council tax benefit on 1 April 1998. [76268]

Ms Armstrong: We consulted on our detailed proposals for council tax benefit subsidy limitation on 2 December 1998. We received 129 representations. I have placed in the Library a list of those that responded.

SSSIs

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the implications for Sites of Special Scientific Interest of his access to the countryside proposals. [76275]

Mr. Meacher: We do not expect a new statutory right of access on foot to have a significant impact generally on the scientific interest of the land concerned. Provision will be made to close land, or otherwise restrict access, on nature conservation grounds, where this is justified. Such land may include areas notified as Sites of Special Scientific Interest.

Countryside Access (MOD Land)

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the application of his proposals for access to the countryside to Ministry of Defence property; what assessment he has made of the effect of the proposals on (i) security and (ii) property prices; and what consultations he has held with Ministers in the Ministry of Defence on this issue. [76280]

Mr. Meacher: The Government's proposal for a new statutory of access to open countryside will apply to mountain, moor, heath, down and registered common land. Provision will be made for the Ministry of Defence to continue to close land, or otherwise restrict access, where necessary, in the interests of defence. Provision will also be made to close land, or otherwise restrict access, on grounds of conservation, land management and health and safety. The new right of access will not apply to developed land or to agricultural land other than that used for extensive grazing.

An economic appraisal study for the Government by independent consultants supports the view that the economic impact on property prices is likely to be limited.

In developing the Government's proposals, I have consulted Ministerial colleagues in all Departments with an interest, including the Ministry of Defence.

Home Energy Efficiency Schemes

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many home energy efficiency schemes have been introduced since 1 May 1997. [76435]

Mr. Meacher: My Department funds the Home Energy Efficiency Scheme and a wide range of programmes which are run by the Energy Saving Trust to improve energy efficiency in the home. The Trust has introduced three new schemes since 1 May 1997. They are schemes to promote the development of energy services, encourage the installation of small scale Combined Heat and Power in residential premises and promote the installation of energy efficient boilers and heating controls. In addition a large number of schemes is run by others, including local authorities and electricity suppliers.

Recycling

Mr. Bill O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on his Department's future programme for encouraging recovery and recycling of household waste. [76209]

Mr. Meacher: We are revising the existing waste strategy for England and Wales. A draft will be produced later in the Spring for consultation, and will include among other things our proposals for dealing with household waste. The final strategy will be published by the end of the year.

Appointments

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list those people he has appointed to public bodies since 1 November 1998, indicating the positions to which they have been appointed and if they receive remuneration. [76415]

Mr. Meale: The information requested has been placed in the Library of the House.

Jubilee Line

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will publish the results of London Transport's Jubilee Line Extension cost review; and if he will make a statement. [76634]

Ms Glenda Jackson: I refer my hon. Friend to my reply of 3 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *730*, to the hon. Member for Croydon, South (Mr. Ottaway).

Mr. Ottaway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 3 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *730*, concerning the cost of the Jubilee Line extension, when the cost review undertaken in August 1998 was completed; and when the results were made available to ministers. [76752]

Ms Glenda Jackson: London Transport's August 1998 Jubilee Line Extension cost review was completed in August 1998 and its results were issued to my Department immediately after they had been submitted to the LT Board. A copy was made available to the Secretary of State's Agent, Ove Arup, who commented on it in a report to Ministers dated 11 August 1998.

Climate Change

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the Government's policy towards the European Community strategy on climate change. [76193]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 12 March 1999]:* The UK plays a leading role in developing and arguing the Community's position in international negotiations on climate change.

Within the Community, the UK brokered the agreement reached in June 1998 sharing out the EU's 8 per cent. reduction target from Kyoto, under which the UK took on a share of -12.5 per cent. The UK Presidency also

brokered a set of key agreed areas where policies and measures at Community level were called for to support action taken by Member States to meet their targets.

Black Cabs

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 9 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *164*, concerning black cabs, if a taxi licensed by the Public Carriage Office will be permitted also to be licensed by another licensing authority to ply for hire outside the new Metropolitan Police District boundary. [76473]

Ms Glenda Jackson *[holding answer 15 March 1999]:* This decision will rest with the relevant local licensing authority. But I can see a number of practical reasons, particularly in relation to taximeters and licence plates, why a local authority would choose not to grant a second taxi licence for a vehicle which has already been licensed as a London taxi.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what estimate he has made of the number of taxi cabs that will be affected within each suburban licensing sector by the realignment of the Metropolitan Police District. [76474]

Ms Glenda Jackson *[holding answer 15 March 1999]:* Of the 22,700 London licensed taxi drivers, 1,365 hold suburban licences which entitle them to ply for hire in one or more of the nine suburban sectors which will be directly affected by the Metropolitan Police District boundary change. 444 drivers hold licences covering sectors 3A (Epsom) and 3B (Carshalton); 338 covering sectors 1A (Woodford); 237 covering sectors 4A (Kingston) and 4B (Hounslow); 215 covering sector 5B (Ruislip); and 131 covering sectors 6A (Finchley), 6B (Wood Green) and 6C (Walthamstow). Drivers holding suburban licences will still be entitled to ply for hire throughout the relevant suburban zone; the Public Carriage Office is currently reviewing the boundaries of suburban sectors in the light of the Metropolitan Police District boundary change, with a view to ensuring that each sector is of reasonable size. In addition, the 20,400 drivers with all-London licenses will continue to be entitled to ply for hire throughout the Metropolitan Police District (as defined by the new boundary).

Railway Stations (Access)

Joan Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what discussion he has had with the rail regulator on the obligations to be placed on Railtrack and train operating companies regarding access to railway stations for people with disabilities when part III of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 takes effect; and if he will list them. [77158]

Ms Glenda Jackson: My Department keeps in close touch with the Rail Regulator on mobility issues generally, although we have had no specific discussions on these issues. In relation to station access, Railtrack and the train operating companies, are subject to the provisions of Part III of the Disability Discrimination Act in the same way as any other service provider.

From October 1999, they will have to take reasonable steps to change practices, policies or procedures which make it impossible or unreasonably difficult for disabled people to use a service; provide auxiliary aids or services, for example induction loops or information in Braille, which would enable disabled people to use a service; and overcome physical barriers by providing a service by a reasonable alternative method.

From 2004, they will have to take reasonable steps to remove, alter, or provide reasonable means of avoiding physical features that make it impossible or unreasonably difficult for disabled people to use a service. For example, the provision of a ramp to allow wheelchair access into a station.

Railtrack and the train operating companies were informed about these requirements at a seminar organised by my Department and the DfEE at the end of last year.

Thames Gateway (Rail Links)

Mr. Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 9 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *149*, on the Thames Gateway, what assessment he has made of the regeneration potential of *(a)* the proposed Woolwich rail tunnel, *(b)* a rail and *(c)* a rapid transit link to Thamesmead. [76769]

Mr. Caborn: The regeneration potential of new cross river public transport links were assessed within the East Thames Appraisal Framework report, commissioned by the Government Office for London, which reported in July 1998. The options considered in the report included a rail tunnel at Woolwich, and light rail and guided bus links to Thamesmead.

GM Vegetables

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the applications he has received in respect of genetically modified vegetables where the purpose of modification is to enable contaminants to be removed from soil; what is the approved disposal route for such vegetables; and if he will make a statement. [76509]

Mr. Meacher: I have received no applications for consent to release this type of genetically modified crop.

Traffic Reduction

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, pursuant to his oral answer of 9 March 1999, *Official Report*, column 172, if he will list the areas where he aims to secure a real reduction in traffic levels. [76513]

Ms Glenda Jackson: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 3 November 1998, *Official Report*, columns *458–59*.

Train Punctuality

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what steps he is taking to eliminate the setting of artificially late expected arrival times at destinations by train operating companies where the object is to meet punctuality targets. [76516]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Passenger Service Requirements (PSR) in franchise agreements prescribe maximum journey times based on pre-privatisation practice. Train operating companies' timetables must comply with PSRs.

Soil Crops

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he has received from ACRE of the recent report from the Soil Association on genetically modified crops, with particular reference to the distance beyond the precautionary 200 metre boundary around genetically modified plants which pollen can spread; if he will publish the evidence for that assessment; and what assessment he has made of their conclusions. [76518]

Mr. Meacher: The Advisory Committee on Releases to the Environment will discuss the Soil Association commissioned report on the dispersal of maize pollen at their next meeting on 25 March. Its advice will then be made public through the minutes of the meeting.

Retroviruses

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list those retroviruses approved for release into the environment, giving in each case the date of approval given for release. [76504]

Mr. Meacher: No genetically modified retroviruses have been approved for release into environment in the UK.

Rural Railways

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the railway routes classified as rural where the present frequency of service exceeds that required under the relevant franchise agreement, giving in each case (i) the minimum frequency required, (ii) that currently applicable and (iii) that applicable in 1988. [76506]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The information requested is not available.

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what is his policy in respect of the present minimum frequency levels required by current franchise agreements in respect of rural railway services. [76505]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The present minimum frequency levels in respect of all services are matters of contract. We have made it clear we are prepared to renegotiate existing franchise agreements if greater investment and better performance can be obtained for passengers and on terms that represent value for money for the taxpayer.

Railway Security

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions in respect of the annual report 1997–98 of the Director and Co-ordinator of Transport Security, (i) if he will list the 37 stations referred to in Paragraph 24, (ii) if he will list the problems identified as requiring rectification in Paragraph 24, (iii) how many bomb-warnings, in Appendix A Paragraph 3, proved to relate to bombs and (iv) how many *(a)* suspicious packages and *(b)* bomb threats, in Appendix A Paragraph 6 proved to relate to bombs or other material capable of endangering life. [76507]

Ms Glenda Jackson: In answer to (i) and (ii), for security reasons it would not be appropriate to reveal the actual stations inspected or the issues identified for rectification. The stations inspected included major stations throughout England, Scotland and Wales.

(iii) None.

(iv) During the period 1 April 1997 to 31 March 1998 no suspicious packages proved to be actual devices. One bomb threat proved to be a device and this exploded at Leeds Station in April 1997.

Community Transport

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he expects to publish the report into the role of voluntary and community transport services. [76511]

Ms Glenda Jackson: A draft of the final report was presented last week to the project steering group which includes representatives of the Community Transport Association, the Rural Development Commission and local authorities. Subject to their comments and final drafting changes, it should be possible to publish the report within the next few weeks.

Traffic Increases

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, pursuant to his oral answer of 9 March 1999, *Official Report*, column 172, what estimate he has made of the overall increase in traffic levels by 2010 having taken into account those areas where road traffic levels will be reduced. [76514]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The answers I gave to the hon. Member on 12 January 1999, *Official Report*, column *189*, explained that my Department is undertaking further analysis of the expected effect on traffic of the policies in last year's Transport White Paper—taking into account information from local authorities on what measures they plan to introduce—in order to inform reports under the Road Traffic Reduction (National Targets) Act 1998. The first such report will be published by the end of this year.

National Rail Timetable

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many train journeys were advertised in the national rail timetable for each year from 1980 to date. [76517]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The information requested is not available.

Greater London

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what representations he has received concerning the European Commission's assessment of the levels of *(a)* wealth and *(b)* deprivation in Greater London. [77167]

Mr. Raynsford: This Department has received no representations concerning the European Commission's assessment of the levels of *(a)* wealth and *(b)* deprivation in Greater London.

Regional Expenditure

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) what the reduction in expenditure by English Partnerships in 2000–01 will be relative to that for 1999–2000 in the south-east region of England; and in what areas spending will be reduced; [77026]

(2) what the reduction in expenditure by English Partnerships in 2000–01 will be relative to that for 1999–2000 in the central region of England; and in what areas spending will be reduced; [77022]

(3) what the reduction in expenditure by English Partnerships in 2000–01 will be relative to that for 1999–2000 in the east midlands region of England; and in what areas spending will be reduced; [77027]

(4) what the reduction in expenditure by English Partnerships in 2000–01 will be relative to that for 1999–2000 in the west midlands region of England; and in what areas spending will be reduced; [77021]

(5) what the reduction in expenditure by English Partnerships in 2000–01 will be relative to that for 1999–2000 in the north east region of England; and in what areas spending will be reduced; [77030]

(6) what the reduction in expenditure by English Partnerships in 2000–01 will be relative to that for 1999–2000 in the Yorks and Humber region of England; and in what areas spending will be reduced; [77028]

(7) what the reduction in expenditure by English Partnerships in 2000–01 will be relative to that for 1999–2000 in the south-west region of England; and in what areas spending will be reduced; [77023]

(8) the reduction in expenditure by English Partnerships in 2000–01 will be relative to that for 1999–2000 in the north-west region of England; and in what areas spending will be reduced; [77029]

(9) what the reduction in expenditure by English Partnerships in 2000–01 will be relative to that for 1999–2000 in the eastern region of England; and in what areas spending will be reduced. [77024]

Mr. Meale: From 1 April 1999, responsibility for the regional elements of the land and property budget (with the exception of London which will transfer a year later) will move from English Partnerships to the Regional Development Agencies. Regional budgets for 2000–01 have not yet been confirmed. The decision on budgets for that and subsequent years needs to wait for RDA regional strategies and corporate plans.

The grant in aid voted by Parliament for the total land and property programme will be £208m for 2000–01, compared with £216m[1] in 1999–2000, as set out in the CSR settlement. The balance of funding for the programme is made up from capital receipts.

[1] The CSR settlement for 1999–2000 is £230m, but £15m of this total is ring-fenced for the Greenwich Millennium project.

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what targets he has set the East of England RDA for 2000–01. [76942]

Mr. Meale: Targets have not yet been set for any RDAs for 2000–01.

RDA Hearings

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions which officials in his Department attended the Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs Committee hearings on RDAs *(a)* at Westminster and *(b)* elsewhere; what was the purpose of their attendance; and what was the cost. [76941]

Mr. Caborn: In addition to those from my Department and the Government Offices who gave evidence to the Committee, the following attended the sessions:

(a) Westminster

Date of session	*Number of officials attending*
16 February	3
2 March	2
9 March	6

(b) Elsewhere

Date of session	*Number of officials attending*
22 February, Newcastle	3
22 February, Leeds	1
23 February, Manchester	2
23 February, Birmingham	1
25 February, Chelmsford	1

The purpose of their attendance was to inform their work in briefing those appearing as witnesses and/or staff development. On 9 March, the officials included a private secretary and two press officers.

The cost, over and above salaries (standard class travel, and subsistence) was £306.48.

Environment Council

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what was the outcome of the Environment Council held in Brussels on 11 and 12 March; and if he will make a statement. [77248]

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the issues discussed at the Environment Council on 11 and 12 March, indicating the positions adopted by the UK Government. [76201]

Mr. Meacher: I represented the United Kingdom at the Environment Council which took place in Brussels on the 11 March.

The Council reached a common position on the proposal for a Water Framework Directive following the receipt of the European Parliament's opinion in February. This is a major environmental proposal which will set demanding but achievable targets for improvements in the quality of both surface and groundwaters to be delivered through co-ordinated plans, where necessary between Member States, for each river basin. It was agreed to postpone a final decision on the End of Life Vehicles Directive until the next Council meeting in June.

Discussions took place on Council Conclusions establishing the Community's negotiating position on climate change for the next round of global negotiations. These focused in particular on the definition of a concrete ceiling on the use of emissions trading and other off-set mechanisms under the Kyoto Protocol. A final consensus was not reached on this despite protracted negotiations, and Ministers will return to this issue in the near future.

Council Conclusions were adopted on the Commissions negotiations with Japanese and Korean car manufacturers, which seek to secure an equivalent voluntary agreement to that reached with ACEA last October. This is part of the EU Strategy on reducing carbon dioxide emissions from cars. The Conclusions impress on the Commission to conclude their negotiations by May and report back to the Council by June.

First Ministerial debates were also held on two other dossiers. The first, on a proposal to amend the Directive limiting emissions of certain pollutants into the air from large combustion plants, is an integral part of the Commission's Acidification Strategy. It will reduce emissions of sulphur dioxide and nitrogen dioxides, both of which can potentially cause acidification and health problems. During discussions on whether the directive should cover existing plants emissions, I argued that these were better covered by the current IPPC directive and National Emissions Ceilings Directive being developed by the Commission. The second debate was held on a proposal that would allow voluntary participation by organisations in a Community eco-management and audit scheme. Both of these proposals will return to the Council in June, along with a proposal for a directive on the incineration of waste. At this Council the Commission reported on the progress of negotiations in working group of this dossier.

I welcomed the Presidency announcement on its plans to reach a common position at the June Council on the proposal for a revision to the 90–220 Directive controlling the release and marketing of genetically modified organisms. In addition, Council Conclusions were agreed that reflect on the suspension of discussions on the biosafety protocol in Cartegena last month, and agree that a strategy be developed with a view to completing the negotiations.

Lorry Accidents

Mr. Lilley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the number of road accidents involving lorries for each year since 1980. [77211]

Dr. Reid: The number of road accidents involving a Heavy Goods Vehicle (HGV) is shown in the following table.

Road accidents involving at least one HGV[1]: 1980–97

Year	*Number of accidents[2]*
1980	14,117
1981	13,283
1982	13,307
1983	12,328
1984	12,950
1985	13,073
1986	13,435
1987	13,642
1988	14,775
1989	16,107
1990	15,063
1991	13,616
1992	13,016
1993	13,173
1994	13,178
1995	12,613
1996	12,426
1997	13,122

[1] HGV: From 1 January 1994 the weight definition changed to those vehicles over 3.5 tonnes maximum permissible gross weight. Prior to that these vehicles were defined as goods vehicles over 1.524 tonnes unladen weight and included vehicles with six or more tyres, some four wheel vehicles with extra large bodies and larger rear tyres and tractor units travelling without their usual tailer.

[2] Accidents may involve more than one HGV.

Bus Service Partnerships

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many quality partnerships for delivery of bus services are currently in place; and what plans he has to put such partnerships on a statutory basis. [77175]

Dr. Reid: I am aware of over 30 quality partnerships in existence, and more in prospect. We announced in the Transport White Paper our intention to provide statutory backing for quality partnerships and will be publishing further details shortly.

Government Grants

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) what grants each *(a)* unitary, *(b)* shire county, *(c)* shire district, *(d)* metropolitan district and *(e)* London borough council received for 1998–99 from central Government other than those included in the total external support figure; and if they were ring-fenced for any purpose; [76789]

(2) what grants each *(a)* unitary, *(b)* shire county, *(c)* shire district, *(d)* metropolitan district and *(e)* London borough council will receive for 1999–2000 from central Government other than those included in the total external support figure; and if they will be ring-fenced for any purpose. [76790]

Ms Armstrong: The information has been placed in the Library of the House. It has been assumed that the question relates to grants for revenue purposes. All revenue grants, apart from those included in total external support, are specific or special grants which are, by definition, earmarked for the purpose indicated by their title.

Shipping

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the measures his Department is taking to develop shipping and ports. [77180]

Dr. Reid: The Government's policy for developing British shipping is set out in the White Paper "British Shipping: Charting a new course", published in December 1998. A ports policy paper is currently out for consultation and should be issued later this year.

Cycling

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he will publish advice to local authorities on good practice in improving the safety and convenience of cycling. [77177]

Dr. Reid: The Department generates a wide range of advice to local authorities on encouraging safer and better conditions for cycling. In addition to our Local Transport Notes and Traffic Advisory Leaflets, we have worked with the Institution of Highways and Transportation, the Cyclists' Touring Club and the Bicycle Association to produce "Cycle-friendly Infrastructure". We have also collaborated with the Institution of Highways and Transportation to produce "Guidelines for Cycle Audit and Cycle Review". Four new Traffic Advisory Leaflets on cycling will be produced in April.

Access to Countryside

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what advice his Department plans to issue to landowners regarding public liability insurance as a result of his Department's plans to provide a statutory right of access to open countryside. [76792]

Mr. Meacher: It is, in the first instance, for individual landowners and their advisers to decide what insurance, including public liability insurance, is most appropriate for their needs. The Government have made clear that the liability owed by landowners to people exercising a new statutory right of access will be limited to that owed to trespassers.

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what estimate he has made of the extra public liability insurance costs for landowners as a result of his Department's plans to provide a statutory right of access to open countryside. [76796]

Mr. Meacher: The Government do not expect a new statutory right of access on foot to open countryside to have a significant impact on public insurance costs for landowners. An economic appraisal study for the Government by independent consultants suggests that any increase in the public liability insurance premium will be small.

Homelessness

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he intends to place on local councils a statutory duty to protect the homeless. [77088]

Ms Armstrong: I refer the right hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Minister for London and Construction to my hon. Friend the Member for Edmonton (Mr. Love) on Monday 1 March 1999, *Official Report*, columns *519–20*.

Roads Maintenance

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he intends to introduce public/private partnerships for the maintenance of roads. [77179]

Dr. Reid: Existing DBFO contracts already cover a significant proportion of the maintenance obligations for the trunk roads network. We have announced that we intend to increase this through pursuing the DBFO procurement method for certain schemes announced in the Accelerated Review and in our targeted programme of improvements. In addition, we are currently examining the scope for further public private partnerships for trunk road maintenance.

London Transport Plans

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when the first local transport plans will be published; and when he expects such plans to be placed on a statutory basis. [77178]

Dr. Reid: Local highway authorities in England (outside London) need to submit their provisional local transport plans (LTPs) to the Department by 31 July. Full LTPs are to be submitted by 31 July 2000. Publication is a matter for the local authorities, but we expect LTPs to be readily available locally.

We believe there would be advantages in making LTPs statutory and propose to legislate in due course. However, LTPs can be implemented on an administrative basis, which will provide an opportunity to test the system and identify the necessary requirements of any subsequent legislation.

House Sales

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what measures he has put in place to tackle problems arising from the non-enforceability of verbal agreements to sell houses. [77011]

Ms Armstrong: The Government published for consultation on 7 December 1998 a package of proposals aimed at making the home buying and selling process easier and more efficient. The consultation period ends on 31 March. We will consider carefully responses to the consultation in reaching conclusions on action required to improve the process in the interests of all responsible home buyers and sellers.

Nuclear Waste

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 30 November 1998, *Official Report*, column *48*, what representations he has received from BNFL Ltd. concerning *(a)* its investment in Pangea

Resources Inc., and *(b)* its support for Pangea's plans to construct an international repository for nuclear waste in Australia. [77170]

Mr. Meale: No representations relating to this issue have been received by DETR from BNFL Ltd.

Light Dues

Mr. Gareth Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on light dues. [77456]

Ms Glenda Jackson: I am pleased to announce that there will be no changes to the light dues rates for 1999–2000. Current rates were set in 1997, when charges were reduced by an average of 4.6 per cent., following four years of stability. The ability to maintain light dues at current levels is an indication of the General Lighthouse Authorities' continuing efforts to achieve greater efficiency.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Police Manpower

Mr. Maginnis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department in the latest year for which figures are available how many police officers and of what ranks are engaged exclusively in *(a)* complaints and discipline and *(b)* drug squad duties in each constabulary in Great Britain; and what is the total manpower of each constabulary. [75908]

Kate Hoey: I can answer only in respect of England and Wales. Information is not available centrally on the number and ranks of police officers engaged exclusively in complaints and discipline duties. The number of officers engaged exclusively in drugs duties in 1997–98 in each force area is in the table. Information is not collected centrally on the ranks of the officers involved. In some forces, the detection of drugs offences will form part of a wider range of responsibilities undertaken by officers.

Figures for the number of officers in each force in England and Wales at the end of September 1998 are also in the table.

Year: 1997–98

Forces	*Number of dedicated drugs officers*
Avon and Somerset	38
Bedfordshire	13
Cambridgeshire	6
Cheshire	6
City of London	0
Cleveland	4
Cumbria	0
Derbyshire	21
Devon and Cornwall	10
Dorset	18
Durham	14
Dyfed-Powys	16
Essex	8
Gloucestershire	23
Greater Manchester	30
Gwent	10
Hampshire	19
Hertfordshire	11
Humberside	14
Kent	0

Year: 1997–98

Forces	*Number of dedicated drugs officers*
Lancashire	0
Leicestershire	13
Lincolnshire	9
Merseyside	6
Metropolitan Police	83
Norfolk	21
Northamptonshire	25
Northumbria	31
North Wales	21
North Yorkshire	0
Nottinghamshire	17
South Wales	26
South Yorkshire	80
Staffordshire	27
Suffolk	24
Surrey	11
Sussex	0
Thames Valley	27
Warwickshire	10
West Mercia	9
West Midlands	38
West Yorkshire	105
Wiltshire	18
England and Wales total	862

Number of officers—police forces in England and Wales

Forces	*30 September 1998*
Avon and Somerset	2,965.8
Bedfordshire	1,050.9
Cambridgeshire	1,285.9
Cheshire	2,054.9
City of London	792.5
Cleveland	1,453.2
Cumbria	1,153
Derbyshire	1,768.5
Devon and Cornwall	2,918.1
Dorset	1,286.4
Durham	1,559.1
Dyfed-Powys	1,013.3
Essex	2,903.1
Gloucestershire	1,090.9
Greater Manchester	6,890.2
Gwent	1,254.3
Hampshire	3,489.9
Hertfordshire	1,706.4
Humberside	2,003.4
Kent	3,200.2
Lancashire	3,245.1
Leicestershire	1,974.5
Lincolnshire	1,159.2
Merseyside	4,270.4
Metropolitan Police	26,106.3
Norfolk	1,409.6
North Wales	1,395
North Yorkshire	1,359.8
Northamptonshire	1,162.3
Northumbria	3,802
Nottinghamshire	2,269
South Wales	2,945.6
South Yorkshire	3,170.6
Staffordshire	2,271.1
Suffolk	1,179.7
Surrey	1,614.7
Sussex	2,923.9
Thames Valley	3,789.6
Warwickshire	923.5
West Mercia	2,024.2
West Midlands	7,215.3
West Yorkshire	5,065.7
Wiltshire	1,147.8
Total	124,264.8

Common Market Referendum

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Boston and Skegness (Sir R. Body), of 21 January 1999, *Official Report*, column *553*, on the Common Market referendum, which provisions of the Public Records Acts relating to the timing of release of documents apply to the files relating to the referendum. [76365]

Mr. Straw: The 30-year-rule established by section 5(1) of the Public Records Act 1958, as amended by the Public Records Act 1967, generally applies. However, the Lord Chancellor may give his approval for records more than 30 years old to be retained by the Security Service under section 3(4) of the 1958 Act if they are required for administrative purposes or ought to be retained for any other special reason. In the case of Security Service records, the special reason may be that the records in question contain highly sensitive information relating to national security.

Animal Experiments

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 30 November 1998, *Official Report*, columns *80–81*, what conclusions he has reached in respect of the requirement to report figures relating to the overbreeding of animals listed in Schedule 2 to the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986. [76515]

Mr. George Howarth: I have not yet reached any conclusions on this issue. There are a number of issues that need to be carefully explored, including the practicalities of collating this information.

Lighter Refills

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the banning of the sale of cigarette lighter refills to under 16-year-olds. [77010]

Mr. George Howarth: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike) on 10 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *273*.

Victims of Crime

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures he has put in place to ensure that victims of crime are kept fully informed about the progress of their cases. [77015]

Mr. Boateng: The 1996 Victim's Charter places responsibility on the police for keeping victims informed about significant developments in their case. Pilot projects to establish best ways of doing this were set up later that year. Interim findings of an evaluation managed by the Home Office Research and Statistics Directorate and carried out by Bristol University were published late last year, and drawn to criminal justice agencies' attention in Home Office Circular 55/1998 issued on 23 December 1998. This also reminded the police, and other agencies, of their responsibilities for keeping victims informed. A final evaluation report and recommendations are expected later this year, after which it is hoped good practice guidelines can be issued.

Youth Offender Teams

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many youth offender teams have been established; at what cost; and what plans he has to monitor their effectiveness. [77019]

Mr. Boateng: Youth offending teams under section 39 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 have been established in 10 areas, by 16 local authorities working in partnership with the police, probation service and health authorities. These areas are piloting the teams, together with new powers for the police and the courts under the 1998 Act, ahead of national implementation. The Government expect all areas of England and Wales to have youth offending teams in place by April 2000, when it intends to implement section 39 nationwide.

The Youth Justice Board for England and Wales, established under section 41 of the 1998 Act, is monitoring progress in all areas in preparing for national implementation of the Act's provisions for youth offending teams and other new youth justice measures and will monitor the effectiveness of the new teams in reducing youth offending. The Board is aware that youth offending teams have so far been substantially established on a non-statutory basis in around 35 local authority areas to undertake existing work with young offenders.

The pilots will help the Government better to assess the costs and savings associated with the new youth justice measures. The Government are expecting local authorities and their partner agencies to put in place the basic structure of youth offending teams within existing resources, reflecting the work which staff within those agencies should already be undertaking with young offenders and those at risk of offending. Where local areas are being expected to deliver new services under the 1998 Act, the Government recognise that extra resources may be needed. These were estimated in the Financial Memorandum to the Crime and Disorder Bill and these estimates are now being tested through the pilots.

Crime and Disorder Act 1998

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* local child curfew schemes, *(b)* parenting orders and *(c)* anti-social behaviour orders have been made under the Crime and Disorder Act 1998. [77016]

Mr. Boateng: The power to impose a local child curfew is a permissive one. The decision as to whether or not a local child curfew is appropriate will be one which must be made by a local authority following appropriate local discussion.

The relevant provisions of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 were brought into force on 30 September 1998. Before imposing a local child curfew, local authorities, in consultation with the chief officer of police and such other persons or bodies that they consider appropriate, must first draw up proposals for a local child curfew scheme,

including arrangements for consultation with the residents in the area in which the curfew is to apply, and submit these to the Home Secretary for approval.

No applications for local child curfew schemes have been received at this stage. Such schemes are designed to be part of an integrated response to reducing crime and disorder in local areas. In considering their potential use, local authorities will wish to take into account the wider crime and disorder reduction strategies, also required under the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, which are currently being developed.

Parenting orders have been available since 30 September 1998 in the nine areas which form the greater part of the youth justice pilot exercise. By the end of January 1999, courts in these nine pilot areas had made 12 parenting orders.

Although the parenting order will be available in several different court arenas, that is, the family proceedings court, a civil magistrates court and all criminal courts, the order has been introduced gradually throughout the youth justice pilot areas. This has been done partly to allow pilot areas to focus initially on the need to establish and operate satisfactorily the new youth offending teams across the full range of existing and new work with juvenile offenders. Also, to see how the parenting order will operate alongside Children Act 1989 based work with children and families in need and to put in place provision for counselling and guidance sessions required under the parenting order.

The provisions in the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 in relation to anti-social behaviour order do not come into force until 1 April 1999.

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prosecutions there have been for *(a)* racially aggravated assaults and *(b)* racially aggravated harassment under the Crime and Disorder Act 1998. [77017]

Mr. Boateng: These offences came into force on 30 September 1998. Provisional data for the last quarter of 1998 from the Home Office Court Proceedings database should be available in June with provisional data for each quarter of 1999 becoming available at three monthly intervals thereafter.

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many drug treatment and testing orders have been made under the Crime and Disorder Act 1998. [77014]

Mr. George Howarth: Thirty drug treatment and testing orders had been made in the Crown Court and magistrates courts in the pilot areas (Croydon, Gloucestershire and Liverpool) as at 12 March 1999.

Sentencing Policy

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures he has put in place to monitor the effectiveness of sentencing policy. [77018]

Mr. Boateng: The Home Office is committed to monitoring the effectiveness of the sentences imposed by the courts, including their effect on reconviction. It does this through the regular collection of statistics and ad hoc research. All major new initiatives in the field of sentencing policy, as in other areas of criminal justice activity, are accompanied by measures to monitor their effectiveness. In addition, three sentencing projects are being funded under the crime reduction programme. These are in the areas of fine enforcement, restorative justice and the information available to sentencers and are aimed at improving the cost-effectiveness of sentencing.

Telephone Tapping

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions he has held with other European countries on co-operation for tapping on request of (i) land lines, (ii) cellular telephones and (iii) electronic mail; what is the intended role of Europol; which countries outside the European Union are involved; what discussions he has had with the United States Government on this issue; and if he will make a statement. [76300]

Mr. Straw *[holding answer 12 March 1999]:* A working group operating under the European Union Justice and Home Affairs Council is currently considering a draft Convention on Mutual Legal Assistance which contains proposals for co-operation on the interception of telecommunications. The text of the draft Convention does not distinguish between the kinds of telecommunications mentioned in the Question. The German Presidency has also proposed a draft Council Resolution on the lawful interception of new technologies such as the Internet and satellite communications. The latest texts of these proposals have been submitted to the European Scrutiny Committees for their consideration. Copies are in the Library. This matter has been discussed at formal meetings of the Justice and Home Affairs Council, in which I and other Home Office Ministers have participated, and informally with other European Union Interior Ministers.

I am not aware of any proposal for Europol to be involved in co-operation on interception matters between member states.

The draft Convention and Council Resolution apply only to the European Union. Ministers have not discussed them with the United States Government.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Trade Delegations

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what was the last occasion on which a Government Minister led a trade delegation to *(a)* Mexico, *(b)* Morocco, *(c)* Mozambique and *(d)* Namibia; and what future trade delegations are planned. [76547]

Mr. Wilson: *(a)* The last Government Minister to lead a trade delegation to Mexico was Lord Laing of Dunphail when President of the Board of Trade in October 1996.

I will be taking a trade delegation in June this year. Other trade missions planned are as follows:

Month/Year	
May 1999	General trade mission led by Wolverhampton Chamber of Commerce
September 1999	Healthcare mission led by London Chamber of Commerce
October 1999	General trade mission led by the Latin America Trade Advisory Board
November 1999	General trade mission led by the Industrial Development Board for Northern Ireland

(b) The last ministerially-led trade delegation to visit Morocco was in December 1997 (a water mission led by the Under-Secretary of State for Social Security, my hon. Friend the Member for Wallasey (Angela Eagle) the then Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions.

Two trade missions to Morocco are planned:

Month/Year	
September 1999	Business Link, Barnsley
March 2000	Nottingham Chamber of Commerce

(c) There have not been any ministerially-led missions to Mozambique. There are plans for three trade missions to visit Mozambique:

Month/Year	
February 2000	Business Link, Gloucestershire
February 2000	British Water
Date to be announced	London Chamber of Commerce

(d) My hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Mrs. Roche) when Minister for Small Firms, Trade and Industry, led a delegation to the Southern Africa Trade and Investment Conference held in Namibia between 24 and 27 July 1998.

There is a trade mission in Namibia at present. No others are planned.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what was the last occasion on which a Government Minister led a trade delegation to *(a)* Belarus, *(b)* Bolivia, *(c)* Botswana, *(d)* Cambodia and *(e)* Chile; and what future trade delegations are planned. [76523]

Mr. Wilson: There has been no recent ministerially-led trade delegation to Belarus or Botswana and none is planned in the near future.

Lord Fraser of Carmyllie led a trade mission to Bolivia in November 1996 and I am planning a visit at the end of May 1999. A trade mission run by the Energy Industries Council will also visit Bolivia in May 1999.

There have been no recent ministerially-led trade delegations to Cambodia and none is planned in the near future. The British Electro Technical and Allied Manufacturers Association are planning a trade mission in November 1999.

Lord Clinton Davis led a trade delegation to Chile in September 1997. The following trade missions are planned:

	Month/Year
Trade International Northern Ireland	April 1999
Northern Development Company	May 1999
British Electro Technical and Allied Manufacturers Association	June 1999
Southern Derbyshire Chamber of Commerce/BL North Derbyshire	September 1999
Birmingham Chamber of Industry and Commerce	November 1999
British Chilean Chamber of Commerce	November 1999
London Chamber of Commerce and Industry	March 2000

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what was the last occasion on which a Government Minister led a trade delegation to *(a)* Pakistan, *(b)* Panama and *(c)* Paraguay; and what future trade delegations are planned. [76553]

Mr. Wilson: The last Government Minister to lead a trade delegation to Pakistan was my right hon. Friend the Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) in January 1998, when President of the Board of Trade. This year trade delegations from Business Link Sussex (March), the Society of British Gas Industries (April), Thames Valley Chamber of Commerce (September) and Nottinghamshire Chamber of Commerce (October) will visit Pakistan.

Sir Martin Laing, BOTB Chairman, led a small delegation to Panama in May 1998. LATAG, the Latin American Trade Advisory Group will be taking a mission to Central America, including Panama this July.

The right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer) led a trade delegation to Paraguay in 1993. There are plans for Mid-Yorkshire Chamber of Commerce (July) and the British Argentine Chamber of Commerce to visit this year.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what was the last occasion on which a Government Minister led a trade delegation to *(a)* Georgia, *(b)* Ghana, *(c)* Guatemala and *(d)* Honduras; and what future trade delegations are planned. [76532]

Mr. Wilson: There have been no recent ministerially-led missions to Georgia. There are no planned trade missions to that country.

Lord Fraser of Carmyllie led a trade mission to Ghana from 3–5 March 1996. The following trade missions to Ghana are currently planned:

	Date
Thames Valley Chamber of Commerce	6–18 June 1999
Birmingham Chamber of Commerce	9–23 September 1999
London Chamber of Commerce	February-March 2000

There have been no recent ministerially-led trade delegations to either Guatemala or Honduras and none is planned. A trade mission run by LATAG, the Latin American Trade Advisory Group, will visit Central America in July 1999; Guatemala will be one of the countries visited.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what was the last occasion on which a Government Minister led a trade delegation to *(a)* New Zealand, *(b)* Nicaragua, *(c)* Nigeria and *(d)* Oman; and what future trade delegations are planned. [76550]

Mr. Wilson: The information is as follows:

New Zealand

There have been no recent ministerially-led trade delegations to New Zealand. However, New Zealand has been visited by many UK Ministers, including the previous Minister for Trade.

My Department plans to support nine trade missions to New Zealand in the financial year 1999/2000:

	Date
Association of British Healthcare Industries	12–14 July 1999
Business Link Sussex	6–10 September 1999
Dorset Chamber of Commerce and Industry	27–29 September 1999
North Staffordshire Chamber of Commerce and Industry	13–15 October 1999
Australia and New Zealand Trade Advisory Committee	17–19 November 1999
Liverpool Chamber of Commerce and Industry	2–5 February 2000
Nottinghamshire Chamber of Commerce and Industry	14–18 February 2000
Business Link Shropshire	20–22 March 2000
Birmingham Chamber of Commerce and Industry	13–15 March 2000

Nicaragua

There have been no recent ministerially-led trade delegations to Nicaragua.

My Department has no plans to support any trade missions to Nicaragua in the financial year 1999/2000.

Nigeria

The present Minister for Trade led a trade delegation to Nigeria from 14–16 December 1998.

My Department is planning to support four trade missions to Nigeria in the financial year 1999/2000:

	Date
Thames Valley Chamber of Commerce and Industry	6–18 June 1999
Birmingham Chamber of Commerce and Industry	9–23 September 1999
Energy Industries Council	29 November–3 December 1999
London Chamber of Commerce	February-March 2000

Oman

The last occasion on which a Government Minister led a trade delegation to Oman was in October 1996.

My Department is planning to support four trade missions to Oman in the financial year 1999/2000:

	Date
Coventry and Warwickshire Chamber of Commerce	22–24 May 1999
London Chamber of Commerce and Industry	25–27 September 1999
Business Link West	8–17 February 2000
Middle East Association	6–8 March 2000

Trade Promotion

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what trade promotion priorities his Department has given to United Kingdom trade promoters in *(a)* Colombia, *(b)* Cuba, *(c)* Cyprus, *(d)* Dominica and *(e)* the Dominican Republic; [76528]

(2) what trade promotion priorities his Department has given to United Kingdom trade promoters in *(a)* Pakistan, *(b)* Panama and *(c)* Paraguay; [76555]

(3) what trade promotion priorities his Department has given to United Kingdom trade promoters in *(a)* Belarus, *(b)* Bolivia, *(c)* Botswana, *(d)* Cambodia and (c) Chile; [76525]

(4) what trade promotion priorities his Department has given to United Kingdom trade promoters in *(a)* India, *(b)* Indonesia, *(c)* Israel and *(d)* Jamaica; [76537]

(5) what trade promotion priorities his Department has given to United Kingdom trade promoters in *(a)* South Africa, *(b)* Sri Lanka, *(c)* Thailand and *(d)* Uganda; [76561]

(6) what trade promotion priorities his Department has given to United Kingdom trade promoters in *(a)* Lithuania, *(b)* Malawi, *(c)* Malaysia and *(d)* Mauritius; [76546]

(7) what trade promotion priorities his Department has given to United Kingdom trade promoters in *(a)* Kazakhstan, *(b)* Kyrgyzstan, *(c)* Lebanon and *(d)* Lesotho; [76543]

(8) what trade promotion priorities his Department has given to United Kingdom trade promoters in *(a)* New Zealand, *(b)* Nicaragua, *(c)* Nigeria and *(d)* Oman; [76552]

(9) what trade promotion priorities his Department has given to United Kingdom trade promoters in *(a)* Ukraine and *(b)* Uruguay; [76564]

(10) what trade promotion priorities his Department has given to United Kingdom trade promoters in *(a)* Japan, *(b)* Jordan, *(c)* Kenya and *(d)* Kuwait; [76540]

(11) what trade promotion priorities his Department has given to United Kingdom trade promoters in *(a)* Ecuador, *(b)* Egypt, *(c)* Estonia and *(d)* Gambia; [76531]

(12) what trade promotion priorities his Department has given to United Kingdom trade promoters in *(a)* Peru, *(b)* Qatar, *(c)* Saudi Arabia and *(d)* Singapore; [76558]

(13) what trade promotion priorities his Department has given to United Kingdom trade promoters in *(a)* Algeria, *(b)* Argentina, *(c)* Australia, *(d)* Bahrain and *(e)* Bangladesh; [76522]

(14) what trade promotion priorities his Department has given to United Kingdom trade promoters in *(a)* Mexico, *(b)* Morocco, *(c)* Mozambique and *(d)* Namibia; [76549]

(15) what trade promotion priorities his Department has given to United Kingdom trade promoters in *(a)* Georgia, *(b)* Ghana, *(c)* Guatemala and *(d)* Honduras. [76534]

Mr. Wilson: Our export promotion priorities for the majority of the markets mentioned are contained in the Markets and Sectors Matrix, published on 4 March, a copy of which has been placed in the Library of the House. Major trade promotion campaigns are underway in a number of markets included in the Matrix; for example campaigns aimed at new and inexperienced exporters in

Western Europe and USA, and at the more experienced exporter in Japan, Brazil (in the context of MERCOSUR), India, China/Hong Kong, Egypt, South Africa and Turkey. In the coming months, we shall also be launching campaigns for Canada, Taiwan, Mexico and extending the existing campaign in Poland to cover Central Europe, adding in Hungary and the Czech Republic.

We provide a range of help for exporters in all markets, including targeted market information, market research services, and where appropriate support for missions and trade fairs.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) if he will make a statement on the prospects for increasing United Kingdom trade with *(a)* Colombia, *(b)* Cuba, *(c)* Cyprus, *(d)* Dominica and *(e)* the Dominican Republic; [76527]

(2) if he will make a statement on the prospects for increasing United Kingdom trade with *(a)* Peru, *(b)* Qatar, *(c)* Saudi Arabia and *(d)* Singapore; [76557]

(3) if he will make a statement on the prospects for increasing United Kingdom trade with *(a)* Algeria, *(b)* Argentina, *(c)* Australia, *(d)* Bahrain and *(e)* Bangladesh; [76521]

(4) if he will make a statement on the prospect for increasing United Kingdom trade with *(a)* South Africa, *(b)* Sri Lanka, *(c)* Thailand and *(d)* Uganda; [76560]

(5) if he will make a statement on the prospects for increasing United Kingdom trade with *(a)* Mexico, *(b)* Morocco, *(c)* Mozambique and *(d)* Namibia; [76548]

(6) if he will make a statement on the prospects for increasing United Kingdom trade with *(a)* India, *(b)* Indonesia, *(c)* Israel and *(d)* Jamaica; [76536]

(7) if he will make a statement on the prospects for increasing United Kingdom trade with *(a)* Georgia, *(b)* Ghana, *(c)* Guatemala and *(d)* Honduras; [76533]

(8) if he will make a statement on the prospects for increasing United Kingdom trade with *(a)* Kazakhstan, *(b)* Kyrgyzstan, *(c)* Lebanon and *(d)* Lesotho; [76542]

(9) if he will make a statement on the prospects for increasing United Kingdom trade with *(a)* Japan, *(b)* Jordan, *(c)* Kenya and *(d)* Kuwait; [76539]

(10) if he will make a statement on the prospects for increasing United Kingdom trade with *(a)* Ukraine and *(b)* Uruguay; [76563]

(11) if he will make a statement on the prospects for increasing United Kingdom trade with *(a)* Lithuania, *(b)* Malawi, *(c)* Malaysia and *(d)* Mauritius; [76545]

(12) if he will make a statement on the prospects for increasing United Kingdom trade with *(a)* Pakistan, *(b)* Panama and *(c)* Paraguay; [76554]

(13) if he will make a statement on the prospects for increasing United Kingdom trade with *(a)* New Zealand, *(b)* Nicaragua, *(c)* Nigeria and *(d)* Oman; [76551]

(14) if he will make a statement on the prospects for increasing United Kingdom trade with *(a)* Ecuador, *(b)* Egypt, *(c)* Estonia and *(d)* Gambia; [76530]

(15) if he will make a statement on the prospects for increasing United Kingdom trade with *(a)* Belarus, *(b)* Bolivia, *(c)* Botswana, *(d)* Cambodia and *(e)* Chile. [76524]

Mr. Wilson: The excellence of many British products and services means that there are prospects for increasing UK trade in all markets to which our companies have access.

Export Licences

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry under what circumstances *(a)* designs and *(b)* designs backed up by training or implementation services, require an export licence. [76123]

Dr. Howells: Specified exports of technology, including designs, are subject to control under various entries in the Export of Goods (Control) Order 1994, the Dual-Use and Related Goods (Export Control) Regulations 1996, and Council Decision 94/942/CFSP, and the controls apply irrespective of whether or not the technology is linked to the provision of training on its use or implementation.

At present, as noted in the White Paper on Strategic Export Controls, published in July 1998, HMG can control only tangible exports, which means that export licences are currently required for controlled technology only when this is exported in physical form e.g. on paper or computer disc. However, the White Paper contained a proposal to provide HMG with the power to control the transfer of technology, whatever the means of transfer, and proposals for the use of that power.

Firework Safety

Mrs. Gilroy: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will publish the fireworks injuries statistics for the 1998 firework season; and if he will make a statement. [77007]

Dr. Howells: The total number of persons recorded as requiring treatment at hospital casualty departments in Great Britain during the 1998 firework season was 831. This represents a reduction of over 8 per cent. on the previous year's total. Within the overall reduction, there was a 36 per cent. fall in injuries caused by sparklers. My Department's firework safety campaign highlighted the risk of injury from sparklers and I am particularly pleased that this message has been heeded.

The number of serious injuries fell from 71 in 1997 to 46 last year. Figures also reveal a 12 per cent. drop in hooligan injuries after 21 areas were targeted by my department in partnership with local councils during the campaign to stamp out this anti-social behaviour.

I am arranging for copies of a summary of the injury figures to be placed in the Libraries of both Houses. Detailed analytical and regional tables will be published soon.

US Import Duties

Jane Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) if he will compensate Cornflower Fine Art Publishers of Reading for the increase in their export

costs to the United States as a result of the increase in United States import tariffs; and if he will make a statement; [76778]

(2) what assessment he has made on the loss of revenue to Kew Gardens as a result of the increase in United States import duties; and if he will make a statement. [76776]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answers 15 March 1999]:* My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced on 4 March 1999, *Official Report*, columns 1223–29, that the Government had decided to establish a scheme for the cashmere knitwear industry to guarantee the bonds requested by the United States. The mere threat of US action had been having a particularly significant effect on cashmere, in view of the highly seasonal nature of that industry. The precise details and scope of the bond scheme have still to be decided.

The Government are very aware of the effect that the US action may have not only on the various industry sectors targeted by the US (including lithographs), but also on the possible implications for others in the UK involved with those sectors.

Jane Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions he has had with the United States Government on a resolution of the present dispute over United States increased import tariffs; and if he will make a statement. [76783]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 15 March 1999]:* It is of course the European Commission that acts for the European Union on this matter. The UK Government have also discussed this with the US Administration at every level. We have repeatedly made clear our desire to see the dispute resolved within the WTO framework. We have stressed that US retaliatory action will do nothing to resolve the underlying dispute, which is about the compatibility with WTO rules of the EU's revised bananas regime. We have urged the US to abide by the WTO process currently under way, which offers the best prospect for a resolution of this dispute.

Jane Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will estimate *(a)* how many United Kingdom companies will incur increased export costs as a result of the increase in United States import tariffs, *(b)* how many companies Her Majesty's Government have compensated for the increase in their export costs, *(c)* the cost to public funds of this compensation, *(d)* the nature of the exports of each company and *(e)* the cost to United Kingdom businesses of the increase in United States import duties. [76782]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 15 March 1999]:* Against the background of historical levels of exports in each sector, it is not possible to say what the overall impact might be. Much will depend on how long any retaliatory measures remain in place, the ability of the affected firms to find alternative customers and local labour market conditions. The precise details of the bond scheme announced by the Government on 4 March 1999, *Official Report*, columns 1223–29, have still to be decided. No companies have therefore been compensated so far. The sectors affected by the US action are: cashmere sweaters; batteries; plastics; biscuits; bath oils; candles; lithographs; bed linen; cartons; coffee makers; wallets; handbags; cheese; and felt paper.

Minister for Science

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions the Minister for Science has had with the Wellcome Trust concerning their applications for planning permission at Hinxton Hall in South Cambridgeshire. [76069]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 11 March 1999]:* None.

Milk Marque

Mr. Livsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will publish the conclusions of the MMC investigation into Milk Marque. [76901]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 15 March 1999]:* My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry is required to publish all monopoly reports by the Monopolies and Mergers Commission. The report will be published as soon as is practicable.

Supermarkets

Mr. Livsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will publish the conclusions of the Office of Fair Trading report of their investigation into the trading practices of the main supermarkets in the United Kingdom. [76900]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 15 March 1999]:* It is a matter for the Director General of Fair Trading to decide what he will publish regarding his investigation into the profitability of the major supermarkets in the grocery sector. I understand that he hopes to be in a position to announce his conclusions by the end of this month.

Edgar Fernandes

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if the Minister of State will take up the case of Edgar Fernandes during his visit to Turkey. [76428]

Mr. Wilson: The purpose of my visit to Turkey is to promote British trade. British consular staff in Ankara, Istanbul and Valetta continue to monitor closely Turkey's request for the extradition from Malta of the man charged with Mr. Fernandes' murder. They have urged both Governments to act swiftly to resolve this case.

SCOTLAND

Social Work

Mr. Ernie Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he proposes to publish the White Paper on Social Work in Scotland; and if he will make a statement. [77455]

Mr. Dewar: The White Paper "Aiming for Excellence: Modernising Social Work Services in Scotland" is published today. It contains the answers to three key questions—What kind of social work services do we want? How can they be delivered? How will we know if they are being delivered effectively? It sets out proposals to strengthen the protection of children and vulnerable adults, to support a confident and competent workforce and to ensure high quality services which meet people's needs.

We propose to create a Scottish Commission for the Regulation of Care as the independent regulatory of social work services, whoever provides them. The Commission will register all organisations that provide care gainst agreed criteria and will make regular independent inspections to see that they are met. It will regulate residential care homes and nursing homes, making it easier for homes to offer both forms of care. It will introduce for the first time regulation of care services provided in people's own homes and will also cover all relevant children's services.

We propose that the workforce should be regulated by a Scottish Social Services Council which will have the duty of registering specified groups of staff who have completed approved courses of training as a pre-condition for registration. The Council will also regulate professional and vocational education and will publish codes of conduct and practice. Social work services make a critical contribution to social inclusion, providing crucial support to people at times of personal or family crises. The White Paper also underlines the critical importance for successful services of close and effective partnership working between agencies.

If enacted by the Scottish Parliament, the proposals in this White Paper will strengthen public confidence, creating modern social work services on which we can all rely.

Copies of Command Paper No. CM4288 are available in the Library of both Houses.

Education Budget

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the Scottish Office education budget in cash terms and at 1998–99 prices for *(a)* 1995–96, *(b)* 1996–97, *(c)* 1997–98 and *(d)* 1998–99; and what is his estimate for (i) 1999–2000, (ii) 2000–01 and (iii) 2001–02. [76866]

Mr. Dewar: The information is as follows:

£ million

Year	*Cash terms*	*1998–99 prices*
1995–96	3,553	3,848
1996–97	3,611	3,794
1997–98	3,524	3,612
1998–99	3,633	3,633
1999–2000	4,039	3,940
2000–01	4,360	4,150
2001–02	4,536	4,212

Sources:

1995–96: 1995 Departmental Report (table 6.2 excluding sport and Gaelic Broadcasting) and GAE announcement

1996–97: 1996 Departmental Report (table 4.1 excluding sport) and GAE announcement

1997–98: 1997 Departmental Report (table 4.3 excluding sport) and GAE announcement

1998–99: 1998 Departmental Report (table 4.2 new deal for schools and table 4.4 excluding SOPA running costs) and GAE announcement

1999–2000 to 2001–02: Comprehensive Spending Review and 1999 Budget announcement

As from 1 July 1999, this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

Fossils

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps Scottish Natural Heritage has taken to prevent the illegal removal of important fossils from sites of special scientific interest in Scotland; and if he will make a statement. [76938]

Mr. Macdonald: Scottish Natural Heritage is developing a site safeguard plan which will be published shortly.

As from 1 July 1999, this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

Agriculture Improvement Scheme

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the budget for the Highlands and Islands Objective 1 area under the agricultural improvement scheme for *(a)* 1991–92, *(b)* 1992–93, *(c)* 1993–94, *(d)* 1994–95, *(e)* 1995–96, *(f)* 1996–97, *(g)* 1997–98 and *(h)* 1998–99; and what is the underspend for each year. [76862]

Mr. Macdonald: The Agricultural Business Improvement Scheme (ABIS) forms part of the Objective 1 Highlands and Islands Agricultural Programme (HIAP), along with the Marketing Scheme and the Crofting Township Development Scheme. There is no separate budget provision for ABIS.

The original budget provision for the HIAP was £23 million, but due to the strength of sterling against the ecu, this figure is now nearer £20 million.

The estimated expenditure and outturn figures from 1994–95, when the programme was launched, to 1998–99 are shown in the table:

£ million

Financial year	*PES provision*	*Expenditure*
1994–95	1.600	0.049
1995–96	2.178	1.188
1996–97	4.855	2.528
1997–98	4.836	3.162
1998–99	4.830	[1]2.132

[1] To end February 1999

Total expenditure to date under HIAP is therefore £9.059 million. In addition, there are commitments totalling £4.7 million still to be paid, giving an overall total to date of £13.759 million. The programme remains open for approvals until 31 December 1999 and for payments until 31 December 2001.

From 1 July 1999, this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

Health Budget

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was his Department's health budget in cash terms and at 1998–99 prices for *(a)* 1995–96, *(b)* 1996–97, *(c)* 1997–98 and *(d)* 1998–99; and what is his estimate for (i) 1999–2000, (ii) 2000–01 and (iii) 2001–02. [76868]

Mr. Galbraith: The information is as follows:

£ million

	Cash terms	1998–99 prices
1995–96	4,105	4,446
1996–97	4,227	4,441
1997–98	4,376	4,485
1998–99	4,626	4,626
1999–2000	4,934	4,814
2000–01	5,225	4,973
2001–02	5,449	5,153

From 1 July 1999, this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

Special Police Officers

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the estimated number of *(a)* full-time and *(b)* special police officers, by rank and force, for (i) 1999, (ii) 2000, (iii) 2001 and (iv) 2002. [76859]

Mr. McLeish: The information is not available in the form requested. My right hon. Friend does not estimate police numbers in future years. Numbers of regular and special constables at the latest date available are shown in the table.

At 31 March 1998

	Number of regular constables	Number of special constables
Central	719	72
Dumfries and Galloway	446	193
Fife	841	132
Grampian	1,226	138
Lothian and Borders	2,621	198
Northern	667	480
Strathclyde	7,186	319
Tayside	1,148	191
Total	14,854	1,723

From 1 July 1999, this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Structural Adjustment Programmes

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what representations she has made to the IMF and World Development Bank concerning the impact of structural adjustment programmes on health and education programmes. [77168]

Clare Short: In all my discussions with both the Managing Director of the IMF and the President of the World Bank, I have underlined the importance of protecting anti-poverty spending during adjustment. In particular, I have stressed the importance of avoiding interventions which work against the poor having access to health and education services. We were pleased that the 1998 Review of ESAF proposed that the IMF should pay greater attention to the potential social impact of adjustment programmes, drawing on the expertise of the World Bank and paying particular attention to health and education. We are following closely the implementation of these recommendations.

South Africa

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what plans she has to fund *(a)* police and *(b)* army training for the Republic of South Africa. [76250]

Clare Short: We have committed up to £5.5 million since 1994 to help South Africa develop effective civilian oversight of the police. We have provided international expertise to the national Department of Safety and Security, the national Police Service and the Independent Complaints Directorate and contributed to production of a White Paper on Safety and Security. We have supported community policing projects in Western Cape, Free State, Eastern Cape and North-West Provinces.

We have no plans to assist South Africa with army training beyond our contribution of £50,000 to Exercise Blue Crane, a peacekeeping exercise by regional armed forces to take place in South Africa in April.

Appointments

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list those people she has appointed to public bodies since 1 November 1998, indicating the positions to which they have been appointed and if they receive remuneration. [76416]

Clare Short: The following appointments have been made during the period in question:

Commonwealth Development Corporation

Ms Jayne Almond (Deputy Chair): annual remuneration £10,000.

Mr. Russell Seal (Non-Executive Board Member): annual remuneration £7,500.

Know How Fund Advisory Board

Baroness Williams of Crosby (Member): unremunerated[1]

Ms Ann McElvoy (Member): unremunerated[1]

Professor Robert Deacon (Member): unremunerated[1]

Development Awareness Working Group

Mr. John Westaway (Member): unremunerated[1]

Ms Gill Beauchamp (Member): unremunerated[1]

Mr. Peter Smith (Member): unremunerated[1]

[1] travel expenses are reimbursed.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Community Trusts

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many part-time staff are employed in the *(a)* North and West and *(b)* South and East Belfast community trusts; and how many of them are employed by private businesses with contractual relations with the trusts. [75520]

Mr. McFall: The number of part-time staff employed in each Trust is as follows:

(a) North and West Belfast: 1,873

(b) South and East Belfast: 2,290.

None of the part-time staff is employed by private businesses with contractual relations with the trusts.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Digital Radio

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what steps he is taking to ensure that people in Derby and South Derbyshire can receive digital radio services. [74448]

Janet Anderson: The Government are committed to encourage the take up of digital radio. Responsibility for the roll out of digital radio services across the UK rests with the BBC in accordance with the Royal Charter and Agreement and with the Radio Authority under the framework of the Broadcasting Acts. The BBC national digital radio multiplex is already broadcasting and Digital One's national commercial digital multiplex is expected to commence in the autumn. These national multiplexes will deliver services to the major population centres in Derbyshire, with the lowland populated areas particularly well served. Initially, services may not cover some of the more remote areas in the county where they are shielded from signals by local terrain. It may be necessary to consider improvements to coverage in future transmission plans, in the light of initial experience.

Tourism

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what steps he is taking to promote tourism in the North West of England; and if he will make a statement. [76362]

Janet Anderson: The North West, like all parts of England, benefits from the work of the British Tourist Authority and of the English Tourist Board. For 1998–99, the BTA has a grant of £35 million and the ETB a grant of £9.7 million, of which £292,000 is for the North West Tourist Board. New support structures for tourism in England, announced on 14 December, must ensure that more effective use is made of this money in the future, with a greater proportion going to the regions.

The Government's new tourism strategy, "Tomorrow's Tourism" which was published on 26 February, sets out specific proposals for action by Government, local authorities, tourist boards and the industry to promote the sustainable development of a modern, competitive, high quality tourism industry. This will benefit all regions, including the North West.

BBC On-line

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what is the estimated expenditure on BBC on-line over the next three years. [76163]

Janet Anderson: Total expenditure on BBC on-line to date is as follows:

Date	*£ million*
1997–98	18.7
1998–99	23.1
1999–2000	23.4 (forecast)

Levels of expenditure in years after 1999–2000 have not yet been determined.

Gardens (Funding)

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what support *(a)* his Department and *(b)* the National Lottery give to gardens. [76162]

Mr. Alan Howarth: My Department does not directly fund gardens. However, English Heritage (EH) can offer grants under its Historic Parks and Gardens Grant Scheme and in recent years it has offered an average of £200,000 per year to garden projects. In the past three years it has assisted 20 sites. Grants are, however, restricted to outstanding historic gardens which are graded I and II* on EH's Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest in England. EH is also currently considering a new integrated grant scheme for gardens, buildings and monuments.

The Heritage Lottery Fund, National Lottery Charities Board and UK Arts Councils have to date contributed over £84 million to over 223 projects which create, restore or enhance gardens.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced on 12 March that £125 million of Lottery money will be made available through the New Opportunities Fund, under its Green Spaces and Sustainable Communities Initiative, to help urban and rural communities across the UK to understand, improve and care for their natural and living environment and improve the overall quality of their surroundings. Gardens may well benefit from this new initiative.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Information Superhighway

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many schools have to date been linked to the information superhighway and at what cost; and when he estimates that all schools will have been linked to the information superhighway and at what total cost. [74760]

Mr. Charles Clarke: The Department published last year the results of a survey of ICT provision in schools which indicated that 17 per cent. of primary schools and 83 per cent. of secondary schools were connected to the Internet by March 1998. This is in comparison to the previous year's survey (published in 1997), which indicated that 5 per cent. of primary schools and 47 per cent. of secondary schools were connected to the Internet at that time. Subsequent annual surveys will indicate the change in growth of schools with such connections, although the latest estimates from British Educational Communications and Technology Agency (BECTA) are that approximately 30 per cent. of primary schools, 90 per cent. of secondary schools and 45 per cent. of special schools in England currently have some form of Internet access. The Government are committed to ensuring that all schools are connected to the Internet by 2002.

The Government are supporting expenditure of over £700 million during the period 1998–2002 on the National Grid for Learning Standards Fund. This is enabling schools to connect to the information superhighway and equip themselves with the networking infrastructure and information and communications technology to make

best use of it. It is not possible to break down this figure into the precise amount that schools spend on use of the Internet.

Opportunity for Youth

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on his policy on the development of an Opportunity for Youth strand to the European Communities budget. [76277]

Mr. Mudie: The European Commission has proposed an action programme for youth from the year 2000 that includes support for young people undertaking projects to develop their initiative and enterprise. The Government are participating positively in negotiations with other Member States on the content of the new programme.

Class Sizes

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many pupils in Oxfordshire at *(a)* primary school, *(b)* Key Stage 1, *(c)* Key Stage 2 and *(d)* secondary schools were in classes of 31 or more pupils taught by one teacher in (i) January 1997, (ii) January 1998 and (iii) January 1999. [76761]

Ms Estelle Morris *[holding answer 15 March 1999]:* I refer the hon. Member to my reply of 19 November 1998, *Official Report*, column *776*, and my subsequent letter of 24 February 1999, copies of which have been placed in the Library.

Information on Class Sizes (Provisional) in Maintained Primary Schools in England: January 1999 will be published in April.

National Curriculum

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans the Government have to implement the curriculum recommendations of the Panel for Education for Sustainable Development. [76967]

Mr. Charles Clarke: We have asked the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority to take the Panel's recommendations into account in their review of the National Curriculum. This will inform the forthcoming consultation about changes to the National Curriculum from September 2000.

Correspondence

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment when he intends to reply to the letters to him dated 14 October 1998, 7 January and 11 February 1999 from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton with regard to Mr. W. Jackson. [76940]

Mr. Mudie: A reply to Mr. Jackson's letter will be issued today, 16 March 1999.

Suicides

Dr. Stoate: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what steps he is taking to reduce the rate of suicide among young men by introducing education in schools to help children recognise the symptoms of depression and sources of help. [76578]

Mr. Charles Clarke: The Department for Education and Employment, together with the Department of Health, announced the Healthy Schools Initiative in May 1998. This will support personal, social and health education in schools and address the issue of emotional health and well being. As part of the initiative we have established the Wired for Health website, providing health information initially for teachers, and later for pupils and students. The site provides a link between the Young Minds Website and the Royal College of Psychiatrists fact sheets on child and adolescent mental health. We will be expanding the information relating to mental health on the website in due course.

The Government regard children with emotion and behavioural difficulties and mental health problems as having special educational needs. Preventing the development of these problems is a key element of our policy. The recently published Action Programme, "Meeting Special Educational Needs" flagged as priorities measures targeted at young children to prevent them developing problems, and to strengthen provision for older children. Such activities were eligible for support under the 1999–2000 Standards Fund, and approximately 20 Local Education Authorities are to be supported to undertake pilot projects in this field.

Autistic Children

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) what action he has taken since the research project commissioned in 1993 by his Department and the Department of Health into under-identification of autistic children; [76400]

(2) what statutory provisions require a local education authority in England and Wales to provide a relevant education service for an individual child with autistic spectrum disorder; and if he will make a statement; [76401]

(3) if he will institute a public inquiry into the educational services provided for children with autistic spectrum disorder in the United Kingdom; [76403]

(4) what steps the Government have taken to implement the recommendations of the Health Committee's report on health services for children and young people in the community and school (HC 314 of session 1996–97) in respect of education services for children with autistic spectrum disorder. [76440]

Mr. Charles Clarke: Under Part IV Chapter 1 of the Education Act 1996, local education authorities are required to identify and assess children with special educational needs who may require provision beyond that which can normally be met from within the resources of local schools, and to arrange suitable provision where necessary. This includes children with autistic spectrum disorders.

The final report of the research project commissioned in 1993 by the Departments for Education and Employment and Health, "A Descriptive and Comparative Study of Current Interventions for Children with Autism"

(Jones, Meldrum, Newson; University of Nottingham, June 1995) found under-identification of children with autism and a shortfall in specialist provision.

The Government are implementing an SEN Action Programme, announced in November 1998, designed to improve provision for all children with special educational needs, including those with autism. This followed wide-ranging consultation and takes into account the University of Nottingham's report and the Health Committee's recommendations, contained in "The Specific Health Needs of Children and Young People". Last year my Department published a report on existing research into the educational interventions for children with autism which will complement current research into the provision made for such children, commissioned by the Local Government Association. We will consider the findings of the latter research carefully once they are available.

Provision for children with autism in the rest of the United Kingdom is a matter for my hon. Friends the Secretaries of State of Scotland, for Wales and for Northern Ireland.

Investors in People

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what action he is taking regarding the alleged misuse by Classic Collections (UK) Ltd., Slough, of the Investors in People logo; and if he will make a statement. [76129]

Mr. Mudie: The guardianship of the intellectual property and associated trademarks of the Investors in People Standard is a matter for Investors in People UK.

I understand that the Compliance Unit of Investors in People UK received satisfactory assurances on 3 March from the Chairman of Genesis Marketing, the company which owns Classic Collections, that they would cease use of the logo immediately.

Schools (Exclusions)

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many *(a)* permanent and *(b)* temporary exclusions there have been over the last five years. [75023]

Mr. Charles Clarke: The following table shows the number of permanent exclusions from maintained schools in England for each of the school years for which information is available centrally. Data on permanent exclusions in 1997–98 are currently being collated and will be published later this year.

Permanent exclusions from maintained schools in England

Year	*Number of permanent exclusions*
1994–95	11,084
1995–96	12,476
1996–97	12,668

The Department does not currently hold information on fixed period (temporary) exclusions. The Department plans to collect information about fixed period exclusions of more than five days from the end of the 1998–99 school year. This information will be used to set a baseline for a national target of a one third reduction in fixed period exclusions by 2002.

The Government will be spending £493 million over the next three years on initiatives to reduce truancy and exclusions, including the provision of more on-site units in schools for disruptive pupils.

Appointments

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list those people he has appointed to public bodies since 1 November 1998, indicating the positions to which they have been appointed and if they receive remuneration. [76411]

Mr. Mudie: The information requested is given in the following table. My hon. Friend will wish to note that this information will be in the Department's Annual Report when it is published this year.

Name of public body	*Position*	*Remuneration*
Construction Industry Training Board		
David Adamson	Board Member	None
Robert Blackman	Board Member	None
Stewart Bonnette	Board Member	None
Engineering Construction Industry Training Board		
Susan Bush	Board Member	None
Douglas Walker	Board Member	None
Education Transfer Council		
Keith Bridge	Chair	£15,000 per annum
Roy Atkinson	Board Member	None
Michael Ellison	Board Member	None
Michael Lodge	Board Member	None
George Mathews	Board Member	None
Mary Schofield	Board Member	None
Equal Opportunities Commission		
Julie Mellor	Chair	To be finalised
FEFC—West Midlands region		
Jock Gallagher	Board Member	None
Christine King	Board Member	None
Roy Pinney	Board Member	None
FEFC—South East region		
John Brookham	Board Member	None
Higher Education Funding Council for England		
John Taylor	Board Member	None
Investors In People UK		
Norman McLean	Board Member	None
Lord Tom Sawyer	Board Member	None
John Steele	Board Member	None
Students Loans Company		
Sir Anthony Battishill	Chair	£50,000 per annum
Brian Booth	Board Member	£5,000 per annum

WALES

Welsh Development Agency

Mr. Livsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the amount spent by the WDA in each local authority area in Wales for each of the last five years. [72371]

Mr. Hain *[holding answer 25 February 1999]:* As the details of the amounts spent by the WDA in each local authority in Wales for the last five years are lengthy, they have been placed in the Library.

NHS Training and Education

Mr. Livsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what data his Department collects on expenditure on NHS training and education and its distribution. [76943]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: The information is as follows:

Departmental expenditure on NHS education and training in 1998–99 is summarised in the table:

Budget	*Expenditure £ (estimated out-turn)*	*Recipient(s)*
Service Increment For Training (Trusts)	18,544,000	NHS Trusts involved in undergraduate teaching
Service Increment For Training (GPs)	291,500	Training practices
Postgraduate Medical and Dental Education	10,320,000	University of Wales College of Medicine, NHS Trusts and Health Authorities
Central contribution to salaries of doctors in postgraduate training	26,566,000	NHS Trusts
Postgraduate Pharmaceutical Education	703,000	University of Wales College, Cardiff
Postgraduate Optical Education	28,000	British College of Optometrists, London
Other training of health professionals	41,605,000	Higher education institutions

Trusts and GPs involved in medical and dental undergraduate training are reimbursed through Service Increment For Training (SIFT) for the ancillary costs incurred as a result of training activity. SIFT money is allocated on a basis that reflects historical costs, but also changing student numbers and distribution.

The Department's direct contribution of £10,320,000 to postgraduate medical and dental education and training includes a one-off payment of £500,000 from the Welsh Office Primary Care Initiative. This budget is managed and accounted for by the Post-Graduate Dean, UWCM. In addition, the Department contributes towards the salaries of doctors in training, in recognition of the time they spend on their studies. Contracts for education and training of health professionals other than doctors and dentists in higher education institutions in Wales are managed by the Education Purchasing Unit of the Welsh Health Common Service Authority (which will become part of the Department when WHCSA is abolished), which monitors student numbers and pays invoices monthly.

In addition, the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales fund medical and dental undergraduate degrees (and funded degrees in certain other health-related subjects until the end of the 1997–98 academic year), but their funding is calculated on the basis of overall numbers of students in each College, not numbers of students taking particular courses.

The Department does not monitor that expenditure on education and training which is undertaken by Trusts themselves, though this is included in Trusts' annual accounts together with expenditure on research.

Trust expenditure includes training purchased from the NHS Staff College. The College receives support from Health Authorities, which totalled £1,278,000 in 1997–98.

Following the transfer of functions, this issue will be a matter for the National Assembly.

Health Authority Budgets

Mr. Livsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the estimated surplus or deficit of each health authority in Wales in 1998–99. [74378]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones *[pursuant to his reply, 9 March 1999, c. 175]:* I regret that two of the figures given in the answer were incorrect. A corrected answer is as follows:

The estimated surplus/(deficit) that health authorities and their Trusts will be incurring in 1998–99 is as follows:

Health authority area	*£ million*
Bro Taf	(5)
Dyfed Powys	(13)
Gwent	—
Iechyd Morgannwg	(2)
North Wales	(1)
Wales	(21)

Note:
These forecasts are based on health bodies' best estimates of their income and expenditure position, and are subject to audit adjustment. The final position will be reported in their 1998–99 annual accounts, which will be available in audited form at the end of July 1999.

Following the transfer of functions, this issue will become a matter for the National Assembly.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Spain

15. **Mr. Hammond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the current state of relations between the United Kingdom and Spain. [74921]

Mr. Robin Cook: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I have already given earlier in the House today to the hon. and learned Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier), *Official Report*, columns 867-68.

MOX Fuels

19. **Mr. Llew Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what *(a)* assessment he has made of and *(b)* recent representations he has received concerning the proliferation dangers posed by the use and transport of plutonium-based MOX fuels. [74925]

Mr. Fatchett: The proliferation risks posed by the use of Mixed Oxide Fuel (MOX) by European Union countries and its transport from EU suppliers to Japan are assessed as being extremely low. Indeed, the use of MOX fuel reduces proliferation risks by gradually reducing plutonium stockpiles.

I am aware only of representations made by the Fijian-based Pacific Concerns Resource Centre Inc to HMG in August 1998.

Indonesia

21. **Mrs. Mahon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the United Kingdom's relations with Indonesia. [74928]

Mr. Fatchett: We enjoy a positive bilateral relationship and look forward to continuing to work with the Government of Indonesia in their efforts to bring about peaceful, democratic reform and economic recovery.

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 26 February 1999, *Official Report*, column *490*, on Indonesia, what information he has received from President Habibie since the Minister raised the investigation into the deaths of Malcolm Rennie and Brian Peters in October 1998. [77184]

Mr. Fatchett: I still await a full reply. I will continue to press for information.

Syria

22. **Mr. Davidson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the Amnesty International report on human rights and democratic representation in Syria. [74929]

Mr. Fatchett: We have taken note of the report and of the concerns it raises about political detainees in Syria. We raise human rights with the Syrians both bilaterally and together with EU partners.

East Timor

23. **Mr. Patrick Hall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on UK policy on the transition of East Timor towards independence. [74930]

26. **Mrs. Fyfe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress he has made towards resolving the issue of the status of East Timor. [74933]

Mr. Fatchett: We continue to support the efforts under UN auspices to secure a future for East Timor which will fully respect the interests and legitimate aspirations of the East Timorese people. We hope that the Indonesian Government's recent announcement on East Timor, including their willingness to envisage independence, will prove to be a turning point.

St. Helena

24. **Mr. Bob Russell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the restoration of full British citizenship to residents of the island of St. Helena. [74931]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: The issue of British citizenship for those citizens of the UK Overseas Territories who do not already have it was considered as part of our review of policy towards the UK Overseas Territories. The outcome will be contained in the Overseas Territories White Paper, which will be published this week.

Kosovo

25. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps Her Majesty's Government are taking to secure peace and conformity with international legal obligations in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. [74932]

32. **Mr. Wilkinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the situation in Kosovo. [74939]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: The United Kingdom has played a leading role in international efforts, including in the UN, in NATO, in the EU, in the Contact Group—particularly as co-chairman of the talks which began in Rambouillet in February—and on the ground, to promote a peaceful settlement of the crisis in Kosovo and persuade the authorities of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and representatives of the Kosovar Albanians to comply with their obligations to the people of Kosovo and to the international community, including those set out in successive UN Security Council resolutions. This week's resumed negotiations in France are a key element in those efforts.

British Council

27. **Mr. Bennett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the future funding of the British Council. [74934]

Mr. Fatchett: As a result of the Comprehensive Spending Review, the Government have been able to secure for the British Council £133.1 million in the first year, rising to £138.9 million in the third year. This means a real increase of about £2 million for each of those years. The British Council now has the resources to continue the excellent work it does and to develop further programmes.

Iran

28. **Mr. Ivan Lewis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on relations with Iran. [74935]

Mr. Fatchett: In September last year, my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary and the Iranian Foreign Minister, Mr. Kharrazi, came to an agreement concerning

the Rushdie case. We hope that this agreement will provide the basis for further positive developments in the relationship between Iran and the UK.

Lebanon

29. **Mrs. Dunwoody:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on Her Majesty's Government's relations with Lebanon. [74936]

Mr. Fatchett: We enjoy good relations with Lebanon.

Kashmir

30. **Mr. McCabe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the recent meeting and agreements between the Prime Ministers of India and Pakistan; and if he will launch a new initiative regarding the situation in Kashmir. [74937]

Mr. Fatchett: We welcome the recent talks between the Indian and Pakistani Prime Ministers in Lahore, and applaud their joint commitment to intensify efforts to resolve bilateral issues, including Kashmir. We wish them every success in their efforts to find solutions to these problems.

33. **Dr. Lynne Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Governments of India and Pakistan regarding the composition of those undertaking talks between the two countries on the issue of Kashmir. [74940]

Mr. Fatchett: We regularly discuss Kashmir with representatives of India and Pakistan. We welcome the joint commitment made in Lahore by the Prime Ministers of India and Pakistan to intensify efforts to resolve all bilateral issues, including Kashmir.

Wye Agreement

31. **Helen Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he next expects to meet President Arafat to discuss the implementation of the Wye agreement; and if he will make a statement. [74938]

Mr. Fatchett: President Arafat visited London on 11 March at the personal invitation of the Prime Minister. In addition to talks with my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, he attended a dinner that I hosted at Lancaster House. This visit provided us with a valuable opportunity to explore ways that Europe can help get Wye back on track.

Together with our EU partners, we have deplored the failure to complete implementation of the Wye River Memorandum within the declared deadline. We continue to urge both sides to implement their obligations in full and without new conditions.

Sierra Leone

34. **Mr. Ian Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the current situation in Sierra Leone. [74941]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: The security situation in Sierra Leone remains fragile following the renewed fighting in Freetown at the start of the year, when rebel forces caused appalling violence and destruction.

We continue to support strongly the democratically elected Government of Sierra Leone, and the efforts of the Nigerian-led West African force, ECOMOG, to protect the civilian population and deliver lasting peace and stability.

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many matching pledges of financial support have been received to date from the international community to match the £10 million package for Sierra Leone. [77172]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: A number of pledges of support for Sierra Leone have been received from the international community following the announcement of the UK £10 million package of assistance. So far, confirmed new pledges have been received from the European Commission, the United States, Italy and Sweden, totalling over £5 million. Several other countries have undertaken to consider making new contributions to Sierra Leone. We welcome the fact that others are now following our lead in helping to promote lasting peace in Sierra Leone.

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 8 March 1999, *Official Report*, column 2, if he will spend any part of the £10 million additional support for Sierra Leone in the event of no matching pledges of financial support being received from other countries. [77171]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: The Treasury has stipulated that access to the Reserve for up to £10 million for Sierra Leone is conditional upon matching new pledges of support from other international donors. The UK £10 million will be disbursed as we receive these matching pledges from other donors.

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the embassies and high commissions which contacted their host country about financial support for Sierra Leone, indicating whom they contacted and when; and if he will place a copy of the letter of contact in the Library. [77173]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: On 2 March, Posts in European Union Member States, and Posts in key countries of the Sierra Leone Contact Group, as well as in other key international donor countries, were instructed to lobby for additional support to Sierra Leone in response to the announcement of the new UK £10 million package of assistance. We continue to receive responses from these countries. The telegram instructing Posts to make contact is classified, and it would therefore not be appropriate to place a copy in the Library.

Turkey

35. **Mr. Bill O'Brien:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on current relations with Turkey. [74942]

Ms Quin: We attach considerable importance to our relations with Turkey, and pursue dialogue on a wide range of issues.

My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary is in regular contact with the Turkish Foreign Minister, Mr. Cem.

Russian Arms Supplies (Middle East)

36. **Mrs. Ellman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Government of Russia about the supply of weapons to countries in the middle east. [74943]

Ms Quin: During my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary's visit to Russia on 2–5 March, he discussed with Foreign Minister Ivanov the dangers of arms exports and assistance to countries of concern, including the recent speculation about Russian arms exports to Iraq. He has noted the Russian Government's strong statements that they are committed to upholding UN sanctions.

Euro

37. **Mr. Paterson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has held with other EU member states about Britain joining the euro. [74944]

Ms Quin: There has been no recent discussions on joining the Euro in EU Council meetings. We do, however, keep our partners informed of the Government's position, most recently following the statement by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 23 February 1999.

EU Enlargement

38. **Mr. White:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the timetable for enlarging the European Union to include the first group of applicant countries. [74945]

Ms Quin: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave earlier in the House today to my hon. Friend the Member for Harlow (Mr. Rammell), *Official Report*, column 883.

Al Shifa

39. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what new information he has received about the functions of the Al Shifa factory. [74946]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave him on 25 January 1999, *Official Report*, column *148*, and the answers I gave the hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs. Gillan) on 16 February 1999, *Official Report*, columns *751–54*, and 22 February 1999, *Official Report*, column *199*.

Pakistan

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the United Kingdom's relations with Pakistan. [74923]

Mr. Fatchett: United Kingdom/Pakistan relations are long-standing and friendly. We have a continuing dialogue on a wide variety of issues of mutual concern.

Algeria

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action the European Union is taking in respect of human rights violations in Algeria. [76871]

Mr. Fatchett: The European Union takes a close interest in allegations of human rights violations in Algeria. It raises its concerns at both bilateral and multilateral level. The first bilateral dialogue of substance took place in January 1998, when I led the EU Troika of Ministers to Algiers. The presidency has had two further meetings with the Algerian Government since, in Palermo last June led by Robin Cook, and Vienna last October. In Vienna, the Algerian Government agreed to consider individual human rights cases put forward by the presidency. I submitted the UK's contribution, supported by Amnesty International, to the presidency in January.

On a multilateral level, such as the UN Commission on Human Rights, the EU works to persuade the Algerian Government to co-operate with UN human rights instruments and institutions. This year, the UK will work with the EU to try and persuade the Algerians to invite in UN Special Rapporteurs on Extra-judicial Executions and on Torture.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will seek to strengthen the measures taken by the European Union in respect of human rights violations in Algeria. [76872]

Mr. Fatchett: We support efforts by the European Union to establish a constructive dialogue with the Algerian Government on the issue of human rights. These efforts take place at both a multilateral and bilateral level and have made genuine progress in the past six months.

At this year's UN Commission on Human Rights, the UK will encourage the EU to urge the Algerian Government to invite in UN Special Rapporteurs on Extra-judicial Executions and on Torture.

British Passport Holders

Mr. Burden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on how his Department deals with *(a)* complaints and *(b)* inquiries regarding missing or abducted British passport holders in the Indian sub-continent when the persons involved hold dual nationality. [76405]

Mr. Fatchett: Complaints received from hon. Members are answered by Ministers, those from the public may also be answered by Ministers or by the relevant Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) department.

Inquiries about missing or abducted British nationals in the Indian Sub-continent are handled by Consular Division in the FCO, or by our overseas diplomatic and consular missions. Our ability to help dual nationals in the country of their second nationality is limited by international law.

Arms Exports

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he will publish the first annual report on arms exports; and if he will list and define the arms categories to be covered. [76870]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: We will publish the report as soon as possible. As regards the content of the report, I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Dr. Jones) on 14 July 1998, *Official Report*, column *149*.

Recruitment

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what percentage of those recruited at the policy entrant point were women in *(a)* 1996, *(b)* 1997, and *(c)* 1998. [77183]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: The percentages of women recruited at the policy entrant point in the years requested were as follows:

Date	*Percentage*
1996	24
1997	36
1998	52

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many disabled entrants have been recruited into his Department since the implementation of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. [77191]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: Since the implementation of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office has recruited 10 staff who have declared themselves to have a disability(s). Total recruitment to the FCO over the same period numbered 750.

Family Policies

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will place a copy of the review of family policies within his Department in the Library. [77174]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: I am placing in the Library of the House a copy of the list of family policies which was drawn up following a process of review of family policies in 1997–98. It includes several items which were added as a result.

Select Committee Reports

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire) of 4 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *876*, from whom his office received *(a)* the command paper version of the Foreign Affairs Select Committee's report on Human Rights shortly before its publication in December 1998 and *(b)* the draft version of the Foreign Affairs Committee's report on enlargement. [77095]

Mr. Robin Cook: My office received the command paper version of the Foreign Affairs Select Committee's report on Human Rights from the hon. Member for Dundee, West (Mr. Ross).

There was nothing on the draft version of the Foreign Affairs Committee's Report on enlargement to indicate its source. The hon. Member for Dundee, West has made clear to us that he did not send the document.

Nuclear Waste

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received concerning BNFL Ltd.'s *(a)* investment in Pangea Resources Inc. and *(b)* support for Pangea's plans to construct an international repository for nuclear waste in Australia. [77097]

Mr. Fatchett: The Australian High Commission in London has sought information about the Pangea project. We have also received two representations from members of the public.

General Pinochet

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs at what time *(a)* his office and *(b)* he personally, was first informed of (i) the presence of General Pinochet in the United Kingdom, (ii) his intention to leave the UK on 20 October, (iii) the reports from the British Embassy in Madrid on Judge Garzon's activities, (iv) the contact between the 5th Central Magistrate's Court in Madrid and the Metropolitan Police and (v) the issuing of an arrest warrant for General Pinochet. [70290]

Mr. Tony Lloyd *[holding answer 9 February 1999]*: On the answers to *(a)* and *(b)* (i), and (ii) I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire) on 4 November 1998, *Official Report*, column *601*, and to the answer I gave to the hon. Lady on 27 October 1998, *Official Report*, column *146*.

(iii) The reports from our Embassy in Madrid of 12 November 1997 and 23 January 1998 were read at desk level; the reports of 15 and 16 October 1998 were read at senior official level, and drawn on in briefing the Foreign Secretary orally on 16 October before Senator Pinochet was detained.

(iv) FCO officials were informed of the request to interview Senator Pinochet from the 5th Central Magistrate's Court in Madrid on 14 October. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary was briefed on this request at the same time as he was informed of the request for Senator Pinochet's provisional arrest on 16 October.

(v) The FCO was informed of the issuing of a warrant for the provisional arrest of Senator Pinochet by the Bow Street Magistrate late on the evening of 16 October. The Foreign Secretary was immediately informed.

Prisoner Transfers

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps are being taken by Her Majesty's Government to establish arrangements for prisoner transfers between Venezuela and the UK. [76423]

Mr. Fatchett: Her Majesty's Government has encouraged the Venezuelan Government to sign the Council of Europe Convention of the Transfer of Sentenced Prisoners. The Venezuelan Government's application to accede to the convention is being processed by the Council of Europe.

Entry Documents

Mr. Gorrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs in which countries the facilities for obtaining entry documents by people wishing to enter the UK are not available. [76622]

Mr. Fatchett: There are no facilities to apply for UK entry clearance in the following countries: Andora, Benin, Bhutan, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cambodia, Cape Verde, Cayman Islands, Central African Republic, Chad, Comoros, Congo, Djibouti, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Gabon, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Haiti, Kiribati, Kyrgyzstan, Laos; Liberia, Liechtenstein, Macao, Maldives, Mali, Marshall Islands, Mauritania, Micronesia, Moldova, Monaco, Nauru, Netherland Antilles, North Korea, Niger, Palau, Paraguay, San Marino, Sao Tome and Principe, Sikkim, Suriname Tajikistan, Togo, Tuvalu, Western Samoa, Anguilla, Antigua & Barbuda, British Virgin Islands, Commonwealth of Dominica, Grenada, Montserrat, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent & The Grenadines.

Posts in Afghanistan, Iraq, Sierra Leone, Somalia and Sudan are closed.

The following Posts offer a limited entry clearance service: Algiers, Almaty, Baku, Kigali, Riga, Skopje, St. Helena, Taipei, Tallinn, Tashkent, Tblisi, Tehran, Tirana, Tripoli, Vilnius and Yerevan.

Applicants for visit visas may apply at any UK diplomatic or consular Post offering a full visa service. Applicants for other categories of visas who have no UK entry clearance Post in their country of residence are required to apply to a designated Post, usually in a neighbouring country. My noble Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary will write to the hon. Member with full details of such Posts.

TACIS Programme

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Leicester, South (Mr. Marshall) of 5 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *940–42*, on the General Affairs Council, for what reasons funds from the Russian TACIS programme were transferred to the European Community Humanitarian Office; and if the issue of fraud was raised in the course of this stage of deliberations. [76368]

Clare Short: I have been asked to reply.

TACIS is a technical assistance programme wherever this European Community Humanitarian Office (ECHO) provides emergency humanitarian relief. However, the need in this particular case was for emergency assistance. Transferring funds from TACIS to ECHO is the best way to address these needs while at the same time respecting overall budgetary ceilings. There has been no suggestion of fraud in discussion of the transfer.

Iraq

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 16 February 1999, *Official Report*, column *739*, on Iraq, from whom he received the account of the episode relating to the 16-year-old Iraqi youth. [72887]

Mr. Fatchett *[pursuant to his reply, 15 March 1999, c. 511]:* An administrative error led to a mistake in my answer to the hon. Member of 15 March. The correct answer should read as follows:

My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary received the information from my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Incapacity Benefit

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many individuals were claiming incapacity benefit in *(a)* each region and nation of the United Kingdom and *(b)* in each county, metropolitan or unitary authority in the Government Office-North East Region on 31 May (i) 1996, (ii) 1997 and (iii) 1998. [76124]

Mr. Bayley: The available information is set out in the tables.

Incapacity benefit recipients in the United Kingdom

	31 May 1996	*31 May 1997*	*31 May 1998*
All cases	1,872,328	1,810,908	1,720,655
England	1,376,060	133,220	1,270,720
North East	140,600	133,000	124,080
North West	258,540	235,040	221,020
Merseyside	81,600	76,540	72,560
Yorkshire and Humber	162,020	167,380	157,640
East Midlands	111,780	109,660	107,980
West Midlands	155,740	151,060	144,880
South West	100,240	99,890	102,420
Eastern	111,820	110,220	105,220
London	98,680	98,060	100,840
South East	155,040	152,280	134,080
Scotland	234,220	225,240	211,000
Wales	175,440	165,760	154,920
Overseas	8,740	8,520	8,000
Northern Ireland	77,868	78,168	76,015

Notes:
1. Great Britain figures are taken from a 5 per cent. sample of the computer and exclude a small number of cases held clerically.
2. Northern Ireland figures are taken from a 100 per cent. sample of the computer and exclude a small number of cases held clerically.

Incapacity benefit recipients in the North East region

	31 May 1996	*31 May 1997*	*31 May 1998*
Gateshead	12,038	11,960	10,728
Newcastle upon Tyne	12,424	11,649	11,032
North Tyneside	9,175	8,606	7,991
South Tyneside	8,303	7,976	7,664
Sunderland	18,534	17,678	16,246
Chester-le-Street	2,903	2,760	2,698
Darlington	3,694	3,552	3,366
Derwentside	5,278	5,054	4,746
Durham	4,141	3,937	3,449
Easington	11,145	10,371	9,515
Sedgefield	6,131	5,622	5,355
Teesdale	771	731	710
Wear Valley	3,938	3,714	3,429
Alnwick	1,015	1,035	1,013
Berwick-upon-Tweed	875	731	689
Blyth Valley	3,918	3,714	3,448
Castle Morpeth	1,705	1,766	1,622
Tynedale	1,746	1,624	1,722
Wansbeck	3,918	3,613	3,327
Hartlepool UA	5,989	5,683	5,171
Middlesborough UA	7,085	6,312	6,044
Redcar and Cleveland UA	8,080	7,713	7,181
Stockton-on-Tees UA	7,796	7,469	6,935

Notes:
1. Figures are derived from available information about postcodes

Company Licences

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list for *(a)* small and medium-sized enterprises and *(b)* larger companies (i) all licences and permits issued by his Department and its agencies to companies permitting them to carry out their business, (ii) the cost of each such licence or permit in (A) 1997–98 and (B) 1999–2000 and (iii) the current number of companies which are in receipt of each such licence or permit. [76848]

Mr. Timms: We issue no licences or permits.

Housing Benefit Fraud

Ms Kelly: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of the level of fraud in respect of housing benefit in *(a)* Bolton, *(b)* the North West and *(c)* England. [75621]

Mr. Timms: There are no figures available regarding the level of Housing Benefit fraud in Bolton.

The results of the 1997–98 Housing Benefit Accuracy Review provide the estimates shown in the table for the percentage of the Housing Benefit caseload in 1997–98 within each of the categories.

	Percentage of caseload	*Confidence limits*
North West		
Confirmed fraud	1.6	Below 0.05–3.4
Strong suspicion of fraud	4.3	1.9–6.8
Mild suspicion of fraud	1.1	Below 0.05–2.7
England		
Confirmed fraud	1.5	0.8–2.3
Strong suspicion of fraud	4.1	1.8–7.2
Mild suspicion of fraud	1.2	0.7–2.0
Great Britain		
Confirmed fraud	1.9	1.3–2.6
Strong suspicion of fraud	4.0	1.9–6.8
Mild suspicion of fraud	1.1	0.7–1.7

Note:

The main figures provide the best estimate from the review for the percentage of the Housing Benefit caseload in 1997–98 within each of the categories. These estimates are uncertain since conclusions about the level of fraudulent payments were derived from evidence from a sample of HB claims. The uncertainty surrounding an estimate derived from a sample can be quantified by calculating "confidence limits". For the table above 95 per cent. confidence limits have been calculated for each of the estimates and are shown in brackets. These limits indicate the range within which we can be 95 per cent. certain that the true value lies. For each estimate derived there is a 5 per cent. chance that the true value lies outside the stated range.

Myalgic Encephalitis

Mr. Levitt: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate the number of myalgic encephalitis sufferers who *(a)* were in receipt of disability living allowance, *(b)* were appealing against being turned down for disability living allowance or having it withdrawn and *(c)* had successfully appealed against a decision to refuse payment of disability living allowance at the latest date for which figures are available. [76222]

Mr. Bayley: Figures are not available in the form requested. The available information for a wider group of people, those with Chronic Fatigue Syndromes including myalgic encephalomyelitis and post viral conditions, is in the table.

People claiming Disability Living Allowance whose main disabling condition is chronic fatigue syndrome

	Number
People in receipt of benefit at 31 August 1998	8,900
First awards of benefit between 1 April 1992 and 31 August 1998	
All first awards	10,300
awards on initial claim	6,500
awards resulting from review	2,600
awards resulting from appeal	1,300

Notes:

1. People for whom myalgic encephalitis is not their main disabling condition may also receive Disability Living Allowance
2. Figures do not sum owing to rounding

Source:

Analytical Services Division: 5 per cent. data

Health and Safety

Mr. Dawson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of Trillium in managing health and safety issues within the DSS Estate. [77185]

Angela Eagle: Prior to awarding the contract, Trillium's credentials and proposals for managing health and safety across the DSS estate were scrupulously examined by an independent Health and Safety assessor and found to be robust and comprehensive. Post contract, Trillium now have fully trained and qualified health and safety professionals in place throughout the country. Their performance is rigorously monitored by a dedicated contract management team which includes a fully qualified in-house health and safety professional together with a team of technical auditors.

All Trillium's practises and processes are closely monitored to ensure their effectiveness. We are satisfied that all contractual and statutory duties are being met and that they are fully competent to manage health and safety on behalf of the Department.

Benefits (Ministerial Discretion)

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what guidance is used by Ministers in determining requests to exercise discretion in relation to individual benefit cases; and if he will place a copy of that guidance in the Library; [76239]

(2) on what grounds the Secretary of State rejected the request by the hon. Member for Mid-Worcestershire to use his discretion in the case of the overpayment of benefit to Ms Linda Knight of 42 Stalls Farm Road, Droitwich Spa, Worcestershire; and if he will make a statement. [76237]

Mr. Timms: In individual cases of overpayments the Secretary of State can apply his discretion in relation to the recovery of the overpayment. This discretion is exercised only where recovery would cause extreme hardship. Guidance is contained in "Government Accounting", a copy of which is held in the House of Commons Library.

Pensions

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security in what circumstances he proposes to make contracting out of the state second pension compulsory. [76154]

Mr. Timms: None.

Bereavement Benefits

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate the numbers of *(a)* widows and *(b)* widowers who will be claiming income support with the bereavement premium in each of the first five years after implementation of his proposals for bereavement support as set out in paragraph 1 of his consultation paper on bereavement support. [76103]

Angela Eagle: It is estimated that there will be *(a)* fewer than 5,000 widows and *(b)* fewer than 5,000 widowers who claim Income Support with the Bereavement Premium in each of the first five years after implementation of our proposals.

Notes:

1. The estimates presented above are broad orders of magnitude. They are rounded to the nearest 10,000 and are our best estimate of the number who might be in receipt of the premium, but are subject to a wide range of uncertainty.

2. Estimates assume that a constant proportion of those affected by the proposed changes to Bereavement Benefits move onto Income Support with the IS bereavement premium.

3. Estimates use information from the 1995–96 Family Resources Survey, the Income Support Quarterly Statistical Enquiry and forecasts from the Government Actuary's Department concerning the number of men and women affected by the proposed changes.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if it is his policy that widows and widowers who are bereaved below the age of 55 years will be entitled to claim the proposed income support bereavement premium on reaching the age of 55 years if the qualifying conditions for the premium apply on the basis set out in paragraph 1 of his consultation paper on bereavement support. [76102]

Angela Eagle: No. The proposed bereavement premium in Income Support, and other income-related benefits, will be available only to those men and women who are aged 55 and over at the start of the new arrangements and who are widowed during the subsequent five years. The premium will be payable once their time-limited benefit, Bereavement Allowance, comes to an end.

Family Resources Survey

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what evidence is provided by *(a)* the 1995–96 Family Resources Survey and *(b)* his Department's administrative data on the housing tenure distribution among pensioners who are (i) receiving income support and (ii) entitled to, but not receiving, income support, and if he will break down his answer for the age groups (1) 60 to 69, (2) 70 to 79 and (3) 80 years or above. [76090]

Mr. Timms: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is in the table.

Percentage

	Age 60–69	*Age 70–79*	*Age 80 or above*
Housing tenure			
Local authority tenants	50	54	43
Other social tenants	8	10	11
Private renters	6	5	6
Owner occupiers	35	29	38
Other	1	1	2
Total	100	100	100

Notes:

1. Figures are shown as a percentage of the total number of pensioner benefit units receiving income support in each age band.

2. Estimates are rounded to the nearest whole per cent. Rows may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

3. Pensioners are defined as single people or couples where at least one partner is aged over 59 years. Couples are allocated to age bands according to the age of the older partner.

4. Receipt of Income Support is based on respondents' own assessment and may be subject to misreporting.

5. "Local authority tenants" are defined as those households where the landlord was either a local authority/council, a New Town development or Scottish Homes and where the property did not go with the job of anyone in the household. "Other social tenants" are defined as those households where the landlord was either a Housing Association, a co-operative or a charitable trust and where the property did not go with the job of anyone in the household. "Private renters" are defined as those households where the landlord was an employer, friend or relative of a household member, or another private landlord or organisation. "Owner occupiers" are defined as those households that were either owned outright, being bought with the help of a mortgage or loan, or were part rented and part mortgaged.

Source:

Family Resources Survey 1995/96.

Disability Living Allowance

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many reviews of disability living allowance were undertaken under the Benefit Integrity Project in 1997–98 and the current financial year to date; and how many reviews it is anticipated will be held in 1999–2000 under the new periodic review system. [76840]

Mr. Bayley: The administration of Disability Living Allowance is a matter for Peter Mathison, the Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mrs. Theresa May, dated 15 March 1999:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking how many reviews of Disability Living Allowance (DLA) were undertaken under the Benefits Integrity Project (BIP) in 1997–98 and the current financial year to date; and how many reviews it is anticipated will be held in 1999–2000 under the new periodic review system.

It might be helpful to clarify what we mean by a review. I assume from your question that you are referring to the total number of cases that have been, and will be, checked under the BIP using the most available year to date figures, and the total number that are likely to be checked under the periodic review of DLA awards that starts in April 1999. I have answered your question on this basis.

The number of DLA cases that were examined and completed by the BIP in the period 1 April 1997 to 31 March 1998 was 72,470. For the period 1 April 1998 to 31 December 1998 (the last available figures), the corresponding figure is 88,117.

A monthly statistical report providing detailed information can be found in the House of Commons library.

Turning now to the number of cases we anticipate dealing with under the new periodic enquiry system from April, the new process will be continually evaluated, refined and developed, in consultation with disabled people and their representatives. Officials will take stock of the findings after six moths. I estimate that over the first six months work will be started on some 10,000 to 15,000 cases, through a mixture of visit and postal enquiry.

I hope that this is helpful.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Law Firms (Franchising)

Mr. Flight: To ask the Minister of State, Lord Chancellor's Department what assessment he has made of the level of access for rural communities under the proposed new arrangements for the franchising of law firms providing legal aid services. [76287]

Mr. Hoon: It is for the Legal Aid Board, through its 13 Regional Legal Services Committees, to establish the legal needs and priorities of any particular community. Contracts will be granted to those quality assured legal service providers who can satisfy, as far as possible within the financial resources available, the communities' needs and priorities. The RLSC's will continue to monitor needs in their regions so that provision can be adjusted as the needs and priorities change.

Electronic Red Boxes

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Minister of State, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will name the Ministers in his Department who are regular users of electronic Red Boxes. [76176]

Mr. Hoon: Neither the Lord Chancellor nor I yet use the new "laptop red boxes" described by the Minister for the Cabinet Office in his reply, *Official Report*, columns *651–52*.

Appointments

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Minister of State, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will list those people he has appointed to public bodies since 1 November 1998, indicating the positions to which they have been appointed and if they receive remuneration. [76464]

Mr. Hoon: The following lists the non-judicial appointments made to the Lord Chancellor's non-departmental public bodies since 1 November 1998. It does not include re-appointments.

Those not receiving remuneration

Advisory Committees on Justices of the Peace

Dr. F. Rabiee-Khan (f)
N. Lowe Esq
J. W. A. Watkin Esq JP
Mrs. M. Mann
Mrs. S. G. Goldie
Ms S. M. Carey
Dr. P. R. Ashurst JP (m)
A. E. Cledwyn Davies Esq
Mrs. J. M. A. Glossop JP
Mrs. E. F. Metcalfe
K. R. Belding Esq JP
Mrs. G. M. Frame
Mrs. A. M. Davies
P. J. Pownall JP
Mrs. S. Friend-Smith
M. H. Smart Esq
Mrs. G. E. A. Wild
L. Forbes Esq JP
K. B. Martin Esq JP
Mrs. J. A. Masterson JP
Mrs. J. C. Ralli
K. Savage Esq JP
Mrs. M. Wyndham JP
Mrs. C. A. Orton JP
Mrs. E. A. Hubbick JP
D. L. Maunder Esq
Mrs. S. P. Holdstock JP
Mrs. B. G. Smith
T. I. J. Mann Esq JP
C. E. Ewing Esq
Miss A-M. C. Costa
P. G. Wells Esq JP
D. Libby Esq JP
Dr. D. F. Johnson
Sir Paul Nicholson LL
Mrs. P. M. Hunt JP
Mrs. J. Robson
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Judge Grigson

Family Proceedings Rule Committee
Mrs. J. M. Roberts

Honorary Investment Advisory Committee
Mrs. P. H. Challens
Mr. A. H. Clifton
Mr. I. E. Sands

Judicial Studies Board
District Judge Wyn Rees

Those receiving remuneration

Advisory Committee on Legal Education and Conduct
George Pulman QC
Malcolm Fowler

Council on Tribunals
Mr. Emrys Roberts

Law Commission
Mr. Justice Carnwath CVO (draws his judicial salary).

HEALTH

Departmental Reviews

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 22 February 1999, *Official Report*, columns *134–35*, on departmental reviews, if he will give an estimated publication date for each of the reviews which have yet to publish their reports. [73966]

Mr. Hutton: The estimated publication date for each of the reviews which have yet to publish their reports are:

	Estimated publication date
Thoracic Surgical Services Review	April 1999
United Kingdom Transplant Support Service Authority Review	Spring 1999
Mental Health Act Review	July 1999
Review of general anaesthesia and sedation with dental treatment	Late summer
Review of the wheelchair voucher scheme and the provision of electrical and indoor wheelchairs	Spring 1999

Physiotherapists

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many physiotherapists are employed by NHS trusts in each region of England; and how many posts are currently vacant in these regions. [74291]

Mr. Denham: Information on the numbers of physiotherapy staff employed by National Health Service trusts in each region of England as at 30 September 1997 has been placed in the Library. Information on how many posts are currently vacant in these regions is not available centrally.

NHS Waiting Lists

Mr. Syms: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many NHS patients were waiting to be seen *(a)* following GP written referral and *(b)* following referral to consultation, for each quarter since 30 March 1997 in each (i) health authority and (ii) English region. [74740]

Mr. Denham: Information on outpatient waiting times by health authority is available only from 1998–99.

Available information on the time patients have been waiting for a first outpatient appointment following general practitioner written referral by health authority has been placed in the Library.

NHS Running Costs

Mr. Syms: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the total running cost of the NHS in real terms has been in each year since 1979. [74742]

Mr. Denham: National Health Service total net expenditure, at 1997–98 prices, is shown in the table:

Year	*£ million*
1978–79	19,575
1979–80	19,899
1980–81	21,919
1981–82	22,399
1982–83	22,810
1983–84	23,045
1984–85	23,494
1985–86	23,597
1986–87	24,494
1987–88	25,545
1988–89	26,439
1990–91	27,732
1991–92	29,654
1992–93	31,665
1993–94	31,919
1994–95	33,262
1995–96	33,795
1996–97	33,822
1997–98	34,664
1998–99	35,961

Note:
Using current GDP deflator estimates

NHS Personnel

Ms Moran: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many (i) paramedics, (ii) chiropodists, (iii) physiotherapists, (iv) clinical psychologists,

(v) occupational therapists and (vi) speech therapists were practising in *(a)* the National Health Service and *(b)* the private sector at the latest available date. [75243]

Mr. Denham: For the available information, I refer my hon. Friend to the "Department of Health NHS Hospital and Community Health Services Non Medical Workforce Census Detailed Results England: 30 September 1997", copies of which are available in the Library. Information is not collected centrally on how many of these grades were practising in the private sector.

Aricept

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what was the cost to the NHS of the prescription of the drug Aricept in 1998; and how many prescriptions were issued by each health authority; [75530]

(2) what funds each health authority in England has allocated to consultants and general practitioners for prescribing the drug Aricept in the current year. [75531]

Mr. Denham: The Department does not allocate funds specifically for prescribing the drug Aricept. Health authorities are expected to budget for the prescribing of this drug within their overall allocations.

In the 12 months ending September 1998, 17,000 prescription items for Donepezil Hydrochloride (Aricept) were dispensed in the community. The total net ingredient cost was £1.6 million. The net ingredient cost is the basic cost of a drug and does not take account of discounts, dispensing costs, fees or prescription charges income. Information for prescriptions dispensed in the year ending December 1998 is not yet available. Information about drugs dispensed in hospitals is not available

Donepezil Hydrochloride was prescribed on the National Health Service in all health authorities in England over the twelve-month period ending September 1998. Information for individual products such as Aricept is not released at health authority level. This is in order to preserve patient, contractor and commercial confidentiality.

NHS Pay and Pensions Enhancements

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if it is consistent with national guidance for NHS trusts to award pay and pension enhancements *(a)* on the authority of the Chair and *(b)* without presenting minutes or reports of remuneration committees to full trust boards. [76131]

Mr. Denham: When dealing with issues of corporate governance, National Health Service trusts should comply with the national guidance contained in the Codes of Conduct and Accountability, which was issued on 28 April 1994, under cover of Executive Letter (94)40, copies of which are available in the Library.

Trust boards are obliged to establish remuneration committees to advise the Board about the appropriate remuneration of the chief executive and other executive directors. However, approval of the remuneration of such key staff would be a decision of the Board.

GP Records

Mr. Andy King: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the incidence of tampering with patients' records by general practitioners; and if he will make a statement. [75922]

Mr. Denham: Allegations that general practitioners have tampered with patients' records are dealt with locally. There is no evidence that tampering occurs to an extent that would warrant a national assessment.

Prescribing

Miss Widdecombe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what plans his Department has to supply copies of the British National Formulary to all essential users in Norfolk; [75910]

(2) what assessment his Department has made of the *(a)* economic and *(b)* safety implications of general practitioners prescribing without access to an up-to-date copy of the British National Formulary; [75911]

(3) what guidelines his Department lays down for the distribution of the British National Formulary to health care professionals. [75909]

Mr. Denham: Copies of the British National Formulary are distributed twice yearly free of charge to all health authorities and trusts. They are responsible for ensuring that it is passed to all essential users.

The Department recommends that all general practitioners, community pharmacists, hospital doctors, hospital pharmacists and health authority medical and pharmaceutical advisers should receive the formulary. In addition, where possible, there should also be a reference copy on each hospital ward and in each paramedic ambulance. The Department has no reason to believe these recommendations are not being followed.

Minimum Wage

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the impact on the private sector care industry of the national minimum wage; and if he will make a statement. [75934]

Mr. Hutton: It is not possible to estimate with precision the overall impact of the national minimum wage on the private sector industry. Subject to statutory requirements, terms of employment are a matter for employer and employees.

Front-line Care

Mr. Syms: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much money, in real terms, has been spent on front-line care in the NHS in each year since 1979. [76035]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 11 March 1999]:* Information in the form requested is not available. However, information on expenditure by programme of care within hospital and community health services is provided each year to the Health Select Committee's Public Expenditure Inquiry (HC959), copies of which are available in the Library.

Dental Services

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Health after the publication of the Poswillo Inquiry, how many general dental practitioners underwent training in anaesthesia and equipped their practices to meet the appropriate recommended safety levels; and what contribution his Department made towards this training. [75429]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 15 March 1999]:* Following publication of the Poswillo Report the Department allocated £20.4 million to regional health authorities over the three years 1992–95. We do not have a breakdown of the usage of this money to include numbers trained and the amount spent on equipment.

Elderly People (Abuse)

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the levels of abuse of elderly people in care; if he will publish this assessment; and if he will make a statement. [76484]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 15 March 1999]:* The Department does not keep data on incidents of abuse in adult care homes. However, the Department has provided funding to Action on Elder Abuse for its national helpline service. Furthermore, we are funding an analysis of the first one thousand calls which that helpline has received. National guidelines for dealing with incidents of abuse to vulnerable adults are currently being developed, and this work is financed and led by the Department.

Incontinence

Mr. Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list his Department's expenditure on grants to voluntary bodies working on incontinence. [76767]

Mr. Hutton: In 1998–99 the Department has funded the following voluntary organisations for continence projects:

	£
Continence Foundation	35,000
Disabled Living	24,750
InContact	6,250

Mr. Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research his Department has *(a)* completed, *(b)* published and *(c)* commissioned on incontinence. [76768]

Mr. Hutton: The Department funds research and development to support its work on policy development and evaluation in health and social care. The Department also manages the National Health Service research and development levy, which is used to support research and development of relevance to the National Health Service in hospitals, general practice and other health care settings, and to fund the NHS research and development programme. In addition, the Medical Research Council (MRC), which receives most of its income via grant-in-aid from the Office of Science and Technology in the Department of Trade and Industry, funds medical research as part of the Government's funding of the science and engineering base.

The NHS research and development programme is currently supporting the following two projects on incontinence:

Cost-effective night-time management of heavily incontinent adults (Dr. Cottenden, University College London); and

The treatment of urinary incontinence in stroke patients (Professor Castledon, University of Leicester).

The Department's policy research programme supported the following research projects:

The development of methodologies to identify urinary incontinence and set targets for health gain (Professor Pearson, University of Liverpool, completed September, 1995); and

DH Post Doctoral Fellowship, Dr. Brenda Hilary Roe, University of Oxford, completed March, 1996. (Dr. Roe's research project evaluated health interventions by primary health care teams and continence advisory services related to incontinence.)

The MRC spent £953,000 in 1997–98 on the following three ongoing projects in the general area of incontinence:

A randomised trial of open versus laparoscopic colposuspension for genuine stress incontinence, (Professor Kitchener, St. Mary's Hospital);

Incontinence: a population laboratory approach to the epidemiology and evaluation of care, (Dr. McGrother, University of Leicester); and

Ion channels in myoctes from human and pig urethra/bladder-modulation by drugs and role in tissue contractile behaviour, (Dr. Brading, University of Oxford).

In addition, the MRC also made grants during the mid 1990s for the following projects:

Can the lower urinary tract be controlled by sacral root stimulation? (Dr. Baxendale, University of Glasgow);

Oestrogen replacement therapy on urinary tract dysfunction and urogenital collagens in postmenopausal women with stress, (Mr. Jackson, Bristol Urological Institute);

Determining the outcome of surgery for stress incontinence in women (Professor Black, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine).

Mr. Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list his Department's budget and planned expenditure relating to incontinence for each of the last 10 years for which figures are available. [76766]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is not available centrally. Local health authorities are responsible for commissioning continence services to meet the needs of their local population. The National Health Service Executive is currently reviewing continence services policy with a view to issuing updated guidance in the spring.

Human Vaccines (Bovine Material)

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what was the last date on which human vaccines containing bovine material prohibited for use in human food were used on humans; [76508]

(2) pursuant to his answer of 8 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *85*, on human vaccines, for what reason he is unable to state how those human vaccines which contain bovine material prohibited for use in the human food chain were disposed of; and if he will make a statement. [76500]

Ms Jowell: No human vaccines for use in the United Kingdom contain or ever have contained in the finished product bovine material prohibited for use in the human food chain. Therefore, no vaccines have ever been disposed of for the reason that they contained bovine material prohibited for use in the human food chain.

Xenotransplantation

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he has prohibited on ethical grounds the use of primates in xenotransplantation trials. [76501]

Mr. Hutton: We recognise that the use of primates as possible source animals for xenotransplantation is an emotive issue arousing strong feelings. The view taken by the Government, as advised by the United Kingdom Xenotransplantation Interim Regulatory Authority, is that there should be a strong presumption against the use of primates as sources for xenotransplantation. The use of great apes in scientific procedures, including xenotransplantation, has already been ruled out.

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how his Department assesses the risk of a new viral disease emerging via xenotransplantation procedures. [76503]

Mr. Hutton: The Government are advised on all issues related to xenotransplantation by the United Kingdom Xenotransplantation Interim Regulatory Authority (UKXIRA).

The UKXIRA membership provides an excellent balance of medical and scientific expertise with appropriate lay representation. The authority keeps itself fully updated on all developments in the field and has developed extensive networks, both in this country and abroad, through which to obtain additional specialist advice. For example, the UKXIRA last year hosted a workshop on the possible risks posed by porcine endogenous retroviruses, involving fifty leading experts from the UK and the United States of America. A report of the day's proceedings is due to be published shortly.

Heart Attacks and Strokes

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the numbers of *(a)* heart attacks and *(b)* strokes in each region in each of the last five years. [75961]

Mr. Hutton: Information on the number of patients admitted to hospital for heart attacks and strokes for the financial years 1993–94 to 1997–98 are shown in the following tables.

Ordinary admissions and day cases combined: number of completed first order episodes by primary diagnosis and Regional Health Authority (RHA) of treatment

NHS hospitals, England 1993–94 to 1995–96

	Heart attacks			*Strokes*		
Regional health authority	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*
Northern	8,807	7,473	6,987	8,234	7,597	6,387
Yorkshire	8,812	8,132	7,636	8,912	8,535	6,757
Trent	10,119	9,045	9,858	11,150	10,982	8,670
East Anglian	4,625	5,791	4,240	4,844	6,647	4,531
North West Thames	5,269	4,438	3,996	6,453	5,771	4,624
North East Thames	7,208	6,958	6,149	7,980	8,731	6,511
South East Thames	6,464	6,246	5,735	7,780	8,198	6,561
South West Thames	5,106	4,639	4,321	6,386	6,360	5,296
Wessex	6,098	5,604	4,530	6,447	6,783	4,623
Oxford	3,561	4,211	3,504	4,441	5,646	4,059
South Western	7,532	6,713	7,087	8,601	8,237	7,336
West Midlands	11,209	10,377	9,756	13,322	13,499	10,440
Mersey	5,637	5,356	4,780	6,195	6,162	4,579
North Western	9,609	9,429	8,529	10,458	10,705	8,078
SHAs	204	0	0	594	0	0
England	100,261	94,411	87,109	111,798	113,853	88,451

Notes:

ICD 10 replaced ICD 9 in 1995–96.

Heart attack: ICD9 code 410 and ICD10 code 121–122 used.

Stroke: ICD9 code 430–436 and ICD10 code 160–164 used.

Data for 1993–94 to 1995–96 are grossed for both coverage and unknown/invalid clinical data.

Source:

Hospital Episodes Statistics

Ordinary admissions and day cases combined: number of completed first order episodes by primary diagnosis and regional office of treatment
NHS hospitals, England 1996–97 and 1997–98

Regional office of treatment	*Heart attacks*		*Strokes*	
	1996–97	*1997–98*	*1996–97*	*1997–98*
Northern and Yorkshire	12,119	11,237	11,533	10,887
Trent	8,333	8,577	7,979	8,828
Anglia and Oxford	6,061	7,284	7,170	8,267
North Thames	8,647	9,050	10,180	10,811
South Thames	9,799	9,401	11,605	10,991
South and West	10,556	10,174	11,385	12,206
West Midlands	9,084	9,159	9,470	9,409
North West	12,392	12,007	12,140	12,289
Not Known	0	85	0	79
England	76,991	76,974	81,462	83,767

Notes:
Heart attack: ICD10 code 121–122 used.
Stroke: ICD10 code 160–164 used.
Data for 1996–97 and 1997–98 are provisional, no adjustments have yet been made for shortfalls in data, (i.e. the data is ungrossed).
Source:
Hospital Episodes Statistics

Neurological Services

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, what assessment he has made of the current arrangements for consulting on and drawing-up contracts for the provision of neurological services. [72565]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 22 February 1999]:* The White Paper, "The new NHS", set out new arrangements for commissioning services through the introduction of long term service agreements. All commissioning in the new National Health Service will take place through service agreements.

Health authorities and primary care groups will be responsible for drawing up service agreements with NHS trusts to deliver improvements in health and health care services which meet the needs of their population.

Increasingly, service agreements will need to reflect the development of long-term relationships between primary care groups and NHS trusts, be based on the shared view of the outcomes of care needed, and cover integrated pathways of care. Guidance on "Commissioning in the new NHS" emphasised that this will apply, in particular, to long-term medical conditions, such as neurological conditions, where, following accurate and timely diagnosis, patient care will largely be managed outside of an acute setting.

A compendium of good practice on the commissioning of neurological services is currently being considered for development in 1999/2000.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Publications

Mr. Burgon: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he expects the latest volume of "Agriculture in the United Kingdom" to be published. [77432]

Mr. Nick Brown: "Agriculture in the United Kingdom 1998" was published today and copies have been placed in the Library of the House.

Baby Foods

Mr. David Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what action is being taken to control pesticide residues in baby foods. [77433]

Mr. Rooker: Agreement was reached last week on 2 new EC Directives which impose stringent limits on the levels of pesticides in infant formulae and baby foods. These measures will enhance existing controls and provide even greater protection for the health of this vulnerable group of the population.

Abattoir Inspectors

Dr. Cable: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will set out the number of incidents of harassment of Ministry abattoir inspectors by abattoir staff for each year over the last five years. [66386]

Mr. Rooker: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Lewes (Mr. Baker) on 3 February 1999, *Official Report*, column *689*.

Genetically Modified Crops

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what discussions he has held with the Minister for Science, about genetically modified crops. [68067]

Mr. Nick Brown: I have not held any discussions with the Minister of Science about genetically modified crops.

Mink Farming

Mr. Heppell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many visits were made in 1998 to mink factory farms, by county, by Ministry officials *(a)* for animal welfare inspections and *(b)* to check compliance with the conditions of the Mink Keeping Regulations 1975 (as amended). [68147]

Mr. Morley: Visits in 1998 were made as follows:

County	*Inspections to check compliance with animal welfare legislation*	*Inspections to check compliance with the Mink Keeping Regulations 1975*
Cornwall	5	2
Dorset	2	4
Hampshire	4	8
Isle of Wight	2	2
Lancashire	5	11
Northumberland	4	2
South Yorkshire	1	3
Staffordshire	3	6
West Yorkshire	2	4
Total	28	42

Fisheries Inspectors (EU)

Mr. Blizzard: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many fisheries inspectors there are in each member state of the European Union. [68591]

Mr. Morley: Information on the number of inspectors for each Member State, based on the most recent report from the Commission on Monitoring the Common Fisheries Policy in 1995, copies of which have been placed in the Library of the House, is set out:

Country	*Number*
Belgium	6
Denmark	143
Germany	30
Greece	172
Spain	[1]262
France	532
Ireland	18
Italy	[2]—
Netherlands	56
Portugal	12
Finland	890
Sweden	500
United Kingdom	[3]158

[1] In addition to 30 national inspectors based in Madrid this includes a further 232 inspectors who work for the autonomous regions. Since the report was published we have been informed that the number of national inspectors for Spain has increased to 53.

[2] In theory some 5,200 persons are available for inspection work as part of their duties.

[3] The UK currently has 152 inspectors.

Fisheries

Mr. Nicholls: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his oral statement of 14 January 1999, *Official Report*, column 544, in what way the industry indicated its agreement not to take the full recommended allocation of cod. [69396]

Mr. Morley: The International Council for the Exploration of the Sea recommended a North Sea cod TAC of 153,000 tonnes for 1998. Following discussion with representatives of the industry, the UK supported a lower TAC of 140,000 tonnes being set in order to help the rebuilding of this stock.

Meat Hygiene Inspectors

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the charges for inspections under meat hygiene regulations in each of the member states of the European Union in pounds sterling. [69719]

Mr. Rooker *[holding answer 10 March 1999]:* I am currently seeking information about the level of hygiene inspection charges levied on individual meat plants in other EU Member States. Once I have received this information, I will write to the hon. Member.

Biotechnical Industry

Mr. Baker: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the biotechnical companies which have placed staff *(a)* on secondment and *(b)* on placement within his Department since 1 May 1997. [74842]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 5 March 1999]:* Secondments and attachments are part of the Interchange Initiative which promotes the exchange of people and good practice between the Civil Service and other organisations. All sectors of the economy are involved: Voluntary, Education, Health, Public and Private.

No biotechnical companies have placed staff *(a)* on secondment or *(b)* on placement within this Department since 1 May 1997.

Pig Industry

Mr. Sawford: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he is taking to ensure that the pig industry in other member states in the European Union is competing with the British pig industry on equal terms in respect of animal welfare. [75894]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 10 March 1999]:* Pig producers in all EU member states are required to comply with the minimum welfare standards laid down in EU Directive 91/630/EEC. We will continue to press the Commission to come forward with proposals to update EU welfare standards to at least those currently applying in the UK.

Organic Aid Scheme

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to narrow the definition of unimproved land for the purpose of calculating organic aid scheme entitlements; and what estimate he has made of the effect of such a change on the total grants payable under the organic aid scheme. [76754]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 15 March 1999]:* The regulations introducing the Organic Farming Scheme were laid before the House on 11 March. The new scheme, which follows a comprehensive review, includes aid for an 'unimproved land' category. I have no immediate plans to carry out a further review of aid rates.

Genetically Modified Organisms

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations Ministers in his Department have received on genetically modified organisms and the biotechnology industry from the US Government. [72760]

Mr. Rooker *[holding answer 1 March 1999]:* Genetically modified organisms and the biotechnology industry have been discussed on three occasions by Ministers in this Department and representatives of the US Government since May 1997. These discussions took place during meetings between my right hon. Friend the previous Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and the US Ambassador to London on 26 November 1997; and between my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and (a) the US Trade Representative, Ambassador Barshefsky, on 23 October 1998 and (b) Mr. Dan Glickman, the US Agriculture Secretary, on 22 January 1999.

TREASURY

Green-field Development

Mr. Steen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to introduce a tax on the development of green-field land. [68800]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 9 February 1999]:* The Government keep under review the scope for using economic instruments to complement the planning system.

Customs and Excise (Plymouth)

Mr. Breed: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the future of Her Majesty's Customs and Excise units in Plymouth. [75515]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 10 March 1999]:* Plymouth is a strategic base for Customs work to tackle smuggling and there are currently no plans to change that position.

Mr. Breed: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made on the financial saving arising from the closure of the Drug Dog Unit and the Customs Intelligence Unit in Plymouth. [75514]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 10 March 1999]:* The Customs Drug Dog Unit in Plymouth is still operational. Customs managers in the South West are currently reviewing the position and a number of options is currently being considered. No final decision has yet been taken.

Tobacco Sales (Belgium)

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what discussions he has had with tobacco warehouse owners in Belgium about sales to United Kingdom customers; and if he will make a statement. [R] [73283]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 26 February 1999]:* None.

Select Committee Reports

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if *(a)* he, *(b)* civil servants in his Department or *(c)* special advisers in his Department have (i) had sight of drafts of Select Committee reports, in whole or in part, or (ii) been informed of conclusions of select committee reports prior to their publication by the select committees. [75867]

Mr. Duncan Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he or any of his Ministers or his Department's Parliamentary Private Secretaries, advisers or civil servants discussed the contents of the Social Security Committee's report on Child Benefit with any members of the Committee prior to publication of the report; [76079]

(2) if he or any of his Ministers or his Department's parliamentary Private Secretaries, advisers or civil servants received copies of the Social Security Committee's report on Child Benefit prior to its publication; [76077]

(3) if he or any of his Ministers or his Department's parliamentary Private Secretaries, advisers or civil servants received any copies of a draft report of the Social Security Committee on Child Benefit. [76078]

Mr. Gordon Brown *[holding answers 10 and 11 March 1999]:* Most of the Treasury's business is dealt with by the Treasury Select Committee, and Treasury Ministers have given evidence to the Committee on several occasions. I have also given oral evidence to the International Development Committee and to the House of Lords Committees on European Legislation and on the Monetary Policy Committee of the Bank of England. Neither I nor any other Treasury Minister have seen copies or drafts of any report prepared by these Committees prior to their release.

Because the Social Security Committee normally deals with the work of DSS, there have been informal discussions between the Treasury and the Committee on how co-operation can best be achieved. The Committee has been anxious to work with the Treasury in two areas: integration of tax and benefits, and child benefit. To discuss tax and benefits, Treasury and Inland Revenue officials have given oral evidence to the Committee. There was also an informal meeting at 11 Downing Street between the whole Committee and myself. More recently, there have been discussions about how best the Treasury can assist the work of the Committee in matters related to the taxation of child benefit. One issue has been detailed questions about the practicalities of implementing arrangements for taxing child benefit. I have talked to the Chairman of the Committee about Treasury officials and Ministers giving evidence; and Treasury and Inland Revenue officials gave evidence on 24 February 1999. It was agreed that, if requested, a Treasury Minister would appear before the Committee following the Budget. A preliminary draft of a report was given to my Parliamentary Private Secretary, but not the final report. Neither I nor any other Treasury Minister was given or read any copy of reports, draft or otherwise, prior to their release.

Children's Tax Credit

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if the children's tax credit allowance will be available for use against investment income. [76657]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 15 March 1999]:* The children's tax credit will reduce the income tax liability of the person claiming the credit up to a set amount. In 2001–02, that amount will be £4,160 at 10 per cent. It will be available to be set against income tax due on earnings and on other sources of income.

Tax Investigation Notices

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many investigation notices dated 31 January 1999 were issued by the Inland Revenue concerning 1996–97 tax affairs; and if he will make a statement on the implications for revenue collection. [75413]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 9 March 1999]:* A small number of inquiry notices—around 100—were issued on 31 January 1999. In any case where an inquiry notice concerning the Self Assessment tax return for 1996–97 was issued, local tax offices have been advised to inform taxpayers and their agents and to discontinue the inquiry.

Corporation Tax

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the number of businesses in

(a) Tamworth and *(b)* Staffordshire who will benefit from the reduction in corporation tax scheduled for April 1999; and if he will make a statement. [75657]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 9 March 1999]:* Nationally about 400,000 companies have a corporation tax liability each year. All will benefit from the cuts in the main and small companies' rates of corporation tax scheduled for April 1999, including an estimated 2,200 of the companies dealt with by the Walsall tax office, which covers Tamworth, and 4,000 of the companies dealt with by tax offices in Staffordshire. Other tax-paying companies trading in these areas will also benefit.

The 1 per cent. reduction in corporation tax rates scheduled for April 1999 builds on the 2 per cent. reduction introduced by this Government from April 1997 and will promote enterprise and encourage investment. The United Kingdom's main rate of corporation tax is the lowest of any major industrialised country.

Mr. Trickett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what estimate he has made of how many businesses in the Wakefield District will benefit from changes in corporation tax which were *(a)* agreed and *(b)* proposed since 1 May 1997; [74039]

(2) what estimate he has made of how many businesses in Hemsworth constituency will benefit from changes in the rate of corporation tax which were (i) agreed and (ii) proposed since 1 May 1997. [74040]

Dawn Primarolo: Nationally about 400,000 companies have a corporation tax liability each year. All will benefit from the cuts in the main and small companies' rates of corporation tax, including an estimated 700 of the companies dealt with by the Wakefield tax office and 400 of the companies dealt with by the Pontefract tax office which covers Hemsworth. Other tax-paying companies trading in these areas will also benefit.

Mr. Ennis: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many businesses in Barnsley and Doncaster will benefit from the proposed reduction in corporation tax scheduled for April. [73371]

Dawn Primarolo: Nationally about 400,000 companies have a corporation tax liability each year. All will benefit from the cuts in the main and small companies' rates of corporation tax, including an estimated 1,500 of the companies dealt with by the Barnsley and Doncaster tax offices. Other taxpaying companies trading in the Barnsley and Doncaster areas will also benefit.

Capital Gains Tax

Mr. Loughton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate *(a)* the number of people liable for CGT and *(b)* the total revenue raised if the individual allowance threshold was raised to (i) £10,000, (ii) £13,600 and (iii) £20,000. [R] [74064]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 2 March 1999]:* The March 1999 Budget proposes an Annual Exempt Amount of £7,100 for the tax year 1999–2000, at which level it is projected that 200,000 taxpayers will have capital gains tax liabilities of £3.6 billion. These estimates exclude companies as their capital gains are charged to corporation tax. The effect of raising the Annual Exempt Amount to the specified levels is shown in the table.

	Change to	
Annual Exempt Amount	*Number of taxpayers (thousand)*	*Capital gains tax liabilities [1] (£ million)*
£10,000	−55	−90
£13,600	−90	−180
£20,000	−125	−310

[1] These estimates take into account the likely effect on capital gains tax yield of changes to volume of disposals in the year brought about by changes to taxpayer behaviour

Mr. Loughton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the amount of CGT revenue which will be collected in respect of the financial year 1998–99; and what will be the cost of collection. [R] [74062]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 2 March 1999]:* The latest available information is given in the table. Information on the cost of collecting Capital Gains Tax in 1998–99 is not available.

Capital Gains Tax

£ million

Year	*Net receipts [1]*	*Cost of collection [2]*
1997–98	1,453	33.4
1998–99	[3]2,400	[4]—

[1] Excludes tax on gains of companies which are charged to Corporation Tax

[2] Relates mainly to the costs arising from gains to individuals and trustees but some other costs (mainly of land valuations for companies) cannot be separately identified and are included in the collection costs of capital gains tax

[3] Provisional estimate

[4] Not available

Stamp Duty (Shares)

Mr. Loughton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what discussions he has had with his European colleagues about rates of stamp duty on shares in other EU states. [R] [74061]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 2 March 1999]:* My right hon. Friend has frequent discussions with his EU counterparts covering a wide range of matters.

Mr. Loughton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the amount of revenue (i) collected in financial years *(a)* 1996–97 and *(b)* 1997–98 and (ii) projected for 1998–99 in respect of stamp duty on shares; and what was the cost of collection. [R] [74065]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 2 March 1999]:* The figures are as follows:

Stamp duty (including stamp duty reserve tax) on transactions of shares and other securities

£ million

Year	*Net receipts*	*Cost of collection*
1996–97	1,408	1.0
1997–98	1,960	1.4
1998–99 (provisional estimate)	2,600	1.4

Premium Bonds

Mr. Field: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the maximum allowed holding of Premium Bonds in each year since 1969. [75944]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 11 March 1999]:* The maximum holding of Premium Bonds in 1969 was £1,250. Since then it has been increased as follows:

	£
1 April 1971	2,000
11 September 1978	3,000
21 April 1980	10,000
13 April 1993	20,000

Lobbyists

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the role of professional lobbyists in formulating policy in his Department. [74367]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 4 March 1999]:* Any contacts with lobbyists by Ministers and civil servants in this Department are conducted in accordance with the "Ministerial Code" and "Guidance for Civil Servants: Contact with Lobbyists."

Fiscal Policy

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he plans to publish the paper "Fiscal Policy: Public Finances and the Cycle", referred to in the November 1998 Pre-Budget report (Cm 4076), paragraph B24; and if he will make a statement. [75353]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 8 March 1999]:* The paper "Fiscal Policy: Public Finances and the Cycle" was published with other documentation on Budget day, 9 March 1999.

KPMG

Mr. Ruffley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the services that KPMG have performed for his Department *(a)* since 1 May 1997 and *(b)* in the corresponding period prior to 1 May 1997, indicating the remuneration made in each case. [72014]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 22 February 1999]:* The services carried out by KPMG for HM Treasury during the periods requested are as follows:

	£000
Services provided since 1 May 1997	
Windfall Tax Consultancy	13
Review of National Savings	6
General consultancy and secondments	26
Services provided between April 1996 and April 1997	
General consultancy and secondments	69
Study on possibility of market testing forecasting function	39

Insurance Premium Tax

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the number of insurance policies which will be taxed at the new rate of insurance premium tax announced in his 1999 Budget. [76453]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 15 March 1999]:* No estimate is available of the number of policies affected.

714 Certificates

Mr. Cotter: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the number of current holders of a 714 certificate who will not be eligible to hold a tax certificate under the Construction Industry scheme. [74157]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 3 March 1999]:* We believe that around 200,000 subcontractors currently holding 714 certificates are unlikely to qualify for gross payment certificates under the Construction Industry Scheme as a result of the new turnover test.

Pensions (Taxation)

Mr. Edward Davey: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer which of the Ministers in his Department has responsibility for policy towards the taxation regime for pensions. [75004]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 8 March 1999]:* Decisions on taxation are taken by the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Cyprus

Mr. Cox: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the financial stability of the Republic of Cyprus following that country's application for membership of the European Union. [76054]

Ms Hewitt: The Government keep the economic and financial position of all the applicants to the EU, including the Republic of Cyprus, under constant review.

European Central Bank

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what discussions he has had with his European partners on increasing the democratic accountability of the European Central Bank. [74878]

Ms Hewitt: Article 109b(3) of the Maastricht Treaty contains several provisions designed to balance the necessary independence of the European Central Bank with the need for democratic accountability.

The Government believe that accountability and transparency in policy/making will be key to ensuring that the European Central Bank gains the trust of the European public and financial markets. Ultimately, it will help to provide the credibility needed to deliver a more effective monetary policy.

Economic and Monetary Union

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if *(a)* the European central bank and *(b)* other Community bodies can prevent the accession of a member state on

EMU-related grounds where that prospective member state has declined to negotiate an opt-out from full economic and monetary union acquis. [74441]

Ms Hewitt: According to Article O of the Treaty on European Union, applications for membership of the Union are considered by the Council of Ministers, after consulting the Commission, and after receiving the assent of the European Parliament. The conditions of admission are then for agreement between Member States and the applicant state.

Exchange Rate (Euro)

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what criteria he will use to decide the appropriate exchange rate for the pound against the euro for the United Kingdom's entry into the monetary union; and what is his strategy for *(a)* achieving and *(b)* maintaining that rate. [74877]

Ms Hewitt: The rate at which sterling would enter the single currency would need to be consistent with economic fundamentals in the UK and compatible with sustainable convergence between the UK and the euro-area. This was the basis for the decision on the conversion rates of currencies which joined in the first wave.

The Government's policy is for a stable and competitive exchange-rate over the medium term. The Government's fiscal and monetary policy framework will help to deliver the macroeconomic stability needed for a stable exchange rate.

Stability Programme

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will place in the Library a copy of the Options on the Stability Programme of the UK, agreed in the ECOFIN Council of 8 February. [75052]

Ms Hewitt: A copy of the ECOFIN opinion on the 1998 UK Convergence Programme has been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Trustee Investments Act 1961

Mr. Quinn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he plans to bring forward a proposal under the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994 to amend the Trustee Investments Act 1961. [74962]

Ms Hewitt: The Government accept in principle the case for reform of the Trustee Investments Act 1961. But any reform must provide a complete and lasting solution, which is not likely to be achieved without primary legislation. The Government are committed to reform in a number of areas and already have a full programme of legislation implementing their key policy priorities. The Government will keep the position under review and seek to make progress at the earliest opportunity.

Income Taxpayers (Scotland)

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the number of income taxpayers in Scotland. [75508]

Dawn Primarolo: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) on 5 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *966*.

US-UK Double Tax Treaty

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the current position of the re-negotiations of the US/UK double tax treaty. [76603]

Dawn Primarolo: Talks at official level were held in Washington in January 1999. It was agreed that a further round of talks would be held in May.

Smuggling

Mr. Gorrie: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what measures he is putting into effect to reduce the smuggling of alcohol and tobacco into the UK. [76621]

Dawn Primarolo: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave the hon. Member for Beckenham (Mrs. Lait) on 10 February 1999, *Official Report*, column *256–58*.

Pensioner Incomes

Mr. Cox: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many pensioners living in the Greater London area have annual incomes in excess of *(a)* £10,000, *(b)* £15,000, *(c)* £20,000 and *(d)* £25,000. [75719]

Ms Hewitt: The latest Survey of Personal Incomes indicates that there were about 200,000 pensioners living in the Greater London area in 1996–97 with annual incomes in excess of £10,000 per annum. Of these, some 110,000 had annual incomes about £15,000, about 65,000 had incomes above £20,000 and 40,000 had incomes above £25,000.

Euro Zone Trade

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the balance of *(a)* visible and *(b)* invisible trade between the euro zone member countries by the rest of EU for each of the last 10 years. [74129]

Ms Hewitt: Data on trade in goods within the EU are available in the publication "External and Intra-European Union Trade" published by Eurostat. Data on trade in services in the EU are available in the Eurostat publication, "International Trade In Services". Both of these publications are available in the House of Commons Library.

Single Currency

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the costs of upgrading Government computer systems to facilitate the National Changeover Plan for United Kingdom participation in the single currency. [73600]

Ms Hewitt: The overall cost of a UK changeover would depend on the approach taken to the changeover. By planning ahead, we can keep costs to the whole economy to a minimum.

European Commission

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate his Department has made of the cost of expanding the staff of the European Commission as proposed in the Commission's internal policy spending review; what grades of post are proposed; and if he will make a statement on *(a)* their purpose and *(b)* his Department's policy on the proposals. [72530]

Ms Hewitt: I would expect any proposals for additional staff for the European Commission to be made in the usual way as part of the Commission's preliminary draft budget for 2000, or as a supplementary amending budget for 1999. No such proposals have been made. In assessing the merits of any proposals for new staff the Government will consider, inter alia, the priority of the tasks new staff are intended to fulfil, the extent to which redeployment has or could be used to meet additional needs, and the availability of additional resources.

VAT

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will assess the benefits of applying a reduced rate of VAT for services with high labour intensity. [74401]

Dawn Primarolo: We understand that the Commission will shortly be bringing forward proposals on experimental reduced rates of VAT on labour-intensive services. We shall consider them when they have been received.

London Inland Revenue

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many inquiries the London Inland Revenue Mobile Advice Centre has handled; and if he will make a statement. [74550]

Dawn Primarolo: The Inland Revenue Mobile Advice Centre has handled 1,984 inquiries since it was brought into service on 21 October 1998.

Shipping Tax

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to introduce a tonnage-based tax regime for UK shipping. [75523]

Dawn Primarolo: The Chancellor has announced that Lord Alexander of Weedon will conduct an independent study of the national and international issues

Computers for the Blind

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will take steps to zero-rate for VAT computers fitted with screen readers and voice synthesisers for blind people. [74628]

Dawn Primarolo: People who are blind can already purchase at the zero-rate of VAT goods which are designed solely for use by a handicapped person. This includes specialised software and hardware for use with computers.

Working Families Tax Credit

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what assessment he has made of the impact of the operation of tapers on working families tax credit benefits; [69936]

(2) what factors underlay the setting of the maximum credit limit on working families tax credit; [69688]

(3) what assessment he has made of the impact on poorer income groups of the change from the family credit programme to the working families tax credit programme. [70276]

Dawn Primarolo: The Working Families Tax Credit, which builds on Family Credit, will have a higher withdrawal threshold and a flatter taper. These improvements will ease the poverty trap by allowing people to keep more of what they earn as they increase their earnings.

CABINET OFFICE

Minister for Science

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, pursuant to his answer of 26 February 1999, *Official Report*, column *455*, concerning meetings on genetically modified foods and crops, for what reason the Minister for Science left the meeting. [75541]

Dr. Jack Cunningham *[holding answer 9 March 1999]:* My noble Friend the Minister for Science set out his reasons for withdrawing from Government decisions or discussions relating to genetically modified food and crop policy in his statement of 16 February. This stated:

"At the time I became a Minister I stated in the press statement I issued that while all my shares in J. Sainsbury plc would be placed in a blind trust, the size of my shareholding in the Company meant that it was likely that I would retain a beneficial interest in the Company via the blind trust. I therefore said that I would stand aside from decisions or discussions having any specific effect on the company."

Electronic Red Boxes

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office if he will name the Ministers in his Department who are regular users of electronic Red Boxes. [76173]

Mr. Kilfoyle: The original electronic red box was essentially a laptop computer built into the traditional red box casing. It provided a useful symbol and demonstration to raise the profile of information-age government.

Experimentation with this device showed its useful facility was the secure connection that allowed non-sensitive documents and information to be emailed between the Private Office and the Minister. However, development of the Government Secure Intranet and other

research, is examining alternative ways to provide this capacity.

Brit Awards

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office if he will list those Ministers in his Department who were present at the recent Brit awards in an official capacity, indicating the organisation acting as their sponsor or host. [76648]

Dr. Jack Cunningham *[holding answer 15 March 1999]:* No Ministers in my Department attended the recent Brit awards.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 17 March 1999

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Genetic Modification

Mr. Baker: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) on how many occasions *(a)* Ministers and *(b)* officials in his Department have (i) spoken with and (ii) received representations regarding genetic modification from Mr. Stan Greenberg of Greenberg Research; [72244]

(2) on how many occasions *(a)* Ministers and *(b)* officials in his Department have (i) spoken with and (ii) received representations regarding genetic modification from Dave Hill of Bell Pottinger; [72067]

(3) on how many occasions *(a)* Ministers and *(b)* officials of his Department have (i) spoken with and (ii) received representations regarding genetic modification from Cathy McGlynn of Bell Pottinger. [72072]

Mr. Rooker *[holding answer 23 February 1999]:* I and my officials are in regular contact with representatives of all those with an interest in biotechnology—including environmental groups, consumer groups and biotechnology companies.

Milk Marque

Mr. Beith: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when the MMC report into the Milk Marque will be published. [76030]

Dr. Howells: I have been asked to reply.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry intends to publish the report as soon as is practicable.

Ministerial Flights

Mr. Terry Lewis: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his letter to the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Maples) of 30 November 1998 concerning Ministerial flights, if he will list the flights on which his departmental *(a)* Accounting Officer and *(b)* Head of Information were passengers. [67363]

Mr. Nick Brown *[holding answer 25 January 1999]:* My departmental Accounting Officer and Head of Information were passengers on the following flights:

Date	*Destination*	*Accounting officer*	*Head of information*
June 1997	Luxembourg	Yes	Yes
July 1997	Strasbourg and Bonn	No	Outward to Strasbourg only
October 1997	Luxembourg	Yes	No
April 1998	Luxembourg	Yes	Yes
June 1998	Luxembourg	Yes	Yes

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Jury Service

Dr. Cable: To ask the Minister of State, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans he has *(a)* to reform the selection process for jurors and *(b)* to avoid the repeated call of particular persons for jury service; and what representations he has received on this. [76745]

Mr. Hoon: Jury service is based on the principle of random selection and therefore it is possible for a person to be called more than once after a period of time. There are no plans to reform the legislation that governs the selection process. Occasionally representations are made by an individual to the Court Service about repeated calls for jury service, and these are referred to the local Crown Court for consideration.

Special Advisers

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Minister of State, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will list the total number of occasions when *(a)* departmental and *(b)* non-departmental special advisers have travelled abroad in an official capacity since 2 May 1997. [76826]

Mr. Hoon: Since 2 May 1997 there have been no occasions when either the Lord Chancellor or I have travelled abroad with a special adviser.

Working Time Directive

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Minister of State, Lord Chancellor's Department how many civil servants in his Department have been invited to waive the Working Time Directive requirement to work less than 48 hours a week on 17 consecutive weeks; how many civil servants in his Department have refused to waive the requirement; and what is the total cost of compliance with the Directive. [76804]

Mr. Hoon: Five civil servants in the Lord Chancellor's Department Headquarters have signed waivers; we expect a few more to do so but none have refused. To date, there has been no cost incurred in complying with the Directive.

PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

Millennium Compliance

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the President of the Council what proposals she has to organise nationwide test days for the millennium compliance of date-reliant computer systems, involved in *(a)* public utilities, *(b)* energy services and *(c)* local government (i) separately and (ii) together; and if she will make a statement. [76059]

Mrs. Beckett: I refer the hon. Member to the answer my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister gave on 23 February 1999, *Official Report*, columns *231–32*. The same concerns apply to the idea of national test days.

Mr. Mates: To ask the President of the Council what simulations of millennium computer compliance failure in the areas of *(a)* health, *(b)* roads, *(c)* travel, *(d)* energy and *(e)* emergency services the Government have conducted. [75936]

Mrs. Beckett: Year 2000 preparations in each of these sectors are being independently assessed. These assessments will examine the quality of the testing and business continuity planning that has been carried out. The results of these assessments will be made available at the next meeting of the National Infrastructure Forum in April, and at subsequent meetings through the year.

Appointments

Mr. Vaz: To ask the President of the Council if she will list those people she has appointed to public bodies since 1 November 1998, indicating the positions to which they have been appointed and if they receive remuneration. [76466]

Mrs. Beckett: The information requested is given below. None of the individuals listed is remunerated.

	Appointed
Engineering Council: Senate	Dr. R. Hawley
General Medical Council	Mrs. R. Evans
General Optical Council	Ms M. Black Ms G. Huka Dr. E. Page Ms D. Rookledge Ms M. Wang Mrs. R. Varley
Independent Schools Tribunal: Educational Panel	Mr. K. D. Anderson Mr. D. Battye Mr. J. T. Billington Mr. R. de Courcy Chapman Mr. R. L. James Mr. S. Jenkin Professor Margaret Maden Mr. J. M. Moore Ms J. M. Lawley

HOUSE OF COMMONS

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TREASURY

Single Currency

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list those benefits of membership of economic and monetary union which cannot be obtained by a member state remaining outside the single currency; and what assessment he has made of the potential financial gain arising to the UK from those benefits. [73598]

Ms Hewitt: The Treasury's assessment of the five economic tests published in October 1997 set out some of the benefits of monetary union. These include reduced transaction costs, the elimination of exchange rate uncertainty on trade and investment in the euro area and increased price transparency. The Treasury's assessment of the five economic tests concluded that membership of a successful single currency could enhance competition and improve prospects for trade and investment.

Debt Relief

Miss Geraldine Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proposals he has made for the reform of the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative. [74264]

Ms Hewitt: At the Annual Meeting of the IMF/World Bank in the autumn, the UK secured agreement to a comprehensive review of the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative, to take place in 1999.

Last month the Chancellor and Secretary of State for International Development wrote to the IMF and the World Bank, pressing for the HIPC initiative to provide faster, deeper and wider debt relief. They asked in particular that the review include an assessment of whether HIPC debt relief ought to be linked more closely to poverty reduction, and whether the current debt sustainability ratios are too strict.

Individual Savings Accounts

Mr. Loughton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many firms have registered to become providers of (i) maxi ISAs, (ii) mini ISAs and (iii) the life insurance element of the proposed ISA. [R] [74044]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 2 March 1999]:* Up to 26 February, a total of 356 firms have received approval. 107 had registered to offer only the cash or life insurance components. These firms can offer only mini ISAs. The remaining 249 firms had registered to offer at least the stocks and shares component. These firms can offer both maxi and mini ISAs. 66 firms have registered to offer the insurance component of the ISA.

Vehicle Excise Duty

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer which other EU States charge vehicle excise duty; and at what level. [74507]

Ms Hewitt: All EU States levy a form of vehicle excise duty. The level charged can vary according to one or more factors, including engine capacity, weight, fuel type and the district in which the vehicle is registered.

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer which other EU states charge different rates of vehicle excise duty on cars of different engine capacities. [74508]

Ms Hewitt: As of 1997, engine capacity was a factor in determining the level of vehicle excise duty payable for passengers cars in the following EU countries:

Belgium

Germany

Spain
Greece
Ireland
Luxembourg, and
Portugal.

Environmental Objectives

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the work his Department has carried out to examine the scope for using the tax system to deliver environmental objectives; and if he will make a statement. [75339]

Ms Hewitt: The Government's commitment to exploring the scope for using economic instruments to secure environmental objectives was set out in the Statement of Intent on Environmental Taxation, published in July 1997.

The progress made in using the tax system to deliver environmental objectives was set out in the 1999 Economic and Fiscal Strategy Report and Financial Statement and Budget Report, and in previous Pre-Budget Reports and Financial Statement and Budget Reports.

Ethical and Social Investment

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what action he is taking to encourage ethical and social investment schemes; and if he will make a statement. [75343]

Ms Hewitt: The Government's strategy is to increase the public's awareness of financial services while at the same time encouraging the financial service providers to offer products that are clearly understood. This will help consumers to choose products that are consistent with their social and ethical beliefs.

Motor Fuels (Taxation)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the revenue received by his Department from taxation on motor fuels in 1998. [75720]

Ms Hewitt: The revenue received from excise duty on all motor fuels in 1998 was £20.8 billion. The estimate amount of VAT received from the sale of motor fuels was £2.1 billion.

Gambling Machines

Mr. Cox: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the tax revenue raised by his Department during 1998 from gambling on machines in the United Kingdom. [76052]

Mrs. Roche: The receipts from excise duty on amusement machine licences in 1998 were £142.1 million. This figure was published by HM Customs and Excise in their "Receipts for Betting, Gaming and Lottery Duties Bulletin: January 1999", published on 16 February 1999.

Social Landlords

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many responses he has received to his consultation paper, "Restriction of VAT Grouping to Fully Taxable Corporate Bodies", from registered social landlords; and what estimate he has made of additional costs for *(a)* registered social landlords and *(b)* Government-funded housing programmes and housing benefit expenditure if the proposals are implemented in their present form. [76126]

Ms Hewitt: The Chancellor made clear in his Budget statement on 9 March that the proposal to restrict the VAT grouping facility to fully taxable companies would not be implemented.

Developing Countries (Debt)

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the relief of the debt of developing countries. [73839]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 10 March 1999]:* Last month the Chancellor and Secretary of State for International Development wrote to the IMF/World Bank pressing for the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative to provide faster, deeper and wider debt relief. The Chancellor also announced a target which would involve committing $50 billion of debt relief to the world's poorest countries by the end of 2000.

European Central Bank

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the salary of the President of the European Central Bank. [76285]

Ms Hewitt: In accordance with Article 11.3 of Protocol No. 3 to the EC Treaty (Statute of the ESCB and ECB), the terms and conditions of employment of the members of the Executive Board, in particular their salaries, pensions and other social security benefits are the subject of contracts with the ECB and are fixed by the Governing Council on a proposal from a Committee comprising three members appointed by the Governing Council and three members appointed by the Council of Ministers.

Jobs (Lancashire)

Mr. Evans: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the number of *(a)* new jobs created and *(b)* jobs lost in Lancashire during the last year for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [76356]

Ms Hewitt: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Director of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Nigel Evans, dated 17 March 1999:

As Director of the Office for National Statistics (ONS), I have been asked to reply to your recent parliamentary question on jobs in Lancashire.

The type of statistics you request are derived from the ONS Annual Employment Survey (AES). The latest results are for September 1997, which can be compared with those at September 1996.

The number of Employee Jobs in Lancashire at September 1997 was 521,500, a net fall of 3,100 since September 1996. It is not possible to differentiate between the number of jobs created and lost over this time.

European Investment Loans

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the projects in the United Kingdom which

have received loans from the (i) European Investment Bank and (ii) European Investment Fund, stating *(a)* the name of the project, *(b)* the sum loaned in pounds sterling, *(c)* the terms of re-payment and *(d)* significant other loans from (1) private and (2) public resources made for such projects. [76772]

Ms Hewitt: The European Investment Bank signed the following loans for projects in the UK in 1998:

Project	*Amount (£)*
Individual loans	
Development of Elgin and Franklin gas and condensate fields in North Sea Texaco North Sea UK Co.	59.9
Power transmission and distribution grids Scottish Power plc	150
London Underground electricity systems Seeboard Powerlink	123
Channel Tunnel Rail Link Railtrack Group plc	200
Railway rolling stock Porterbrook Leasing Company Ltd.	110
Road construction and upgrading Birmingham City Council	81.5
Construction of A5/A55 trunk road UK Highways A55 Ltd.	56
Passenger facilities at Edinburgh, Heathrow and Gatwick airports BAA plc	85
Freight handling centre at Heathrow airport British Airways plc	20
Extension of mobile telephone network Mercury Personal Communications—One 2 One	200
Water supply and wastewater infrastructure Thames Water Utilities Ltd.	125
Water supply and wastewater infrastructure Northumbrian Water Ltd.	75
Construction and refurbishment of social housing and vocational training premises in urban regeneration areas The Housing Finance Corporation Ltd.	44
Establishment of five industrial gas production facilities Air Products and Chemicals Inc.	88.3
Production and distribution of industrial gases in Margam, Wales BOC Ltd.	19
Development of new vehicle and improvements to paint shops and engineering centre Rover Group Ltd.	50
Aircraft design and production Short Brothers Ltd.	30.0
Schools construction Falkirk Council	37.0
Global loans for financing small and medium-sized enterprises	
Barclays Bank	300
Midland Bank	100
Tokyo-Mitsubishi Bank	50
Lloyds Bank	50
ABN AMRO Causeway Mezzanine Partnership LP	15.7
Midland Bank Enterprise Funds	7.1
Total	2,076.5

I am unable to provide details of the terms of repayment on EIB loans or information on other contributory sources of finance as this is commercially sensitive.

The European Investment Fund does not provide loans. It provides loan guarantees and equity investments.

In 1997 (latest available information) the EIF signed guarantees to intermediaries supporting small and medium-sized enterprises in the UK as follows:

£ million

Operation	*Party guaranteed*	*Amount*
Mezzanine Loan Fund	Syndicate, arranger NatWest	10
Barclays Bank	Barclays Bank	34.8

In 1997 (latest available information) the EIF signed equity investments in funds supporting small and medium-sized enterprises in the UK as follows:

£ million

Fund	*Amount*
Prelude Trust plc	2
MTI Three B. Ltd. Partnership	2
Alta Berkeley VCV	2.1
Kennet Ltd. Partnership	3

I am unable to provide details of the terms of EIF operations or information on other contributory sources of finance as this is commercially sensitive.

G8 Meeting, Cologne

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make it his policy to propose common standards for export credit agreements at the Cologne G8 meeting in June. [77080]

Mrs. Roche: Considerable work continues to be undertaken within the OECD to ensure that export credit agencies operate on the basis of a level playing field. The imminent introduction on 1 April this year of the OECD premia regime is the latest example of this work. The G8 recognises that the OECD is often the appropriate forum for export credit issues and for this reason has in the past encourage the OECD to seek a common standard on several export credit matters, including the environment and productive expenditure for highly indebted poor countries. We will continue within the G8 to support the work of the OECD Export Credits Group towards developing common standards for export credit agencies.

Export Guarantees Committee

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 25 February 1999, *Official Report*, column *420*, on the Export Guarantees Committee, if he will place in the Library a list of the items discussed at the four meetings of the Committee since 1 January 1998. [77154]

Mrs. Roche: I have placed in the Library a note listing the items discussed by the Export Guarantees Committee in the meetings held since 1 January 1998.

Childrens Tax Credit

Mr. Field: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer at what rate the children's tax credit will be reduced for families where one or more earners is a higher rate taxpayer. [76662]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 15 March 1999]:* The children's tax credit will gradually be withdrawn where the person claiming it is liable to tax at the higher rate. These people will lose £1 of tax credit for every £15 of income above the point at which they start to pay higher rate tax until their entitlement to the credit is exhausted.

Average Weekly Earnings

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are the average weekly earnings (i) including and (ii) excluding overtime for (x) part-time and (y) full-time workers in *(a)* Scotland, *(b)* each of the Scottish local authorities and *(c)* Great Britain, broken down for (1) men and (2) women in (A) manual employment, (B) non-manual employment and (C) for all workers at (X) cash and (Y) constant terms for each year since 1991–92; and if he will estimate the same information for 1998–99, 1999–2000, 2000–01 and 2001–02. [76116]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 15 March 1999]:* The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Director of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mrs. Margaret Ewing, dated 17 March 1999:

As Director of the Office for National Statistics (ONS), I have been asked to reply to your recent parliamentary question on earnings.

The information requested can only be provided at disproportionate cost. There is a considerable amount of data, from the New Earnings Survey (NES) 1991 to 1998, available in the House of Commons library. This includes estimates of average gross weekly earnings for full-time and some part-time workers for the areas in question. Prior to 1996, data for the former Scottish regions are available. Average earnings excluding overtime can be derived from the relevant tables. Projected earnings are not calculated.

For the growth of earnings in real terms please see the Retail Prices Index (RPI) in the ONS Business Monitor MM23, a copy of which is also available in the House Library.

Financial Services and Markets Bill

Ms Lawrence: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the financial promotion regime under the Financial Services and Markets Bill. [77538]

Ms Hewitt: The Financial Services and Markets Bill provides for a prohibition on unauthorised persons making financial promotions without the approval of an authorised person. The Bill also provides for exemptions from that prohibition to be set out in secondary legislation.

The Treasury has today issued a consultation document on the financial promotion regime under the Bill. Copies have been placed in the Vote Office and the Libraries of the House. The deadline for comments is 30 April. Following consideration of responses, the Treasury will publish further consultation draft secondary legislation setting out proposed exemptions from the prohibition on unauthorised persons making financial promotions.

Finance Bill

Ms Lawrence: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when the Finance Bill will be published; and if he will make Explanatory Notes on the Bill's clauses available to hon. Members. [77737]

Dawn Primarolo: The Finance Bill will be published on Wednesday, 31 March. Explanatory Notes on the Bill's clauses will be placed in the Vote Office and the Libraries of both Houses that day. Members of the public will be able to obtain copies of the Explanatory Notes from the Treasury; these will also be available on the Treasury's Internet site (http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk).

Economic and Monetary Union

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement about the presentation of Government policy in respect of EMU. [75362]

Ms Hewitt: The Government's policy on membership of the single currency was set out by the Chancellor of the Exchequer in a statement to the House of Commons on 27 October 1997. This policy was restated by the Prime Minister in a statement to the House of Commons on 23 February 1999, *Official Report*, columns 179–84.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Millennium Dome

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) if the achievements of the British Armed Forces over the past two centuries will be recognised in the Millennium Dome; [72672]

(2) what recognition will be given in the Millennium Dome to the achievements of Sir Winston Churchill; [72671]

(3) what recognition will be given in the Millennium Dome to the part played by the British Empire in shaping the United Kingdom's history over the past two centuries. [72666]

Janet Anderson *[holding answer 24 February 1999]:* The Millennium Experience does not plan to incorporate exhibitions of an historical nature. The main focus on the Millennium Experience project is the future. However, the Dome's National Identity zone and the Our Town Story initiative will provide vehicles through which issues of history can be addressed and reflected. The content and the narrative of the National Identity zone will be influenced by the outcome of qualitative and quantitative market research testing the opinions of the general public, and the historical content of Our Town Story will depend on what each of the groups taking part consider best reflects their community's history.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on Her Majesty's Government's policy on European Commission proposal COM (1998) 733; what assessment his Department has made of its impact on the *(a)* number of asylum applicants, *(b)* number of rejected asylum applicants, *(c)* repatriation of asylum applicants and *(d)* costs of repatriating asylum applicants. [75557]

Kate Hoey: Her Majesty's Government's current view on Commission proposal COM (1998) 733 is contained within the Home Office Explanatory Memorandum dated 8 February 1999, a copy of which was deposited in the Library. The proposal remains under consideration.

Probation Service

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the impact on probation service budgets of the Government's changes to ACT; and if he will make a statement. [75913]

Mr. George Howarth: The Comprehensive Spending Review settlement for Local Government includes £130 million in each of the next three years to cover the impact on changes in Advanced Corporation Tax on local authority pension funds. This should be sufficient to ensure that any impact on probation service budgets will be minimal.

Kurdish Demonstration (Police Costs)

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police were involved in policing the recent demonstration by Kurds in Holland Park; and what was the additional cost of this demonstration to the Metropolitan Police. [76604]

Kate Hoey: The Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis tells me that 481 uniformed officers were involved in policing the march and demonstration in Holland Park on 20 February. He is unable to calculate the additional policing cost to the Metropolitan Police as overtime claims for all the officers involved have not yet been submitted.

Police Stations

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what contracts the Metropolitan Police have entered into with Higgins Developments Ltd., for the building or refurbishment of police stations; and for what value. [76632]

Kate Hoey: The Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis tells me that neither the Metropolitan Police Service nor the Receiver for the Metropolitan Police District has entered into a contract with Higgins Development Ltd. After competition, undertaken by external consultants, the Receiver has entered into a contract with Higgins Homes Ltd., a subsidiary company of Higgins Group plc, for the purchase of the site at 28–30 High Street Wanstead, subject to planning permission and a time constraint.

Since 1985, another subsidiary company of Higgins Group plc, D. Higgins & Sons Ltd. has been invited by the Receiver to tender, in competition, 36 times, and won four contracts as a result. Those were:

Contract	*Type of work*	*Date let*	*Contract sum (£)*
Borehamwood Police Station	Alteration and refurbishment	9 August 1990	454,000
Canadian Avenue, Catford	Conversion of premises to a probation hostel	6 March 1991	469,000
Archway	Fitting out sector base	8 January 1998	282,000
Lambeth	Alterations for territorial support group	12 November 1998	330,000

Car Crime

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps the Metropolitan Police are taking to reduce car crime at leisure facilities. [76633]

Kate Hoey: The Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis tells me that his objective is to reduce all vehicle crime within the Metropolitan Police District by 10,000 offences in 1999–2000. This is the equivalent of a four per cent. reduction over 1998–1999. The Metropolitan Police tackle vehicle crime through an intelligence-led approach. They use the result of crime audits, conducted with Crime and Disorder Act partners, and analysis of reported crimes, to identify 'hot spots' on which to focus policing activity.

The Commission informs me that information about vehicle crime is not collated according to the types of car park where offences are committed. The Metropolitan Police are, however, contributing to the Association of Chief Police Officers secured car parks scheme by working with local authorities to increase the number of secured car parks in the Metropolitan Police District from 41 to 450 by the year 2000.

Immigration and Asylum Appeals

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applications there were for (i) extension or variation of leave to remain and (ii) duplicate endorsements for the last full year for which figures are available. [76616]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Tunbridge Wells (Mr. Norman) on 1 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *563*.

Special Advisers

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the total number of occasions

when *(a)* departmental and *(b)* non-departmental special advisers have travelled abroad in an official capacity since 2 May 1997. [76835]

Mr. Straw: Between 2 May 1997 and 28 February 1999, my Special Advisers have made visits overseas on three occasions in an official capacity. All travel complied with the requirements of the Ministerial Codes and the Civil Service Management Code.

Company Licences

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list for *(a)* small and medium-sized enterprises and *(b)* larger companies (i) all licences and permits issued by his Department and its agencies to companies permitting them to carry out their business, (ii) the cost of each such licence or permit in (A) 1997–98 and (B) 1999–2000 and (iii) the current number of companies which are in receipt of each such licence or permit. [76851]

Mr. Straw *[holding answer 16 March 1999]:* The information requested is not collected centrally and can be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Human Rights

Mr. McCabe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the Government's response to the findings announced by the European Commission on Human Rights regarding the applications by T and V about their trial and subsequent sentence of detention at Her Majesty's Pleasure for murder. [77571]

Mr. Straw: In summary, the findings of the European Commission on Human Rights were as follows:

On Article 3 ('Production of torture') the Commission found no violation in relation to the trial.

On Article 6(1) ('Right to a fair trial') the Commission found violation by 14 votes to 5 in relation to the trial.

On Article 14 ('Prohibition of discrimination') the Commission found no separate issue because of the violation on Article 6 above.

On Article 3 the Commission found no violation in relation to the sentence.

On Article 5(1) ('Right to liberty and security') the Commission found no violation in relation to the sentence.

On Article 6(1) the Commission found violation by 18 votes to 1 in relation to the tariff.

On Article 5(4) the Commission found violation by 18 votes to 1 in relation to the tariff and review of detention.

The Government welcome the fact that the Commission found that neither the trial nor the sentencing process were in violation of Article 3 of the European Convention which deals with inhuman and degrading treatment.

The areas where the Commission did find against the United Kingdom Government do raise a range of serious and quite complex issues. The Government have decided to refer the Commission's finding themselves to the European Court of Human Rights. The European Commission has also referred these matters to the European Court.

The European Court of Human Rights will now rehear all the issues covered by the Commission. This will give the Government an opportunity to state their position on all these issues. The Government will continue to contest these applications very strongly.

I have placed a copy of the Commission's findings in the Library.

Firearms (Compensation)

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to pay compensation to Mr. R. L. Wickerson of 35 Hillside Road, Paignton, Devon TQ3 3JF (ref DVC/FAC51086E187421) for the surrender of his firearms on 26 February 1998. [76793]

Mr. Boateng: The Option A and B elements of the claim were paid on 18 November 1998, and an offer of payment following examination of the remaining Option C elements of the claim was issued on 8 March 1999. This final payment will be made as soon as the necessary disclaimer has been returned.

ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND THE REGIONS

Nuclear Materials (Transportation)

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he has made of the emission levels from rail-borne flasks carrying nuclear fuel in the United Kingdom; and if he will list the international safety levels set for the transport by rail of nuclear fuels. [76014]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The National Radiological Protection Board, working under contract to the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions carried out surveys into the radiological impact of the transport of radioactive materials by all modes. In the last survey covering rail transport (Radiation Exposure from the Normal Transport of Radioactive Materials within the United Kingdom, 1991 Review, by R. Gelder, National Radiological Protection Board Report NRPB-R255, ISBN 0 85951 351 3) the scenario of a householder living 100 metres from a marshalling yard where fuel flasks may be held for several hours, was assessed to give rise to a maximum dose of 6 microSievert. The maximum dose to persons living closer (50 metres) to a railway line with passing traffic (where exposure times would be very much shorter) was assessed to be very much lower. For comparison, the average annual dose in the UK owing to natural background radiation is about 2000 microSievert.

The international safety levels for the transport of radioactive materials by rail are in the Regulations concerning the International Carriage of Dangerous Goods by Rail (RID) (ISBN 0–11–552032–5). They require that the radiation level from trains carrying radioactive material during normal operations is limited to a maximum of 2 milliSievert/h at any point on the wagon outer surfaces, or the vertical planes projected from the outer edges of open wagons and to 0.1 milliSievert/h at a distance of 2 metres from those surfaces. The maximum levels for non-fixed contamination on the surface of fuel flasks or rail wagons is 4 Bequerels/cm^2 for beta, gamma and low toxicity alpha emitters and 0.4 Bequerels/cm^2 for alpha emitters.

My right hon. Friend the Minister for Transport announced a programme of random independent inspections of contamination levels on spent fuel flasks and other packages transporting radioactive materials. These checks were additional to those already made by

the operators. The contamination survey report is due to be published shortly. Copies will be available in the House of Commons Library.

Affordable Accommodation (London)

Mr. Coleman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many units of accommodation available at affordable rents were developed by regional housing associations in (i) the London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham, (ii) the London Borough of Wandsworth and (iii) the City of Westminster in *(a)* 1997 and *(b)* 1998. [76282]

Mr. Raynsford: The numbers of units of affordable accommodation completed by registered social landlords in the financial year of 1997–98 and in the first 11 months of 1998–99 are as follows:

	1997–98	*1998–99*
Hammersmith and Fulham	291	163
Wandsworth	74	60
Westminster	176	158

Note:
The information is not available by calendar year.

Road Traffic (North West)

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to control the levels of road traffic resulting from summer tourism in the North West of England. [76358]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The road traffic problem caused by summer tourism in the North West is highly localised in nature and is primarily a matter for the local highway authorities concerned. Officials from my Department have been working with key partners in Cumbria to enhance and accelerate the existing Lake District Transport Package which has received TPP funding since 1998. The resultant Transport Strategy will act as a pilot for other National Parks.

The strategy, among other things, aims to reduce traffic and offer alternative modes of transport to the car while maintaining a sustainable tourist industry. We anticipate this strategy will be developed further and subsumed into Cumbria County Council's Local Transport Plan to be submitted later this year.

Electronic Red Boxes

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will name the Ministers in his Department who are regular users of electronic Red Boxes. [76179]

Dr. Reid: I refer the right hon. Gentleman to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office on 16 March 1999, *Official Report*, columns *651–52*.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the *(a)* revenue support grant and *(b)* standard spending assessment for each (i) metropolitan and (ii) unitary authority as a sum per head of their population ranked and numbered in descending order. [76165]

Ms Armstrong: The information requested has been placed in the Library.

Infrastructure Projects

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what measures he has put into place to speed up the planning process for major infrastructure projects. [76396]

Mr. Caborn: Some proposals for improving the processing of major infrastructure projects through the planning system were included in the "Modernising Planning" Policy Statement which I published last year. I intend to publish shortly a consultation paper with detailed proposals to streamline the procedures.

Student Travel Discounts

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to ensure that all students are granted the same concessions in terms of travel discounts; and what representations he has received relating to this. [76747]

Ms Glenda Jackson: This is a matter for local authorities, under the statutory powers available to them. Bus operators and London Transport may also offer reduced fares for students if they think it appropriate. I receive correspondence on this topic from time to time, but have no plans to change the present arrangements.

British Waterways

Mr. Cann: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what resources he plans to make available to British Waterways to repair the existing canal system. [76644]

Mr. Meale: My right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister announced on 18 February an increase in grant to British Waterways, by £8 million to nearly £59 million a year. Over the next three years this will enable British Waterways to increase the amount of investment and reduce the backlog of urgent maintenance from £90 million to £40 million.

Rural Bypasses

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if it is his policy to provide funding for further rural bypass schemes; and if he will make a statement. [76774]

Dr. Reid: Nineteen trunk road bypasses were among the 37 schemes included in the Targeted Programme of Improvements announced last July following the Roads Review. Further cases will be considered in the studies proposed in the Review.

Local Authorities may propose bypasses as part of their Local Transport Plans where they are satisfied that they represent the most appropriate solution to the problem and deserve priority within their Plan.

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he or one of his Ministers will visit Wyre Piddle to examine the case for the construction of a bypass. [76775]

Dr. Reid: We will examine the case for the construction of Wyre Piddle Bypass in the context of Worcestershire County Council's Draft Local Transport Plan, to be submitted in July this year. Any visit in advance of that consideration would be premature.

London Underground

Mr. Ottaway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the planned fare increases for London Underground for the years 2000–05. [76972]

Ms Glenda Jackson: London Underground fares are currently the responsibility of London Transport. Subject to the passage of the Greater London Authority Bill, when London Underground transfers to the Greater London Authority, the Mayor will be under a duty to arrange for the setting of the general level and structure of fares to be charged on services provided or secured by Transport for London, including London Underground fares. We are currently working on the detail of arrangements for setting Underground fares in the transition period after the establishment of the GLA and before London Underground is transferred to it.

Planning Guidance (Electromagnetic Fields)

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he intends to issue planning guidance on land use planning and electromagnetic fields. [77083]

Mr. Raynsford: My Department issued in December 1998 for consultation the draft of a circular prepared jointly with the Department of Health on land use planning and electromagnetic fields (EMFs). The circular provides advice to local planning authorities in drawing up development plan policies or deciding planning applications for development giving rise to EMFs or for development proposed in the vicinity of existing sources of EMFs. A copy of the consultation package has been placed in the Library. Responses were invited by 19 February 1999. We are currently considering the responses received.

Countryside Access

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he has made of the compatibility between his proposals to extend the right of access on foot to open countryside without compensation and the Government's obligations under the European Convention on Human Rights. [76969]

Mr. Meacher: The Government's view is that their plans for creating a new statutory right on foot to open countryside are compatible with their obligations under the European Convention on human rights. In deciding that there will be no general right to compensation, the Government have taken into account the limited nature of the new right of access; its application only to land which is undeveloped and not used for intensive agricultural purposes; the continued ability of landowners to develop and use their land after the introduction of the right; and the extensive provision made for closure of land for land management and other reasons. A cost benefit study for the Government, undertaken by independent consultants, supports the view that landowners will not suffer significant losses or costs as a result of a new right of access such as would warrant the provision of compensation.

Housing Revenue Account (Subsidy System)

Mr. Truswell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what representations he has received regarding the amount of housing benefit subsidy clawed back through negative entitlement under the housing revenue account subsidy formula. [76978]

Mr. Raynsford: A number of right hon. and hon. Members, local authorities, and tenants groups have made representations about the present Housing Revenue Account Subsidy system. In December 1998 we issued a consultation paper "A New Financial Framework for Local Authority Housing: Resource Accounting in the Housing Revenue Account" seeking views on proposals for fundamental changes in the system. These changes would include ending the practice of offsetting assumed surpluses on an Authority's Housing Revenue Account against rent rebate subsidy. Consultations are not yet complete and there will be an announcement about our plans in due course. A copy of the consultation paper is in the Library.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Working Time Directive

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many civil servants in her Department have been invited to waive the Working Time Directive requirement to work less than 48 hours a week on 17 consecutive weeks; how many civil servants in her Department have refused to waive the requirement; and what is the total cost of compliance with the Directive. [76805]

Clare Short: No civil servants in my Department have been asked to waive their rights. Employers of the Department are highly dedicated to the work and inclined to work long hours. We have decided to tackle instances of work overload through measures such as job re-structuring and work re-prioritisation rather than by the continuing acceptance of a long hours culture. Managers at all levels have been asked to ensure that staff are not put under pressure to work hours in excess of those permitted by the Directive or to waive their rights. The costs of compliance with the Directive cannot be collected as they are not clearly evident.

Nigeria

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what proposals she has to ease the debt burden for Nigeria. [76965]

Clare Short: The full extent of Nigeria's debt is unclear. My Department is providing technical assistance to the Government to update its external debt recording and management system. We have also offered to assist the Government to develop a debt management strategy.

Ministerial Meetings (US)

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many times Ministers in her Department have met their counterparts in the US Government since 1 June 1998; and if she will list the dates and locations of each meeting, the ministers involved on each occasion, and the name of the US counterpart at each meeting. [77120]

Clare Short: I have no counterpart in the US Government. I have met Brian Atwood—head of USAID on a large number of occasions.

HEALTH

NHS Waiting Lists

Mr. Syms: To ask the Secretary of State for Health for each of the last 10 years, how many patients have waited *(a)* three to 25 weeks and *(b)* more than 26 weeks to see a consultant in each (i) health authority and (ii) English region. [74732]

Mr. Denham: The information requested is not available.

Information on outpatient waiting times by health authority is only available from 1998–99. Available information for the quarter ending December 1998 is provided in the table.

Number of patients seen for first outpatient appointment, by time band, following written referral by a GP, quarter ended 31 December 1998

Health Authority	Number seen who had waited: 0 to less than 4 weeks	4 to less than 26 weeks	26 weeks and over
Bradford	6,765	9,350	792
Calderdale and Kirklees	8,998	11,709	1,227
Durham	8,936	14,465	1,071
East Riding	8,506	11,170	569
Gateshead and South Tyneside	6,226	8,822	366
Leeds	8,265	15,751	1,417
Newcastle and North Tyneside	8,834	11,009	787
North Cumbria	4,745	7,861	436
North Yorkshire	9,719	15,552	1,134
Northumberland	4,818	7,635	478
Sunderland	3,068	7,916	260
Tees	8,484	13,881	1,547
Wakefield	5,152	6,732	283
Northern and Yorkshire Region total	92,516	141,853	10,367
Barnsley	3,292	5,352	620
Doncaster	3,984	5,591	752
Leicestershire	11,244	19,599	1,824
Lincolnshire	10,241	13,588	1,467
North Derbyshire	5,385	7,558	216
North Nottinghamshire	6,028	7,399	751
Nottingham	6,547	8,928	1,962
Rotherham	3,458	6,035	346
Sheffield	8,292	10,630	1,385
South Derbyshire	8,108	12,048	922
South Humber	5,186	5,553	327
Trent Region total	71,765	102,281	10,572
Bedfordshire	6,743	12,527	1,354
Berkshire	14,647	21,710	1,022
Buckinghamshire	7,652	14,605	1,296
Cambridge and Huntingdon	5,433	10,622	1,364
East Norfolk	9,349	15,569	1,007
North West Anglia	5,628	9,139	1,181
Northamptonshire	6,171	13,681	1,689
Oxfordshire	11,728	13,162	862
Suffolk	7,659	15,798	1,362
Anglia and Oxford Region total	75,010	126,813	11,137
Barking and Havering	4,407	8,590	716
Barnet	3,717	6,156	422
Brent and Harrow	4,937	9,986	555
Camden and Islington	6,941	9,277	703
East and North Hertfordshire	5,523	11,104	442
Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow	10,166	15,822	639
East London and City	7,930	13,865	1,918
Enfield and Haringey	5,938	11,180	1,119
Hillingdon	2,154	4,546	293

Number of patients seen for first outpatient appointment, by time band, following written referral by a GP, quarter ended 31 December 1998

Health Authority	Number seen who had waited: 0 to less than 4 weeks	4 to less than 26 weeks	26 weeks and over
Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster	4,966	6,506	171
North Essex	10,577	19,812	1,298
Redbridge and Waltham Forest	5,670	9,529	1,566
South Essex	8,059	17,962	808
West Hertfordshire	5,631	10,046	452
North Thames Region total	86,616	154,381	11,102
Bexley and Greenwich	6,697	9,547	1,040
Bromley	2,761	6,963	577
Croydon	4,904	5,822	215
East Kent	6,975	12,589	712
East Surrey	5,625	6,422	107
East Sussex Brighton and Hove	8,523	19,374	1,015
Kingston and Richmond	4,719	5,264	135
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham	7,833	16,693	1,360
Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth	9,362	14,286	813
West Kent	11,817	19,323	1,725
West Surrey	9,456	13,772	559
West Sussex	5,960	12,807	1,248
South Thames Region total	84,632	142,862	9,506
Avon	13,889	18,176	3,115
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	8,040	11,091	1,578
Dorset	12,574	17,753	315
Gloucestershire	7,682	12,048	765
Isle of Wight	2,290	3,043	8
North and East Devon	6,809	10,459	906
North and Mid Hampshire	8,591	12,939	781
Portsmouth and South East Hampshire	5,102	12,515	3,239
Somerset	7,279	10,734	747
South and West Devon	8,879	12,609	1,395
Southampton and South West Hampshire	5,701	11,435	747
Wiltshire	9,372	14,094	1,257
South and West Region total	96,208	146,896	14,853
Birmingham	15,532	22,710	557
Coventry	2,976	7,446	518
Dudley	4,116	6,953	119
Herefordshire	6,124	4,152	489
North Staffordshire	3,853	8,255	2,258
Sandwell	4,582	6,813	560
Shropshire	5,239	10,345	847
Solihull	2,295	3,993	56
South Staffordshire	7,566	13,020	2,131
Walsall	3,639	5,632	594
Warwickshire	3,438	6,228	478
Wolverhampton	952	1,852	120
Worcestershire	8,415	10,932	134
West Midlands Region total	68,727	108,331	8,861
Bury and Rochdale	5,771	8,749	571
East Lancashire	6,848	13,448	799
Liverpool	5,627	11,127	1,299
Manchester	6,503	10,065	1,303
Morecambe Bay	5,515	7,051	912
North Cheshire	8,214	5,610	181
North West Lancashire	7,221	11,344	562
Salford and Trafford	7,507	11,155	1,200
Sefton	2,499	6,793	593
South Cheshire	9,295	14,462	698
South Lancashire	4,001	7,897	817
St. Helens and Knowsley	5,290	8,086	866
Stockport	5,578	6,818	493
West Pennine	6,164	10,401	1,063
Wigan and Bolton	8,266	14,360	924
Wirral	3,687	6,766	1,017
North West Region total	97,986	154,132	13,298
England total	673,460	1,077,549	89,696

Paediatric Services

Mr. Lock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance his Department is providing to health authorities on the provision of paediatric occupational therapy services; and if he will make a statement. [74875]

Mr. Hutton: Guidance on the provision of paediatric occupational therapy services is contained in "Child Health in the Community—A Guide to Good Practice", published in 1996. We expect that Primary Care Groups will work with their local Health Authorities to ensure that Health Improvement Programmes will include adequate occupational therapy services for children.

Medicines Control Agency

Mr. Gill: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much income the Medicines Control Agency derives from licensing fees. [75727]

Ms Jowell: The Medicines Control Agency receives almost all its income from licensing and associated fees. The balance of its income derives from charges for associated services for which statutory fees are not levied.

In 1997–98, the Medicines Control Agency received in excess of 97 per cent. (£27.4 million out of £28.1 million) of its income from licensing-related fees. Further information can be obtained from the agency's annual report and accounts.

Health Services Accreditation

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if *(a)* his Department, *(b)* the NHS Executive and *(c)* East Sussex, Brighton and Hove Health Authority informed customers of the closure of Health Services Accreditation; and if he will make a statement on the (i) nature and (ii) number of responses received. [76355]

Mr. Denham: The Director of Health Service Accreditation (HSA) wrote on 3 March 1999 advising customers of its closure. As of 16 March, HSA had received a total of 14 letters from contributors to the service standards reports or from providers of patient services eligible for accreditation. They all expressed regret that the work of the HSA had come to an end and all hoped that ways might be found of maintaining access to the materials.

Electronic Red Boxes

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will name the Ministers in his Department who are regular users of electronic red boxes. [76170]

Mr. Hutton: The Department has made a laptop computer available to each Minister to enable them to e-mail non-sensitive documents securely to and from their Private Office and access other departmental information sources. I currently use this facility as does the Minister of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Denham).

Home Help Charges

Mr. Coleman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are the weekly charges to clients who are in receipt of a home help service in the *(a)* City of Westminster, *(b)* London Borough of Wandsworth and *(c)* London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham. [76267]

Mr. Hutton: Information on charges made to individuals for home help provision is not available centrally. However, the total amounts reported by local authorities as having been received from clients in the form of fees and charges, in 1996–97, for different services are collected centrally, and are available on the Department of Health Web page [http:\\www.open.gov.uk/doh/public/pss__stat.htm] for all local authorities in England.

Viagra

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the extended period of public consultation on the provision of Viagra by the NHS will come to a conclusion. [76746]

Mr. Denham: The public consultation on our policy proposals about the treatment of impotence on the National Health Service will end on 25 March 1999.

Pen Needles

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he intends to issue free pen needles for use by insulin-dependent diabetics. [76881]

Mr. Denham: I announced on 25 February that we hope to allow insulin pen needles and reusable insulin injection pens to be prescribed by general practitioners on the National Health Service. This would be contingent upon the addition of pre-filled, disposable pens to Schedule 10 to the National Health Service (General Medical Services) Regulations 1992 on which we are consulting interested parties. Copies of this announcement and the consultation letter have been placed in the Library.

The consultation period ends on 9 April 1999.

Nurses

Mr. Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many former nurses (i) in total and (ii) who had been out of the profession for more than five years have *(a)* applied and *(b)* been accepted on back to nursing courses since his January announcement. [76387]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 12 March 1999]:* The information requested is not available centrally.

In the first few weeks of the national nursing publicity campaign, which began on 1 February, over 44,500 people have contacted the response line, of which about 4,400 have expressed an interest in returning to nursing in the National Health Service.

Mr. Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many former nurses have (i) applied, (ii) been accepted upon and (iii) completed back to nursing courses in each of the last five years; [76385]

(2) what was the average cost of back to nursing courses for former nurses who have been out of the profession for *(a)* less than five years and *(b)* more than five years, for each of the last five years on record; [76388]

(3) how many former nurses have applied for back to nursing courses for each of the last five years; [76384]

(4) how many former nurses who had left nursing at least five years previously have (i) applied to, (ii) been accepted on and (iii) completed back to nursing courses in each of the last five years. [76386]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 12 March 1999]:* The information requested is not available centrally.

It is planned to include information about return to practice courses in the statistical bulletin which is due to be published by the English National Board for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting during week commencing 19 April 1999.

Dental Services

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has for the development of community dental services. [75436]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 15 March 1999]:* The Community Dental Service plays a valuable part in the provision of NHS dentistry, which we plan to continue. The type and level of CDS services commissioned and funded is for individual health authorities to determine in the light of local needs and priorities.

Official Journal (EC)

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list each management consultancy contract advertised by NHS organisations in the supplement to the *Official Journal of the European Community* in each of the last five years. [76489]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 15 March 1999]:* The information requested can be provided only at disproportionate cost. Information on contract notices placed in the supplement is available on the internet website "http://www.ted.eur-op.eu.int".

Mobile Phones

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research he has commissioned into the possible link between heavy use of mobile phones and memory loss. [76951]

Mr. Hutton: The Department has funded two research projects on possible effects of radio frequency fields similar to those emitted by mobile phones. One is a behavioural study of rodents and the other is a human study involving psychological tests under simulated mobile phone use. Memory loss is a component of both these studies. Neither study has yet been published.

Women's Unit

Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the work of the Women's Unit. [75375]

Mr. Hutton: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply my right hon. Friend the Minister for Public Health gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Stretford and Urmston (Ms Hughes) on 2 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *669*.

Aspirin

Mr. Derek Twigg: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to end the present regulation limiting the sale of 75mg. aspirin to 32 tablets at one time. [77437]

Mr. Denham: Following statutory public consultation, the Medicines Commission has advised that low dose aspirin (75mg) may safely be sold or supplied in packs of up to 100 tablets or capsules under the supervision of a pharmacist. The Prescription Only Medicines Order will be amended to implement this. The Statutory Instrument is due to be laid in Parliament by 1 April and, with Parliamentary agreement, would be effective from 22 April 1999.

WALES

Roads

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his estimate of expenditure by his Department and agencies on roads for each of the years from 1994–95 to 1998–99; what are the planned figures for each of the years from 1999–2000 to 2001–02; and if he will make a statement. [74899]

Mr. Hain: My Department's expenditure on trunk roads was as follows:

	£ million
Outturn	
1994–95	202.1
1995–96	192.3
1996–97	162.0
1997–98	112.9
Plans	
1998–99	100.6

Trunk road provision for future years is:

	£ million
Plans	
1999–2000	101.6
2000–2001	104.6
2001–2002	104.6

This Government have stuck by the spending plans of the previous Government up to and including those for the current financial year (1998–99). However, we were

able, exceptionally, to inject an extra £10 million into the trunk road programme in 1998–99, and this will be reflected in final outturn figures.

The Department also supports local authority expenditure on major road construction schemes through Transport Grant arrangements. Transport Grant allocations for road schemes in the period in question were as follows:

	£ million
Outturn	
1994–95	65.6
1995–96	83.0
1996–97	79.4
1997–98	48.5
Plans	
1998–99	38.0
1999–2000	25.3

From 1998–99 the Department has used Transport Grant to support integrated transport packages and Safe Route to School initiatives. Allocations of £12 million have been made for these purposes for 1999–2000, which are additional to the provision above. Future Transport allocations for local roads will depend on bids received this Summer and subsequently.

There are other elements of Welsh Office programme expenditure which relate to roads but these are not easily identifiable.

Following the transfer of functions the allocation of expenditure for roads will be a matter for the National Assembly.

European Standard Fund

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what estimate his Department has made of the annual amount received in Wales from European structural funds between 1992 and 1999; and what percentage these amounts were of the total receipts received under European structural funds within the United Kingdom. [75856]

Mr. Hain: The information is not available in the format requested since Structural Fund programmes run over a period of years. For the period covered by the present regulations (1994–99), Wales has been allocated £640 million from the Structural Funds, which represents 7 per cent. of the total United Kingdom allocation.

Electronic Red Boxes

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will name the Ministers in his Department who are regular users of electronic Red Boxes. [76169]

Mr. Michael: I refer the right hon. Member to the reply given to him by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office, on 16 March 1999, *Official Report*, columns *651–52*. Preparations are being made to ensure that Assembly Secretaries and Members are at the cutting edge of new technologies.

Schools Census

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when the results of the January 1999 schools' census will be published. [76212]

Mr. Hain: Schools Census results will be available later this year and will be published in "Statistics of Education and Training in Wales: Schools in 2000". Provisional results about class sizes will be published in a Statistical Release in the summer. The precise date of publication will be announced in the Office for National Statistics' monthly "National Statistics Update" in due course.

Following the transfer of functions, this issue will be a matter for the National Assembly.

SCOTLAND

Nurses (Pay)

Mr. Gorrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what finance has been provided in the Comprehensive Spending Review for increases in nurses' pay in Scotland in 2000–01 and 2001–02. [69716]

Mr. Galbraith *[holding answer 15 February 1999]:* While no specific funds have been provided for nurses' pay in the Comprehensive Spending Review, the outcome provided sufficient funds to meet the reasonable cost of future nurses' pay awards.

From 1 July 1999, this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

Secondhand Tyres

Mr. Gorrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will increase the resources available to council trading standards departments to enable them *(a)* to enforce rules relating to the sale of unsafe secondhand tyres and *(b)* to publicise the dangers of low-quality secondhand tyres. [75614]

Ms Glenda Jackson: I have been asked to reply.

We took into account pressures on local authorities, and their ability to make efficiency savings, when setting the level of provision in the Comprehensive Spending Review and in reaching conclusions on the Local Government Finance Settlement 1999–2000. We also took into account the views of the local government associations and others who we consulted during consultation on our proposals. The level of resources devoted to the enforcement of the Motor Vehicles Tyres (Safety) Regulations 1994, which seek to control the quality of part worn tyres, is a matter for each local authority responsible for trading standards.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Turkey

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make representations to Turkey about the principles of the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly on the legal rights of a person charged with an offence. [74621]

Ms Quin: We regularly raise with Turkey the importance we attach to Turkey meeting its obligations under the European Convention on Human Rights, including the right of a person charged with an offence to a fair trial and to legal counsel of his choice.

With EU partners we most recently raised this issue with Turkey on 22 February.

Gibraltar

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how he intends to respond to the judgment of the European Court of Human Rights in respect of the rights of citizens of Gibraltar to vote in elections of the European Parliament. [76637]

Ms Quin: We will be taking all available steps to secure extension of the EP franchise to Gibraltar, in the light of the decision of the European Court of Human Rights. However, this can be done only by amending the 1976 EC Act on Direct Elections. This will require the agreement of all Member States. HMG will seek such an amendment in the current negotiations in Brussels on establishing Common Principles for EP elections.

Iraq (Oil)

Mr. Fabricant: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what röle United Nations forces have in the prevention of export of oil from Iraq; [76933]

(2) what estimate he has made of the number of barrels of oil, and the value in US dollars, exported illegally each year from Iraq to each first destination; [76934]

(3) if he will make a statement on the illegal export of oil by road from Iraq. [76932]

Mr. Fatchett: No UN forces are specifically assigned to preventing the export of oil from Iraq. It is for individual member states to implement UN sanctions. A Multinational Interdiction Force, to which the UK regularly contributes maritime assets, patrols the Gulf to reduce the volume of illegal trade with Iraq, particularly oil, the most lucrative source of income for the Iraqi regime. We regularly make representations to Iraq's neighbours on the importance of preventing such a trade.

HMG estimates that illegal exports of refined oil products via the Gulf since 1995 are as follows:

1995: 20,000 metric tonnes, valued at $2 million (one metric tonne is equivalent to 7.33 barrels).

1996: 264,585 tonnes valued at $30 million.

1997: 1,550,692 tonnes valued at $100–130 million.

1998: 1,929,260 tonnes valued at least at $100 million.

1999: approx 37,000 tonnes for January and February.

Illegal exports of refined products via Turkey are:

1995: valued at $20 million.

1996: approx 710,000 tonnes valued at $22–50 million.

1997: valued at $70–150 million.

1998: possibly between 1.7–10.4 million tonnes over the year, estimated at a value of approximately $300 million.

Illegal oil exports via Syria, probably both crude oil and diesel, started in the second half of 1998. HMG cannot assess the quantity or value.

Kosovo

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on his Department's response to Russian objections to Chapters 2 and 7 of the Rambouillet text. [77156]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: The draft interim political agreement on Kosovo remains the subject of negotiation at the current peace talks in Paris. It would not therefore be helpful to comment on specific aspects of the agreement, or on the views of individual Contact Group members, at this critical stage.

Nigeria

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the recent elections in Nigeria. [76979]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: We welcome the progress of Nigeria's transition programme back to civilian democratic rule. While international observers noted some irregularities and logistical difficulties in the recent elections, they have commented that these did not affect the overall result, which we judge was a genuine reflection of the will of the Nigerian people. During his recent visit to Nigeria, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs congratulated President-elect Obasanjo on his victory. We hope that he will be able to visit the United Kingdom soon.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on his meeting with President-elect Obasanjo. [76980]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: My right hon. Friend the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary met President-elect Obasanjo in Nigeria on 10 March. The Foreign Secretary congratulated the President-elect on his election victory and highlighted the efforts Britain was making to help the transition process. The Foreign Secretary announced Britain's new pledge of £750,000 to help prepare the military for their role under a democratic government. My right hon. Friend reaffirmed that the United Kingdom would continue to support Nigeria's efforts to consolidate lasting democracy and prosperity. We would urge our partners in the Commonwealth to lift Nigeria's suspension immediately.

Other topics discussed included Nigeria's economy and future support for the democratically elected government in Sierra Leone.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he is taking to ensure that Nigeria returns to full membership of the Commonwealth. [76981]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: The United Kingdom supports Nigeria's early return to the Commonwealth. The decision lies with Commonwealth Heads of Government. This matter will be discussed by the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group, at their next meeting on 29–30 April.

Dubai

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 10 March 1999, *Official Report*, column 229, what

representations he plans to make to the Government of Dubai regarding its failure to answer his Note Verbale of 10 November 1998. [76946]

Mr. Fatchett *[holding answer 16 March 1999]:* Our Embassy in Dubai has today asked the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Dubai when we might expect a reply to the Note Verbale of 10 November 1998.

Sri Lanka

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many export licences have been granted for arms exports to Sri Lanka since 2 May 1997; when the last licence was granted; and what it was for. [75510]

Dr. Howells: I have been asked to reply.

The entry in the relevant legislation under which the export of goods is controlled is known as their rating. The Export Control Organisation's computer databases have been interrogated and the following results were obtained. Between 2 May 1997 and 25 February 1999, 106 Standard Individual Export Licences (SIELs) and 12 Open Individual Export Licences (OIELs) were issued covering the export to consignees or end-users in Sri Lanka of goods subject to export control by being listed in Part III of Schedule 1 to the Export of Goods (Control) Order 1994, commonly known as the Military List. Individual licences may cover a range of goods with various ratings (and OIELs may also cover a range of countries).

Where this is so, the licence is included in the table in the total for all of the relevant ratings.

Individual licences issued between 2 May 1997 and 25 February 1999 covering the export to Sri Lanka of goods on the Military List

Rating	*Number of SIELs issued covering goods with this rating*	*Number of OIELs issued covering goods with this rating*
ML1	23	0
ML2	8	0
ML3	11	0
ML4	14	1
ML5	2	0
ML6	2	0
ML7	2	0
ML10	3	4
ML11	33	5
ML13	1	1
ML14	1	0
ML15	3	1
ML21	2	0
ML22	3	0
PL5001	1	0
PL5006	1	0
PL5017	3	0

This information does not cover any Media OIELs that may have been issued during this period. Media OIELs authorise the export to all destinations of protective clothing, mainly for the protection of aid agency workers and journalists, when working in areas of conflict.

This information should be considered in light of the answer given by my hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Mrs. Roche) to my hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley (Caroline Flint) on 30 October 1997, *Official Report*, columns *870–71*.

In addition, goods on the Military List may have been exported to Sri Lanka under certain Open General Export Licences; copies of all Open General Export Licences valid at any time during the period are in the Library of the House.

The date on which the last of the above licences was issued during the period was 18 February 1999, and this licence, a SIEL, covered the export of goods with the rating ML3.

As noted in the answer given by the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Central (Mr. Lloyd), to my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Dr. Jones), on 14 July 1998, *Official Report*, column *149*, details of the military equipment for which licences have been granted will be published in the Government's annual reports on strategic export controls and their application.

DEFENCE

AWE Aldermaston

Mr. Salter: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what discussions he has had with Hunting-Brae since the Environment Agency served an enforcement notice on AWE Aldermaston, concerning the presence of tritium from the establishment in the Aldermaston stream; and if he will make a statement; [76021]

(2) if he will make a statement on the enforcement notice served on AWE Aldermaston by the Environment Agency following the alleged illegal discharge of tritium into the River Kennet. [76022]

Mr. Spellar: The Chief Executive of Hunting-BRAE Ltd. made the MOD aware of the Environment Agency's intention to serve an enforcement notice on AWE Aldermaston in early February.

An enforcement notice was duly served by the Environment Agency on 9 February 1999, requiring Hunting-BRAE to provide information to the Agency on discharges of tritium into the Aldermaston stream, and to make proposals to bring the discharges under regulatory control.

The Environment Agency has declared that, because the levels of radioactivity are not a danger to human health or the environment, it has decided not to stop the discharges. It also stated that the radiation dose from tritium in this groundwater at the point of entry into the Aldermaston stream is about 100 times less than the annual European radiation dose limit and 200 times less than natural background radiation. The stream flows into the River Kennet. I understand that samples taken downstream at Padworth bridge indicate that by that point, the levels are close to the limits of detection.

Defence Projects

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the joint defence projects under development which involve members of the European Union. [76264]

Mr. Spellar: The joint defence projects under development involving the UK and other members of the European Union is as shown in the table. It does not include equipment that is either in-service or in production unless there is development activity proceeding in parallel.

Projects	*Nations involved*
Naval equipment	
HORIZON/Common New Generation Frigate	UK, France, Italy
NATO Submarine Rescue System (NSRS)	UK, France, Italy, Norway[1], United States[1]
Land equipment	
MRAV (Multi Role Armoured Vehicle)	UK, France, Germany
Aimed Controlled Effect Anti-Tank Mine	UK, France, Germany
Future Tank Main Armament	UK, France, Germany, United States[1]
Guided Multiple Launch Rocket System	UK, France, Germany, Italy, United States[1]
Future Fire Control System for Multiple Launch Rocket System	UK, France, Germany, Italy
Very Short Range and Short Range Air Defence System Programme	UK, France, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Norway[1], Turkey[1], United States[1]
Missiles	
Long Range TRIGAT (Third Generation Anti-Tank Guided Weapon)	UK, France, Germany[2]
Medium Range TRIGAT (Third Generation Anti-Tank Guided Weapon)	UK, Belgium, France, Germany, Netherlands
Principal Anti-Air Missile System	UK, France, Italy
Air Systems	
Eurofighter[3]	UK, Germany, Italy, Spain
Allied Standards Avionics Architecture Initiative	UK, France, Germany, United States[1]
Active Electronically Scanned Radar for Airborne Multi-mode Solid State Active Array Radar	UK, France, Germany
Advanced Aero-engine Technology	UK, France Germany
Other Equipment	
NATO Improved Link Eleven	UK, Canada[1], France, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, United States[1]
METOP (Next Generation Meteorological Satellites)	UK, France, Germany, Italy, Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Greece, Ireland, Netherlands, Norway[1], Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Netherlands, Switzerland[1], Turkey[1]
Technology Demonstration Programme: Rechargeable Lithium Batteries	UK, France
Technology Demonstration Programme: Towed Decoys	UK, France

[1] Non-EU Members
[2] The UK has declared that they are to withdraw from Long Range TRIGAT at the end of the Development Phase
[3] Eurofighter has recently moved into the Production Phase but there are a number of years of Development activity proceeding in parallel

Nimrod MRA4 Programme

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the current *(a)* estimated cost and *(b)* in-service date of the Nimrod MRA4 programme; and what each was when the contract was placed. [76645]

Mr. Spellar: The current estimated cost of procurement of Nimrod MRA4 is £2.4 billion (at September 1998 economic conditions), an increase of 0.5 per cent. since the contract was placed in December 1996. When the contract was placed, BAe undertook to meet an ISD of April 2003. Resource and technical difficulties with the early phases of the programme at BAe mean that the company does not now expect the aircraft to enter service with the RAF before early 2005. The precise slippage is still the subject of negotiations between MOD and BAe.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what proportion of work for the Nimrod MRA4 programme is being placed with UK registered companies; and what was the forecast workshare when the contract was placed. [76627]

Mr. Spellar: When the Nimrod MRA4 contract was placed in December 1996, the direct workshare for UK companies was estimated at 76 per cent. I will write further once we have been able to calculate the current position and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Specialist Procurement Services

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many people are currently employed by the Specialist Procurement Services; what was the figure at

its inception; on what date the Specialist Procurement Services published its report for 1997–98; and what was the cost of production of the report. [76875]

Mr. Spellar: This is a matter for the Chief Executive of the Specialist Procurement Services. I have asked the Chief Executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from N. J. Bennett to Mr. Mike Hancock, dated 17 March 1999:

I am replying to your question to the Secretary of State for Defence about Specialist Procurement Services' staffing levels and Annual Report as these matters fall within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of Specialist Procurement Services.

As at 16 March 1999 there were 802 employees funded by Specialist Procurement Services. At its inception the Agency employed 832 persons. The minor reduction in numbers since Agency inception reflects the beginning of a longer-term plan to maintain numbers in line with reduced operating cost targets. These changes are leading to initiatives to adopt new working practices in all of the Agency's operating divisions to minimise the impact on business delivery.

In accordance with NAO Agency Audit requirements the Specialist Procurement Services Annual Report and Accounts for 1997–98 was placed in the Library on 20th July 1998. The production cost for the report was £12,800.

Disposal Sales Agency

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on what date the Disposal Sales Agency published its report for 1997–98; and what was the cost of production of the report. [76891]

Mr. Spellar: This is a matter for the Chief Executive of the Disposal Sales Agency. I have asked the Chief Executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Malcolm Westgate to Mr. Michael Hancock, dated 17 March 1999:

I am replying to your question to the Secretary of State for Defence about the Disposal Sales Agency's (DSA) 1997–98 Annual Report as this matter falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of the Disposal Sales Agency.

The Report was laid before Parliament on 29 July 1998 and published on 25 August 1998. The cost of production and printing totalled £9,744.60.

I hope this answers your question.

Service Children's Education Agency

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many people are currently employed by the Service Children's Education Agency; what was the figure at its inception; on what date the Service Children's Education Agency published its report for 1997–98; and what was the cost of production of the report. [76877]

Mr. Spellar: This is a matter for the Chief Executive of the Service Children's Education Agency. I have asked the Chief Executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from David G. Wadsworth to Mr. Mike Hancock, dated 17 March 1999:

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about the Service Children's Education Agency as this matter falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Exeeutive of the Agency.

Service Children's Education was created as a Defence Agency in April 1996. At that time there were 2,620 employees, broke down as 690 United Kingdom Based Teachers (UKBT), 180 locally engaged teachers (LET), 1,600 locally engaged civilians (LEC) and 150 Headquarters and support unit staff (HQ). There are currently 2,459 SCE personnel; 644 UKBTs, 177 UK Paid Teachers (UKPT), 1,517 LECs and 121 Headquarters and support unit staff, which includes Specialist Educational grades, MOD Defence Administration grades, LECs and 1 Military Warrant Officer—a total reduction of some 161 personnel. It should be noted that, since September 1998, SCE has taken on responsibility for the provision of four-year-old nursery education, with around 150 staff in 35 pre-schools worldwide; we also 'lost' catering and cleaning staff as a result of market testing with the result that the figure of 161 represents a 'net' reduction in numbers.

The Annual Report and Accounts for 1997–98 were laid before the House on 30 July 1998. The publication costs of the Report were £3,810. This figure does not include the costs of staff involved in producing the Report, despatch and associated costs, which would be in the region of £15,000. In addition there is a notional charge by the National Audit Office for the auditing of the Accounts of £39,000.

Defence Communication Services Agency

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many people are currently employed by the Defence Communication Services Agency; what was the figure at its inception; on what date the Defence Communication Services Agency published its report for 1997–98; and what was the cost of production of the report. [76899]

Mr. Spellar: This is a matter for the Chief Executive of the Defence Communication Services Agency. I have asked the Chief Executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Major General A. J. Raper to Mr. Mike Hancock, dated 17 March 1999:

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about the Defence Communication Services Agency, as this matter falls within my remit as its Chief Executive. You asked about the number of people currently employed, the number at its inception, the date the Agency published its report for Financial Year 1997–98 and the cost of producing it.

The number of people currently employed in the Defence Communication Services Agency is 1,379 against 1,517 at its inception on 1 April 1998. On the matter of 1997–98 report you will appreciate that, as the Agency only formed on 1 April 1998, no such report was due. There was, consequently, no cost.

Duke of York's Royal Military School

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many people are currently employed by the Duke of York's Royal Military School; and what was the figure at its inception. [76890]

Mr. Spellar: This is a matter for the Chief Executive of the Duke of York's Royal Military School. I have asked the Chief Executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from G. H. Wilson to Mr. Mike Hancock, dated 17 March 1999:

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about the number of people currently employed by the Duke of York's Royal Military School and the figure at its inception, as this matter falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of this Agency.

There are currently 108 people employed by the Duke of York's Royal Military School, 90 of whom are full time and 18 of whom are part-time. The school was founded in Chelsea in 1803 and regrettably we do not have records of staff numbers at that time.

Working Time Directive

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many civil servants in his Department have been invited to waive the Working Time Directive requirement to work less than 48 hours a week on 17 consecutive weeks; how many civil servants in his Department have refused to waive the requirement; and what is the total cost of compliance with the Directive. [76811]

Mr. Spellar: Details of staff who have voluntarily agreed that the maximum 48 hour working week need not apply in their case are not held centrally and the information could be provided only at disproportionate cost. The Department has issued guidance that such opt-outs should be agreed by line managers only in exceptional circumstances. The vast majority of staff will therefore be unaffected by this aspect of the regulations. As normal working hours for MOD civil servants are well within the 48 hour ceiling, the costs of compliance with the Directive are negligible.

Sexual Harassment

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many armed forces personnel have claimed sexual harassment against his Department at industrial tribunals; at what cost, in each year since 1994; and how many of those actions were successful. [76957]

Mr. Spellar: The information requested relating to the number of Industrial (now Employment) Tribunal applications made by serving members, or former members, of the Armed Forces, together with details of compensation paid in each financial year since 1994–95 is set out.

	Number of Industrial Tribunal applications received in period	*Number of Industrial Tribunal cases paid in period*	*Compensation paid in period (£)*
1994–95	0	0	0
1995–96	0	0	0
1996–97	16	4	76,500
1997–98	11	5	173,614
1998–99[1]	62	5	144,000

[1] To 12 March 1999

Procurement Board

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on what dates the Procurement Board has met since 1 January 1998; and if he will place in the Library a list of items discussed at each of these meetings. [77150]

Mr. Spellar: Since 1 January 1998, the Procurement Policy Board (PPB) met on 28 January, 20 April, 15 July, 23 November and 25 January 1999. The major items discussed during these meetings are as follows:

Acquisition Organisation Review

SDR Final Report

Project Managers Development Scheme

Defence Sales

Functioning of Integrated Project Teams

Electronic Commerce

Smart Procurement Implementation Planning

Chief of Defence Logistics Implementation Planning

Defence Procurement Agency—Formation

Smart Procurement Implementation—Commercial Issues

Organisation Conjointe de Cooperation en Matiere d'Armement (OCCAR)

Industrial and Value for Money Implications of LTC 99.

RAF Special Storage Areas

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many RAF special storage areas have been closed since 1 April 1997; for what reason these special storage areas were closed; where these special storage areas were located; and on what date each was closed. [77149]

Mr. Spellar: Two RAF special storage areas were closed in 1998 because they were no longer needed following the withdrawal of the WE177 nuclear weapon. The location of these areas are covered by Exemption 1 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information because of the long-standing policy of neither confirming nor denying the presence of nuclear weapons at a particular time or place. This policy is, however, under review, and I will write to the hon. Member when the review is concluded.

Manston Airfield

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when his Department will fully transfer responsibility for Manston Airfield to a civilian owner and relinquish responsibility for the operation and control of the airfield. [77222]

Mr. Doug Henderson: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Training Aircraft (Kent)

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what provision he has made, at which locations, for the future of *(a)* non-powered glider, *(b)* powered glider and *(c)* fixed wing aircraft training for air cadets based in Kent; and if he will make a statement. [77223]

Mr. Doug Henderson: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Incompetent Teachers

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what measures he has introduced to facilitate the removal from post of incompetent teachers. [74782]

Ms Estelle Morris: This is a manifesto pledge which we took immediate action on following the 1997 general election. New procedures for dealing speedily and fairly with teachers who cannot do the job were agreed at a national level among representative parties. The National Employers Organisation for School Teachers (NEOST) have reported to the Department that most schools have now adopted the new procedures. My right hon. Friend

the Secretary of State has asked NEOST to pursue follow-up action to pick up on the small number of LEAs that have not made good progress and will also conduct a survey to collect information on LEA experience in triggering capability procedures with a view to identifying good practice. In September, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will receive powers under the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 to provide statutory guidance and where necessary impose appropriate staff capability procedures on schools. He will continue to monitor the situation to see whether any use of these powers will be necessary.

Disabled Students Allowance

Mr. Levitt: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans he has to extend the disabled students allowance to postgraduate study. [76738]

Mr. Mudie: We are currently considering the scope of the Disabled Students Allowances and will be making an announcement later in the year.

Student Tuition Fees

Mr. Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what estimate he has made of the extent of non-payment of student tuition fees at universities in England and Wales during the current year; and if he will make a statement. [75960]

Mr. Mudie *[holding answer 15 March 1999]:* The collection of fees is a matter for universities. In this, the first year of the new funding regime for higher education, only first year students will be subject to the new arrangements. Of these, we estimate around a third of students, from lower income families, will not be expected to contribute anything towards the costs of their tuition, and from those students who will be asked to contribute, universities and colleges in England and Wales are expected to receive income of £130 million and £8 million respectively.

Childcare Strategy

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assessment he has made of the impact of the national strategy on childcare; and if he will make a statement. [77013]

Ms Hodge *[holding answer 16 March 1999]:* The National Childcare Strategy is already having a positive impact locally. Through the commitment of a wide range of partners, we are on target to create 60,000 new places in England in the year to April 1999.

Public Bodies

Dr. Tony Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment which of the executive non-departmental public bodies sponsored by his Department publish *(a)* the minutes of meetings, *(b)* the agendas of meetings and documents for those meetings and *(c)* a register of members' interests; and if in each case this is under a statutory requirement. [69950]

Mr. Mudie *[pursuant to his reply, 8 March 1999, c. 71]:* The original answer failed to differentiate between those bodies that publish information and those that make it available to the public on request. It also failed to differentiate between those bodies that publish or make available minutes of meetings and those that publish or make available summary reports of meetings.

The Education Transfer Council makes minutes available to the public on request; the Funding Agency for Schools publishes a bulletin which includes summary updates of key points of meetings; the Further Education Funding Council publishes summary reports of meetings; the Higher Education Funding Council for England makes summary reports of meetings available to the public on request; the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority publishes summary reports of meetings; and the Teacher Training Agency makes minutes available to the public on request. The publication of minutes is not a statutory requirement.

The Teacher Training Agency makes agendas available to the public on request. The publication of agendas and documents is not a statutory requirement.

The British Educational Communications and Technology Agency; the Education Transfer Council; the Funding Agency for Schools; the Higher Education Funding Council for England; the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority; and the Teacher Training Agency, make registers available to the public on request. The Construction Industry Training Board; the Engineering Construction Training Board; the Further Education Funding Council; Investors in People UK; and the Student Loans Company publish registers. Publishing the members' register of interests is not a statutory requirement.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Pensioner Incomes

Mr. Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate from the PENSIM model the proportion of pensioners likely to have incomes of less than (1) 20 per cent. of average earnings and (2) 30 per cent. of average earnings, *(a)* including the impact of the minimum income guarantee and other means-tested assistance and *(b)* excluding all forms of means-tested assistance for (i) 2000, (ii) 2005, (iii) 2010, (iv) 2015, (v) 2020 and (vi) 2025; and if he will list the assumptions made, with particular reference to those relating to (x) growth in earnings, (y) returns on investment and (z) prices. [75232]

Mr. Timms: The information is in the table.

Percentage of pensioners with incomes below 20 per cent. and 30 per cent. of average earning

Percentage

	Proportion below 20 per cent. of average earnings		*Proportion below 30 per cent. of average earnings*	
	Single pensioners	*Pensioner couples*	*Single pensioners*	*Pensioner couples*
2000	30	[1]—	70	5
2005	20	[1]—	70	5
2010	30	[1]—	70	10
2015	20	[1]—	75	10
2020	30	[1]—	75	10
2025	20	[1]—	70	5

Total pensioner unit net income less income support and housing benefit

Percentage

	Single pensioners	*Pensioner couples*	*Single pensioners*	*Pensioner couples*
2000	50	[1]—	75	10
2005	45	[1]—	70	10
2010	40	[1]—	75	15
2015	40	[1]—	75	15
2020	45	[1]—	75	15
2025	40	[1]—	70	15

[1] = less than 2.5 per cent.

Notes:

1. The estimates requested have been made using the PENSIM model. Due to the number of assumptions used in PENSIM, and the uncertainty surrounding estimates so far into the future, these estimates should be considered as broad brush. In particular, PENSIM uses data from a number of different sources. As a result, changes over an interval as short as five years may be due to a change in the composition of the data set used to make projections. Therefore the results presented in the table should be treated with some caution and used to identify long-term trends rather than changes over short periods.
2. All figures are rounded to the nearest 5 per cent.
3. Average earnings are assumed to grow 1.5 per cent. faster than prices.
4. 20 per cent. of average earnings, in 1998 prices, for 2000 is £79.22 and 30 per cent. is £118.84.
5. The return on investments is assumed to be 2 per cent. greater than the rise in average earnings.
6. The answer is based on the current system of retirement pensions—it does not include the effects of the proposed State Second Pension which the Government are currently consulting on.
7. It is assumed that the Minimum Income Guarantee will be uprated broadly in line with earnings.
8. Part *(b)* is answered by deducting Income Support and Housing Benefit from pensioners' income. This is because the PENSIM model does not calculate other means-tested benefits.
9. A pensioner unit is defined as a single (non-cohabiting) person over State pension age or a couple (married or cohabiting) where the man, defined as the head, is over State pension age.

Housing Benefit (Rent Restrictions)

Ms Buck: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many households with children were subject to housing benefit restrictions in 1997–98. [75929]

Angela Eagle: As at 31 May 1997, some 300,000 Housing Benefit recipients with children were subject to Housing Benefit restrictions, principally because of income or non-dependant deductions.

Notes:

1. Information refers to benefits units, which may be a single person or a couple.
2. Figures are rounded to the nearest thousand.
3. Figures do not include restriction because of Rent Officers determinations or restrictions to the eligible rent due to the Local Reference rent scheme.

Source:

Housing Benefit Management Information System, annual 1 per cent. sample inquiries with and without Income Support/JSA(IB), taken at the end of May 1997.

Ms Buck: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many households on income support were subject to rent restrictions affecting their housing benefit entitlement in 1997–98; and what was the average value of the restriction; [75933]

(2) how many people have been affected by single room rent restrictions since October 1996; and what have been the estimated savings; [75931]

(3) what was the total estimated saving arising from rent restrictions on housing benefit in 1997–98; and what was the total for each London borough; [75930]

(4) how many households have been subject to rent restrictions *(a)* in total and *(b)* in each London borough since 1997. [75932]

Angela Eagle: We do not centrally collect information of individuals' contractual rent because it will commonly include items not eligible for Housing Benefit. As a result the information requested is not available in the requested format.

The measures which limit the rent for Housing Benefit purposes are; certain service charges included in the contractual rent which are not generally eligible for Housing Benefit, for example, charges for cleaning, laundry, fuel, meals and personal care and nursing; the range of determinations, including determinations of single room rents, made by rent officers in respect of most claims from tenants living in the private rented sector; and where local authorities consider that the rent is unreasonably high or the accommodation overlarge or the eligible rent is none the less too high in respect of a particular case.

Departmental Computer System

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many representations he has received from individuals on his Department's computer system in Newcastle during the last nine months; and if he will make a statement. [76444]

Mr. Timms: During the last nine months we have received 76 parliamentary questions and 82 representations by letter relating to the National Insurance Recording System (NIRS).

I refer the hon. Member to the written answer my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd, West (Mr. Thomas) on 15 March 1999, *Official Report,* columns *486–88.*

Electronic Red Boxes

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will name the Ministers in his Department who are regular users of electronic red boxes. [76167]

Mr. Timms: I refer the right hon. Member to the written answer from my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office, on 16 March 1999, *Official Report,* columns *651–52.*

Households Below Average Income

Mr. Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what proportion of households below average income receive their main income from *(a)* paid employment and *(b)* benefits, indicating the benefits concerned; and if he will provide the same figures from the inception of the relevant survey. [76198]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 12 March 1999]:* The information is in the table.

Percentage of households with below average income (before housing costs) by main source of income

Year	Main source of a household's income (percentage of total population of households) Benefits	Employment	Other	Total
1994–95	55	36	9	100
1995–96	53	38	9	100
1996–97	52	38	10	100

Notes:

1. 1994–95 is the earliest year for which the FRS based HBAI series is available. 1996–97 is the latest year for which information is available.
2. For the purposes of this analysis, 'benefits' were taken to be: Family Credit, Income Support, Housing Benefit, Council Tax Benefit, Social Fund (all components), State Retirement Pensions, Jobseeker's Allowance/Unemployment Benefit, Incapacity Benefit, Severe Disablement Allowance, Attendance Allowance, Disability Living Allowance, Disability Working Allowance, Invalid Care Allowance, War Pensions, Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit, Child Benefit, One Parent Benefit, Windows Benefit, Guardians Allowance, Maternity Allowance, Statutory Sick Pay, Statutory Maternity Benefits, Back to Work Bonuses, Income from Government Training Schemes.
3. For the purposes of this analysis, 'main source of income' is defined as being the largest of the three sources of income outlined in the table.
4. The income measure used is weekly net (disposable) equivalised household income (that is to say income which is adjusted to reflect the composition of the household).
5. It is standard HBAI practice to give results for income both before and after housing costs, in order to allow for the effect of variations in housing costs between households. In this case, the results are only quoted before housing costs, as they were invariant to the use of the two different income measures.

Source:

All figures are estimates and are taken from the Households Below Average Income (HBAI) data set which are based on the Family Resources Survey (FRS). The FRS does not include Northern Ireland.

War Pensions Agency

Mr. Dawson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security for what reasons union facility time has been reduced to 10 days in the War Pensions Agency. [77186]

Mr. Bayley: The administration of the War Pensions Agency is a matter for its Chief Executive, Mr. Gordon Hextall. I have asked him to write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Gordon Hextall to Mr. Hilton Dawson, dated 16 March 1999:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question regarding the reasons why War Pensions Agency has reduced union facility time to 10 days.

I can confirm that War Pensions Agency has not reduced facility time to 10 days and has no intentions of doing so. Facility time arrangements are reviewed annually and negotiations are currently taking place with unions. These are not due to be completed until the end of March.

Any alterations to the current arrangements will be done in consultation with full-time union officials and will fully abide by Departmental guidelines.

I hope you find my reply helpful.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Royal Ulster Constabulary

Mr. Maginnis: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many police officers and of what ranks are engaged exclusively in *(a)* complaints and discipline and *(b)* drug squad duties in the Royal Ulster Constabulary; and what is the total manpower of the RUC. [75907]

Mr. Ingram: The number and ranks of police officers exclusively engaged in *(a)* Complaints and Discipline and *(b)* Drug Squad duties as at 11 March 1999 are shown in the table.

Rank	Complaints and discipline	Drugs Squad
ACC	1	0
Supt. Ranks	11	1
Chief Inspector	26	1
Insp.	10	2
Sergt.	9	8
Con.	9	77
Total	66	89

The total manpower at the same date is 8,488 RUC, 3,202 RUCR full-time and 1,765 RUCR part-time.

Mr. Maginnis: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the number of man/days identified as having been spent in the investigation of *(a)* malicious complaints and *(b)* false information within the Royal Ulster Constabulary during each year from 1996 to 1998. [75905]

Mr. Ingram: *(a)* There is no offence of making malicious complaints against the Royal Ulster Constabulary.

(b) The information necessary for this question to be answered is not available.

Mr. Maginnis: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many people were charged with *(a)* wasting police time and *(b)* making malicious complaints against the Royal Ulster Constabulary, during each year from 1996 to 1998. [75906]

Mr. Ingram: *(a)* The number of persons proceeded against for the offence of "wasteful employment of police time" in each of the three years 1996 to 1998 is as follows:

Year	Persons proceeded against	Guilty
1996	4	4
1997	2	2
1998 (to 31 March)[1]	1	1

[1] Most recent data available

Note:

These figures are not in respect of complaints against the police

(b) There is no offence of "making malicious complaints" against the Royal Ulster Constabulary.

Autism

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what statutory provisions require an Education and Library Board to provide a relevant education service for an individual child with autistic spectrum disorder; and if she will make a statement. [76402]

Mr. McFall: The statutory provisions requiring education and library boards to provide for children with special educational needs, including those with autistic spectrum disorder, are contained in the Education (Northern Ireland) Order 1996.

Parades Commission

Mr. Donaldson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many people the Parades Commission employs. [76914]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 15 March 1999]:* The Parades Commission does not employ anyone. It comprises a Chairman and six members, and a secretariat of nine staffed entirely by seconded civil servants.

Miss Kirkbride: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many staff have been employed by the Parades Commission in the past 12 months; under what terms and by what process they were appointed; what has been their individual remuneration; and what has been the total cost of the Parades Commission since its inception. [77092]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 16 March 1999]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Mr. Donaldson) today. Since its inception, the Parades Commission has cost £1.66 million.

Mr. Donaldson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when the current Chairman of the Parades Commission was appointed; and what is his length of contract. [76917]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 15 March 1999]:* The current Chairman of the Parades Commission was appointed in March 1997, and his appointment will expire in February 2000.

Mr. Donaldson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland who appoints the Parades Commission Chairman; what is the *(a)* length of his contract and *(b)* level of remuneration; and who assesses the effectiveness of the Chairman's leadership of the Commission. [76916]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 15 March 1999]:* Under the terms of the Public Processions (Northern Ireland) Act 1998, the Chairman of the Parades Commission is appointed by the Secretary of State for a term not exceeding three years. The level of remuneration is currently £30,000 per annum. The Chairman is independent and the Secretary of State has full confidence in the way he is carrying out his responsibilities.

Mr. Donaldson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what are the various levels of remuneration within the Parades Commission. [76915]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 15 March 1999]:* The Chairman receives £30,000 per annum; the members £25,000 per annum. The secretariat staff continue to be paid their Civil Service salaries.

Miss Kirkbride: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much the Parades Commission has paid in consultancy costs since its inception; and for what purposes. [77094]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 16 March 1999]:* To date, the Parades Commission has spent £153,000 on consultancy, for the most part on training of monitors and monitoring of parades, opinion surveys, project planning, recruitment campaigns, media advice and legal costs.

Miss Kirkbride: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland who are the current Parades Commission Commissioners; and what was their background prior to appointment. [77091]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 16 March 1999]:* The current Chairman of the Parades Commission is Alistair Graham, the Chief Executive of Leeds Training and Enterprise Council. The six members are: Aidan Canavan, a solicitor; Frank Guckian, Director of Londonderry Chamber of Commerce; David Hewitt, a solicitor; Barbara Irwin, a senior lecturer; Rose Anne McCormick, a barrister; and Billy Martin, a farmer.

Miss Kirkbride: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what estimate she has made of the running cost of the Parades Commission for 1999–2000; and how are these costs allocated. [77093]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 16 March 1999]:* The estimated expenditure of the Parades Commission for the 1999–2000 financial year is £1,147,000; this is split between departmental running costs (£329,000) and programme expenditure (£818,000).

Miss Kirkbride: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland who determines the terms of appointment and reappointment of the Parades Commission Commissioners; and what assessment is made of their contribution to the work of the Commission. [77090]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 16 March 1999]:* Under the terms of the Public Processions (Northern Ireland) Act 1998, the Chairman and members of the Parades Commission are appointed by the Secretary of State for terms not exceeding three years. Members whose terms of office expire are eligible for re-appointment. The Chairman and members are independent and the Secretary of State has full confidence in the way they are carrying out their responsibilities.

Sean Kelly

Mr. Donaldson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what representations she has made under the provisions of the Northern Ireland (Sentences) Act 1998 to the Sentences Review Commission in respect of the application for early release by the IRA prisoner Sean Kelly. [76839]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 15 March 1999]:* In accordance with the requirements of the Northern Ireland (Sentences) Act 1998 (Sentence Review Commissioners) Rules 1998 the Secretary of State submitted the relevant materials necessary for the Commissioners to satisfy themselves as to whether or not this prisoner met the criteria for release under the Northern Ireland (Sentences) Act 1998. She has made no other representations to the Commissioners in respect of his application.

Prisoner Early Releases

Mr. Moss: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many persons given early release from prison under the Good Friday Agreement have been arrested or had their licences revoked. [71556]

Mr. Ingram *[pursuant to his reply, 3 March 1999, c. 765]:* Two persons released under the Northern Ireland (Sentences) Act 1998 have been charged with offences.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Energy Imports

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment he has made of the threat to the supply of imported energy from France and other countries posed by the millennium bug; and if he will make a statement. [76060]

Mr. Battle: The UK operation of the Anglo-French electricity interconnector is a commercial matter for the National Grid Company. It is normal operational procedure for the National Grid Company to assess continually the risk to electricity supplies in England and Wales which might arise from any credible instantaneous loss of power generation. As part of this procedure, the National Grid Company constantly monitors all credible losses and schedules sufficient reserve capacity to respond to them. In this context the Anglo-French Interconnector is assessed alongside generators in England and Wales. The capacity of the interconnector is $2 \times 1{,}000$ MW circuits, the installed generating capacity in England and Wales is more than 65,000 MW and the typical peak demand over New Years Eve is likely to be in the order of 37,000 MW.

Northern Ireland Electricity expect to provide a normal service to their customers over the period of the millennium and do not envisage any disruption being caused by a failure of the interconnector with the Republic of Ireland.

Cerebus Ltd.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when and for what purpose Ministers attended the opening of the headquarters and laboratories of Cerebus Ltd. [76371]

Mr. Battle: The company founder, Dr. Chris Evans, invited the then President of the Board of Trade, my right hon. Friend the Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett), to perform the opening ceremony on 24 March 1998.

Sports Clubs (Media Takeovers)

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on his policy on the acquisition of sports clubs by media companies. [76254]

Mr. Byers: I refer the right hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) on 8 February 1999, *Official Report*, column *43*.

Competition Act 1998

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when his Department plans to publish its conclusions on the legality of vertical ties under the Competition Act 1998. [76255]

Mr. Byers: My Department is currently consulting publicly on a draft proposed order under section 50 of the Competition Act 1998, which would, if implemented, define and exclude vertical agreements from the prohibition of anti-competitive agreements in the Act. Views are being sought by 6 April and I expect to announce a decision about the scope of such an order within a reasonable time thereafter.

Regional Aid

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he plans to publish the Government's proposals for changes to the regional aid map in the United Kingdom. [76283]

Mr. Byers: As soon as possible.

Renewable Energy

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) if he will commission a study of the potential of the UK manufacturing skill base to capture a proportion of the market for offshore wind energy turbines; [76164]

(2) what plans he has to develop a medium to long term strategy for the UK's renewable energy technologies; and what assessment he has made of the industry's ability to compete *(a)* globally and *(b)* with Denmark in the supply of offshore wind energy technology. [76166]

Mr. Battle: The Government are committed to a new and strong drive to develop renewable sources of energy and has undertaken a review of the status and prospects for renewables, including offshore wind energy. As a first step towards that policy the fifth and largest Non-Fossil Fuel Obligation (NFFO-5) Order of 1,177 MW was announced on 24 September 1998.

For the future the Government have been reviewing what would be necessary and practicable to achieve 10 per cent. of the UK's electricity needs from renewables by 2010, and what contribution new and renewable energy technologies might make to future greenhouse gas commitments.

To achieve 10 per cent. electricity from renewables would require 3–4 Gigawatts (DNC) of additional renewable capacity over and above that in place or likely to be commissioned from existing NFFO arrangements. It would require the use not only of technologies which have formed the mainstay of NFFO to date, such as waste, including landfill gas and onshore wind but also a significant contribution from offshore wind and energy crops.

The Government will shortly be publishing a consultation document on the status and prospects for renewables. A co-ordinated strategy would need to be agreed between Government and industry to cover the medium-term future with a view also to the longer term.

Such a strategy is expected to arise from the renewables consultation document. It would need to take account of the European White Paper on renewables.

As for offshore wind, I have already consulted interested parties on the most suitable arrangements for incorporating the development of offshore wind energy into the NFFO process and the results of my consultation will be incorporated into the co-ordinated strategy arising from the renewables consultation document.

In the meantime, my Department's New and Renewable Energy Programme continues to support preparatory work on offshore wind, including monitoring the development of the first offshore wind NFFO project, at Blyth, and encouraging UK manufacturing industry to seize the commercial opportunities within the offshore wind arena. We have already awarded contracts to two offshore wind projects under NFFO-4. These are located at Gunfleet Sand, near Clacton, Essex, comprising 12.8 MW contracted capacity and the other at Blyth, Northumberland comprising 0.72 MW contracted capacity. Total DTI expenditure on wind energy projects in 1997–98 was £1.5 million.

Post Office

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he expects to publish the White Paper on the future of the Post Office. [76438]

Mr. Byers: It remains my expectation, as my right hon. Friend the Minister of State told the Trade and Industry Select Committee on 9 December, that the White Paper will be published in the first half of the year.

Trade Delegations

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many trade delegations he has led since becoming Secretary of State; and what trade delegations he has made plans to lead during the remainder of 1999. [76490]

Mr. Byers: I became Secretary of State at the beginning of this year. I will be making two major trade promotion visits later this year—the first to China (including Hong Kong), and Japan and the second to India and Saudi Arabia. In addition, I will be visiting Russia in May for the Intergovernmental Steering Committee on Trade and Investment.

Small Businesses

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many small businesses he has visited in the last year. [76974]

Mr. Byers: In an official and unofficial capacity I have visited many small businesses in the last year.

Oil Pollution

Mr. Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) if he will meet local hon. Members to discuss the latest BHP oil pollution incident; [76582]

(2) if he will make a statement on the recent oil pollution incident on the beaches of Rhyl and Prestatyn. [76584]

Mr. Battle *[holding answer 15 March 1999]:* An oil spill was reported from BHP's Liverpool Bay Development on Saturday 6 March, following which small amounts of oil were deposited on beaches in Rhyll and Prestatyn. BHP has shut down oil and gas production from the development until the cause and circumstances of the incident are identified.

My officials are working with the Maritime and Coastguard Agency in regard to this oil spill. The incident is being investigated by a DTI Inspector, and I will also ensure that an independent assessor conducts a review of the incident. I have told all concerned that I am looking for a thorough but prompt investigation.

I wrote to the local hon. Members for the Vale of Clwyd, for Clwyd, West (Mr. Thomas) and for Delyn (Mr. Hanson) on 9 March informing them of this incident. I stated that I would continue to keep them in touch with developments I would be pleased to meet the hon. Members to discuss this incident.

Mr. Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list all oil pollution incidents in the Irish Sea in the past 10 years, giving the size of the incident, the company responsible and the date. [76583]

Mr. Battle *[holding answer 15 March 1999]:* The information relating to oil pollution incidents from offshore installations in the Irish Sea Basin over the last 10 years is as follows:

Date	*Operator*	*Amount (tonnes)*
1 March 1993	Hamilton	0.01
30 November 1993	British Gas	0.30
6 November 1995	British Gas	4.0
13 November 1995	BHP Petroleum	0.022
21 March 1996	British Gas	0.004
6 July 1996	British Gas	0.070
5 September 1996	British Gas	0.004
15 September 1996	British Gas	0.001
22 September 1996	British Gas	0.500
8 May 1997	British Gas	0.013
2 July 1997	British Gas	0.019
27 January 1998	BHP Petroleum	0.001
24 March 1998	BHP Petroleum	0.500
28 March 1998	British Gas	0.001
24 April 1998	BHP Petroleum	1.000
28 April 1998	BHP Petroleum	0.500
4 May 1998	British Gas	0.0151
12 May 1998	BHP Petroleum	0.500
14 June 1998	BHP Petroleum	46.00
20 June 1998	British Gas	0.0005
7 August 1998	British Gas	0.066
21 October 1998	BHP Petroleum	0.0019
1 November 1998	BHP Petroleum	0.042
29 November 1998	BHP Petroleum	0.001
11 December 1998	BHP Petroleum	0.010
15 December 1998	BHP Petroleum	0.010
6 March 1999[1]	BHP Petroleum	[1]0.83
9 March 1999	BHP Petroleum	0.010
Total		54.4315

[1] provisional—investigation ongoing

As an approximation 1 tonne = 1.25 cubic metres of oil.

Mr. Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will review the guidelines relating to oil pollution around the British coast following the new information about the effect of oil pollution of less than one part per billion. [76585]

Mr. Battle *[holding answer 15 March 1999]:* This information comes from studies into the Exxon Valdez oil spillage which occurred in 1989. It will be reviewed and taken into account by my officials and their colleagues in other Government Departments when considering the potential threat of oil spills to fisheries and the marine environment.

Victoria Street Conference Facilities

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many outside organisations used the conference facilities at his offices in Victoria Street in the last year for which figures are available. [76975]

Dr. Howells: The majority of events making use of the Department's conference facilities at 1 Victoria Street are internal.

Of 2,495 events held during 1998, less than 1 per cent. were organised by outside bodies. A further 25 per cent. of events were co-ordinated by DTI staff but in conjunction with organisations from outside the Department.

The Department is currently reviewing the operation of its conference centre with a view to maximising its availability for Departmental events.

India

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he plans to visit India. [76976]

Mr. Byers: I will be visiting India later this year, at a date to be confirmed.

Trawlermen (Compensation)

Mr. Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to the oral statement by the Parliamentary Secretary (Commons) to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food of 8 March 1999, *Official Report*, columns 151–54, on claims for compensation by deep sea trawlermen, if he will *(a)* agree a date to meet the trawlermen and their representatives and *(b)* set out a timetable for the resolution of the claim. [76927]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 15 March 1999]:* As my hon. Friend indicated during this debate, the obligations of the Department of Trade and Industry, and formerly the Employment Department, relate to the former trawlermen's redundancy entitlement under the statutory redundancy payments scheme. These obligations were fully met under ex-gratia arrangements operated by the Redundancy Payments Service between 1993 and 1995. My officials remain ready to consider late claims under those arrangements in appropriate cases. I have received no requests from the former trawlermen or their representatives for a further meeting to discuss their redundancy entitlement.

The former trawlermen's campaign for a more general scheme of Government compensation for the decline in their industry, going beyond their redundancy entitlement, is principally a matter for my hon. Friend to consider, as policy responsibility for the fishing industry lies with the Ministry for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

Bronchitis and Emphysema

Mr. Eric Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps he will take to ensure that claims for damages for miners' bronchitis and emphysema in respect of exposure to coal dust underground before 1954 from mines in Scotland will not be treated as subject to the provisions of the Limitations Act 1954. [77077]

Mr. Battle: The Limitations Act 1954 does not apply in Scotland. However, although the Department accepts liability for claims for damages for miners' emphysema and chronic bronchitis in respect of exposure to mine dust underground in mines in Scotland, the extent of that liability has not been established in the Scottish Courts. The litigation to date covers only England and Wales. The effect of Scottish law on claims from ex-British Coal miners claiming damages for respiratory diseases caused by exposure to dust in Scottish mines will be discussed with solicitors representing Scottish miners once we have agreed the handling arrangements for claims in England and Wales. We expect such agreement to be reached shortly.

Electricity Trading Prices

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make arrangements in the Review of Electricity Trading Arrangements for transparency of prices in trading contracts. [76580]

Mr. Battle *[holding answer 15 March 1999]:* I have asked the Director General of Electricity Supply to ensure that, in developing new trading arrangements, there is adequate price transparency including in the contracts market.

Photovoltaic Industry

Mr. Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to his answer of 2 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *690*, on the photovoltaic industry, what is his Department's budget in respect of photovoltaics; and what photovoltaic projects it plans to sponsor in developing countries in 1999–2000. [77073]

Mr. Battle: My Department is already committed to projects worth around £1 million for 1999–2000. Other projects, including the three initiatives I detailed in my previous answer (worth a total of £15 million, with £5 million coming from the DTI), will boost that figure significantly.

UK aid to developing countries is the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Department of International Development (DFID). However, my Department, with DFID, is currently considering work through the International Energy Agency which could increase the rate of deployment of PV in Developing Countries and result in valuable business for UK based companies.

Incorporation Costs

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will estimate the total cost of incorporation, including professional fees, incurred by a business with profits of under £50,000 per annum. [76788]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 16 March 1999]:* The prescribed fee charged by the Registrar of Companies for incorporating any company is £20 for the normal five day service. A "premium", same day, service is also available for £100.

Many people choose to use the services of a formation agent or other professional intermediary to carry out the incorporation for them. In such cases the total cost can vary considerably depending on the intermediary used and the nature of the service provided. Such additional costs are subject to normal market force.

National Minimum Wage

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will require all employers to provide their workers with a statement about the national minimum wage on commencement of employment. [76045]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 16 March 1999]:* There is no need to require employers to provide their workers with a national minimum wage statement. The Government have begun major campaigns in the press, and on television and radio, to make sure everyone knows about the minimum wage. We have also produced both a detailed guide to the national minimum wage, and short guides for employers and workers. In addition national minimum wage telephone helplines have been established to answer questions and issue the guidance booklets.

Arms Sales

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what cross-departmental initiatives have been introduced to track arms sales by United Kingdom companies. [75385]

Dr. Howells: Further to the answer given by the Financial Secretary to the Treasury, my hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Mrs. Roche) to the hon. Member on 25 March 1998, *Official Report*, column *142*, further details on progress improving the arrangements for the sharing of export licensing information were set out in the Department of Trade and Industry's Supplementary Memorandum to the Trade and Industry Committee's inquiry on Strategic Export Controls (HC65, pages 75–76). As noted in the memorandum, in addition to sharing information on licence applications, there is also a need to share information on licences issued and applications refused, and DTI's Export Control Organisation is working with HMC&E to examine the feasibility of making such information available electronically to Customs officials who have responsibility for enforcing export controls at the point of export. While the Export Control Organisation maintains records of licence applications, it does not compile records of licensed exports.

The new electronic application form described in the Memorandum was launched on 1 March 1999.

PRIME MINISTER

European Union Fraud

Mr. Trend: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 23 February 1999, *Official Report*, column *230*, if he will publish the correspondence between his office and Pauline Green MEP prior to the European Parliament's vote on the censure motion on 14 January. [75717]

The Prime Minister: The right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard) wrote to me on 3 March 1999. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs will reply in due course.

Engagements

Sir Peter Tapsell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Wednesday 17 March. [76770]

The Prime Minister: This morning I had meetings with Ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House I will have further such meetings later today.

CABINET OFFICE

Public Services (Complaints)

15. **Mr. Derek Twigg:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what action he is taking to ensure that public services are more responsive to complaints from members of the public. [75371]

Mr. Kilfoyle: As part of the launch of the Service First programme last year, we issued guidance on the handling of complaints. We have also been working with the British Standards Institution to develop a national standard on complaints handling, which will be published in May. More recently, we have set up links from the Service First website to all of the main government complaints procedures that are available on the Internet and we are encouraging all those departments and agencies who have not yet done so to put their complaints procedures on the net.

Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration

16. **Dr. Ladyman:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office if he will seek to extend the jurisdiction of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration to non-Governmental public bodies; [75372]

23. **Mr. Corbett:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what plans he has to increase the number of public bodies within the jurisdiction of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration. [75381]

Dr. Jack Cunningham: I refer my hon. Friends to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike) earlier today, *Official Report*, column 1114.

Joined-up Government

17. **Mr. Sheerman:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what initiatives he plans to increase the co-ordination of policy across Government departments. [75374]

Dr. Jack Cunningham: The restructured and strengthened Cabinet Office and the establishment of a number of cross-cutting units are helping to tackle policy and service delivery issues which cross conventional departmental boundaries. The White Paper on Modernising Government to be published shortly will set out further initiatives.

Government Agencies

18. **Mrs. Gilroy:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what measures he is taking to build on those improvements in the performance of Government agencies which are set out in 1998 Next Steps Agencies report. [75376]

Mr. Kilfoyle: I very much welcome the improvement in performance of executive agencies as highlighted in the 1998 Next Steps Report. It is essential, however, that this improvement is built upon. With the introduction of Public Service Agreements, agencies will have an important role to play in helping Ministers deliver the Government's new priorities and objectives. I have encouraged colleagues to ensure that agencies' targets for the coming year reflect this contribution to broader goals.

Drugs Policy

19. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office if he will make a statement on progress made in assessing the efficacy of his drugs policy. [75377]

Dr. Jack Cunningham: The Government's anti-drugs strategy was launched last April. In September, I announced an additional £217 million for anti-drugs work from 1999–2002. There are now local plans to tackle drugs problems through Drug Action Teams across the country. The UK Anti-Drugs Co-ordinator's progress report and a national plan will be available shortly.

Public Consultation

20. **Dr. Lynne Jones:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what discussions he has had with other Government Ministers about the conduct of public consultation exercises. [75378]

Mr. Kilfoyle: Last year, the Cabinet Office published a guide on conducting written consultation exercises, setting out best practice for departments and agencies to follow when issuing consultation documents and taking follow-up action. The guide was widely discussed with other Government Departments before issue. We subsequently published a further, more general guide to consulting users of public services. Ministers have also been involved in various discussions on the People's Panel.

Better Government for Older People Initiative

21. **Kali Mountford:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office if he will make a statement about progress with the development of the Better Government for Older People initiative. [75379]

Mr. Kilfoyle: The Better Government for Older People initiative, a practical example of our commitment to modernising government, has important lessons to teach about working in partnership, and improving services through listening to the views of users and responding to their needs. Yesterday, we launched a Learning Network to cascade experience from the pilots. Many more local authorities, along with older people's organisations, and the academic world, can now be involved in this learning process through access to a database of good practice, and regular bulletins and workshops on developments across the programme.

Duchy of Cornwall

22. **Mr. Dawson:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what role the Duchy has in developing employment opportunities in its rural areas. [75380]

Dr. Jack Cunningham: The Duchy's role in developing employment opportunities in its rural areas falls under three headings: first, supporting its tenants in country areas who in turn create employment; secondly, by encouraging the re-use (for employment or residential purposes) of out dated agricultural buildings, and thirdly, by employing its own staff of contractors for the maintenance of properties and for the management of its woodlands.

Genetically Modified Organisms

24. **Mr. Baker:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what further steps he proposes to take to improve co-ordination across Government of issues relating to genetic modification. [75382]

Dr. Jack Cunningham: The Ministerial Group on Biotechnology and Genetic Modification is responsible for co-ordination across Government on issues relating to genetic modification.

Deregulation

25. **Mr. Jenkins:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office if he will make a statement about the Government's deregulation strategy. [75383]

Mr. Kilfoyle: This Government are committed to ensuring that regulations are necessary, fair, effective, command public support and balance the benefits and costs.

My officials in the Better Regulation Unit have published new guidance to help departments to apply the Task Force's principles of good regulation and to assess the impact of regulatory proposals. When we consider regulating we will consult widely, and listen to those affected to ensure a balanced approach. No regulatory proposal which has an impact on businesses, charities or voluntary bodies should be considered by the Government without a thorough assessment of the risks, costs and benefits, a clear analysis of who will be affected and an explanation of why non-regulatory action would be insufficient. This guidance has been welcomed by the Prime Minister and commended to all Ministers and officials.

The Better Regulation Task Force supports our efforts to ensure that unnecessary regulatory burdens are identified for removal or reform. We welcome, for example, their work on Liquor Licensing and Long-term Care.

We are currently consulting on proposals to extend the order-making power in Section 1 of the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994 to remove outdated and unnecessary legislation, without removing any of the safeguards.

Joint Cabinet Consultative Committee

26. **Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office when he expects his review of the policy areas suitable for discussion using the Joint Cabinet Consultative Committee mechanism to be completed. [75384]

Dr. Jack Cunningham: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave him on 16 February 1999, *Official Report*, column *686*.

Select Committee Reports

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office if *(a)* he, *(b)* civil servants in his Department or *(c)* special advisers in his Department have (i) had sight of drafts of select committee reports, in whole or in part, or (ii) been informed of conclusions of select committee reports prior to their publication by the select committees. [75873]

Dr. Jack Cunningham *[holding answer 10 March 1999]:* I refer the right hon. Member to my answer to the hon. Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire) on 1 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *531*. There have been no instances of members of select committees giving me drafts of select committee reports, or of parts of reports including their conclusions, before publication. Nor to the best of my knowledge have there been any occasions on which members of Select Committees have given such material to civil servants or special advisers in my Department. This excludes embargoed copies of reports issued under House of Commons Standing Order 116.

Dr. George Poste

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office if he will list those Government advisory committees of which Dr. George Poste is *(a)* a member and *(b)* an adviser. [76245]

Mr. Kilfoyle: Current information on appointments held by individuals is not held centrally. The Public Appointments Unit maintains an internet directory of public appointments (at http://www.open.gov.uk/pau/paupoint.htm) which lists members of advisory non-departmental public bodies. This directory is updated twice a year on 1 September and on 1 April.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 18 March 1999

PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

Special Advisers

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the President of the Council if she will list the total number of occasions when *(a)* departmental and *(b)* non-departmental special advisers have travelled abroad in an official capacity since 2 May 1997. [76824]

Mrs. Beckett: Between 2 May 1997 and 28 February 1999, special advisers in my Department have made one visit overseas in an official capacity. All travel complied with the requirements of the Ministerial Code and the Civil Service Management Code.

Electronic Red Boxes

Mr. Maclean: To ask the President of the Council if she will name the Ministers in her Department who are regular users of electronic Red Boxes. [76181]

Mrs. Beckett: I refer the right hon. Gentleman to the answer my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office gave on 16 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *651*. Neither I nor the Parliamentary Secretary use an electronic box.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Hamilton *v* Al Fayed Case

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Attorney-General when he was first notified of *(a)* the libel claim by Neil Hamilton and *(b)* the Court of Appeal hearing on appeal from the Queen's Bench Division; when he first responded to Mr. Hamilton's solicitors; when he decided to intervene in the case; when he first notified the House that he was intervening; and for what purpose. [77125]

The Solicitor-General: The Attorney-General was first notified that Mr. Neil Hamilton was pursuing a libel action against Mr. Al Fayed in a letter from Mr. Hamilton's solicitors dated 30 June 1998. A response was sent to Mr. Hamilton's solicitors on 7 July 1998 saying that the Attorney-General did not propose to be represented at the hearing. the Attorney-General was notified that the Court of Appeal had granted leave to Mr. Al Fayed to appeal against the decision of Mr. Justice Popplewell in a letter from Mr. Al Fayed's Solicitors dated 24 November 1998.

Following consultations with the House Authorities, the Attorney-General decided to seek to intervene in the action in December 1998. A letter recording that decision was sent to the Clerk to the House on 7 December 1998.

The purpose of the Attorney-General intervening was to present submissions to the Court of Appeal as to parliamentary privilege, in furtherance of the interests of the House.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Attorney-General if he will place in the Library the Solicitor General's skeleton argument and appendices used in the Hamilton *v* Al Fayed case, together with a transcript of proceedings. [77126]

The Solicitor-General: I have arranged for a copy of my skeleton argument, together with its appendices, to be placed in the Library. It is important to note, however, that there were several modifications to the argument when presented orally. I have also placed in the Library a note prepared for the Court on the role of HM Attorney-General as intervenor in these proceedings. I am afraid that a transcript of the proceedings is not available and would take some weeks to prepare and approve. The Court of Appeal has reserved judgment in the matter, but as soon as an approved version of the judgment is available I will arrange for that, too, to be placed in the Library.

Serious Fraud Office (Secondments)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Attorney-General how many secondments have been arranged in each year since 1995, between staff employed by the Serious Fraud Office and the relevant Financial Services Regulator. [76971]

The Attorney-General: No secondments were arranged in 1995. One secondment to a regulator or disciplinary body has been arranged in each subsequent year. In addition, one secondment was arranged prior to 1995 and was in place in 1995, and one secondment to the Financial Control Directorate General of the European Commission took place between 1994 and 1997.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Minister for Science

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry on how many occasions the Minister for Science has met officers or representatives of *(a)* Diatech Ltd., *(b)* Innotech Ltd., *(c)* Floranova Ltd., *(d)* Floranova Service Corp America, *(e)* Elite Seeds, and *(f)* Floranova s.a., Costa Rica, since becoming a Minister. [73134]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 25 February 1999]:* I am informed that on no occasion has Lord Sainsbury met with officers or representatives of any of these companies acting in an official capacity since his appointment. I understand that he has met with Christopher Stone of Diatech Ltd. on a number of times on a personal basis, but on no occasion were any aspects of the work or investments of any of the companies placed in the blind trust discussed.

Kvaerner Govan Yard

Mr. Sarwar: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the

Government's support for shipbuilding in the United Kingdom, with particular reference to the Kvaerner Govan yard. [74881]

Mr. Battle: To support the UK shipbuilding industry, I established in July 1998 the Shipbuilding Forum whose membership comprises representatives of the shipbuilding industry, its unions, equipment suppliers and customers, both private and public sector. Also involved are the training organisations and relevant Departments. The Forum's terms of reference from me were to consider the current situation of the shipbuilding industry and how to improve its competitiveness so as to increase its share of the European market, leading to increased output, profitability and employment. The Forum is currently preparing an Implementation Plan which it plans to deliver to me within the next few months. These Recommendations—currently more than 40—are to all the participants, not just to the Government. The Forum believes that these Recommendations will go a long way towards a marked improvement in the fortunes of the UK shipbuilding industry and I look forward to reading their Implementation Plan.

My Department gives Shipbuilding Intervention Fund grants to eligible UK yards, including Kvaerner Govan, at the maximum level permitted by the European Union's Shipbuilding Regulation and the Scottish Office made an offer to Govan of a grant under the Regional Selective Assistance programme.

EU Life Patents Directive

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is his policy in respect of the appeal by Italy and the Netherlands to the European Court of Justice against the EU Life Patents Directive. [74827]

Mr. Battle *[holding answer 5 March 1999]:* It is primarily a matter for the Council and European Parliament (as the institutions who adopted the Directive) to lodge the defence against the Netherlands' application seeking to annul Directive 98/44/EC on the Legal Protection of Biotechnological Inventions. EU member states had the opportunity to intervene in this case. The Government have carefully considered the terms of the Dutch action before the European Court of Justice and a decision has been taken not to intervene. We do not wish to add anything to the Council's arguments already lodged before the Court in response to the Dutch action.

Select Committee Reports

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if *(a)* he, *(b)* civil servants in his Department or *(c)* special advisers in his Department have (i) had sight of drafts of select committee reports, in whole or in part, or (ii) been informed of conclusions of select committee reports prior to their publication by the select committees. [75882]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 10 March 1999]:* I refer the right hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to the hon. Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire) on 1 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *531*. There have been no instances of members of Select Committees giving me drafts of Select Committee reports, or parts of reports including their conclusions, before publication. Nor, to the best of my knowledge, have there been any occasions on which members of Select Committees have given such material to civil servants or special advisers in my Department.

British Exports (Euro)

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions he has had with the European Commission on the impact of the current value of the euro on British exporters. [76253]

Mr. Byers: I have had no such discussions.

Longbridge

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if BMW has applied to his Department for grant to make a new *(a)* Mini and *(b)* Rover 35 at Longbridge. [76259]

Mr. Byers: *(a)* No. *(b)* Yes.

Appointments

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list those people he has appointed to public bodies since 1 November 1998, indicating the positions to which they have been appointed and if they receive remuneration. [76461]

Mr. Byers: Appointments made to my Department's public bodies since 1 November 1998 are shown on the attached tables with their positions and an indication of whether they receive remuneration.

Department of Trade and Industry appointments to public bodies from 1 November 1998

Public body and name of appointee	*Position*	*Remuneration*
Biotechnology and Biological Science Research Council		
Dr. John Padfield	Member	Yes
Coal Authority		
Eric Hassall	Deputy Chairman	Yes
Malcolm Edwards	Executive Member	No
Albert Schofield	Executive Member	No
Design Council		
Hamish Brice	Member	No
Penny Egan	Member	No
Dick Powell	Member	No
Sir William Stubbs	Member	No
Roy Williams	Member	No
Hearing Aid Council		
Alan Rudge	Member	Yes
Gillian Booth	Member	Yes
Janice Barnett	Member	Yes
Monopolies and Mergers commission		
Professor J. Beatson	Member	Yes
David Jenkins	Member	Yes
Roger Munson	Member	Yes
Linda Christmas	Newspaper Panellist	Yes
Professor Donald Trelford	Newspaper Panellist	Yes
Charles Wilson	Newspaper Panellist	Yes
Sarwar Ahmed	Newspaper Panellist	Yes
William Gibson	Newspaper Panellist	Yes
Gerald Holbrook	Newspaper Panellist	Yes
Joyce Hopkirk	Newspaper Panellist	Yes
Eve Pollard	Newspaper Panellist	Yes
Gill Owen	Newspaper Panellist	Yes
G. H. Stacy	Member	Yes

Department of Trade and Industry appointments to public bodies from 1 November 1998

Public body and name of appointee	*Position*	*Remuneration*
National Consumer Council		
David Hatch	Chairman	Yes
Persons Hearing Consumer Credit Licensing Appeals		
Nicholas Baxter	Member	Yes
John Bridge	Member	Yes
Persons Hearing Consumer Credit Licensing Appeals (continued)		
William Cran	Member	Yes
Alexander Dalglish	Member	Yes
Anthony Sharp	Member	Yes
Post Office User's National Council		
Robin Aaronson	Member	No
Elizabeth Stanton Jones	Member	No
Janet Langdon	Member	No
Paul Calderwood	Member	No
Clara Arokiasamy	Member	No
David Lane	Member	No
Sheila Hoyle	Member	No
John Fryer	Member	No
Edward Vidler	Member	No
Gary Hepburn	Member	No
Post Office User's Council for Scotland		
Dr. Tom Begg	Chairman	Yes
Peter Jeary	Member	No
Henry Johnson	Member	No
Dr Sylvia Hopwood	Member	No
Post Office User's Council for Wales		
Richard Edwards	Member	No
John Davies	Member	No
David Williams-Masinda	Member	No
Michael Marritt	Member	No
Scottish Consumer Council		
Yvonne Gallagher	Member	Yes
Dr. Alex Wright	Member	Yes
Andrew Raven	Member	Yes
Jeremy Mitchell	Chairman	Yes
Alastair Robertson	Member	No
Simpler Trade Procedures Board (SITPRO)		
N. H. Rose	Member	No
S. Probert	Member	No
D. E. Wakeford, MBE	Member	No
A. W. Russell	Member	No
UK Atomic Energy Authority (UKAEA)		
Stan Gordelier	Executive Member	Yes
Welsh Advisory Committee on Telecommunications		
Karen Counsell	Member	No
Jon Simonds	Member	No
Richard Edwards	Member	No
Warren Ward	Member	No
Ian Lebbon	Member	No
London and South East Regional Development Board		
David Langford	Member	No
Tushar Raja	Member	No
North West Industrial Development Board		
Raymond Armstrong	Member	No
Kirit Pathak	Member	No
South West Industrial Development Board		
Neville Gibson	Member	No
Brian Sherwin	Member	No
Barbara Speirs	Member	No
Yorkshire, The Humber and East Midlands Industrial Development Board		
Neil Adnitt	Member	No
Tony Berryman	Member	No

Human Genetics

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the members of the working group of the Human Genetics Advisory Commission and the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority that recently considered issues relating to human cloning; if he will list in the case of each of those members the outside interests that were declared; and if he will indicate which of those members have academic qualifications in *(a)* ethics, *(b)* psychology, *(c)* philosophy and *(d)* sociology. [76240]

Mr. Battle: The members of the joint working group were nominated by the Human Genetics Advisory Commission (HGAC) and the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority (HFEA). The group was chaired by the Reverend Dr. John Polkinghorne (HGAC). It also comprised Dr. George Poste (HGAC), Professor Christine Gosden (HFEA) and Dr. Anne McLaren (HFEA).

All members of the HFEA and HGAC, whose membership covers a wide range of experience and backgrounds including ethicists, psychologists, philosophers and sociologists, made full contributions to the report and approved it in its final form for publication.

The declarations of interest of all members of the HGAC and HFEA are available for public inspection in accordance with, "Quangos—Opening the Doors", Cabinet Office Guidance (June 1998). Full details of members' academic qualifications are not held centrally, and will not indicate all relevant experience. Requested information held for members of the working group is as follows:

Reverend Dr. John Polkinghorne KBE FRS

Chairman, Advisory Committee on Genetic Testing. Member of the General Synod and the Board of Social Responsibility of the Church of England, Fellow of the Royal Society, Past President of Queens' College Cambridge.

Dr. George Poste CBE FRS

Chief Science and Technology Officer, SmithKline Beecham Plc. Fellow of the Royal Society, Board member, SmithKline Beecham Plc, Non-Executive Chairman, Cerebrus Holdings Plc, Non-Executive Chairman, DiaDexus (USA).

Professor Christine Gosden

Professor of Medical Genetics, University of Liverpool, Liverpool Women's Hospital. Past chair of the MRC Unit's Ethical Committee.

Dr. Anne McLaren DBE FRS

Principal Research Associate, Wellcome CRC Institute, Cambridge. Member of the Nuffield Council on Bioethics and the European Commission's Group of Expert Advisers on Ethics.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he expects to respond to the report on human cloning from the working group of the Human Genetics Advisory Commission and the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority. [76238]

Mr. Battle: The Government are giving careful consideration to the report of the Human Genetics Advisory Commission and the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority, "Cloning Issues in Reproduction Science and Medicine", and will publish its response as soon as possible.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry with effect from what date Sir Colin Campbell resigned as Chairman of the Human Genetics Advisory Commission; and what reasons he gave for his resignation. [76236]

Mr. Battle: Sir Colin Campbell resigned as Chairman of the Human Genetics Advisory Commission on 5 February 1999, as he was anticipating non-executive responsibilities with a major insurance company, and in case HGAC should in future return to consider genetics and insurance wished to remove himself from any possible future conflict of interest.

Assisted Areas

Mr. Collins: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the review of the Assisted Areas map and the timing of its conclusions. [76666]

Mr. Wills *[holding answer 15 March 1999]:* Under the European Guidelines, a new Assisted Areas map for the UK must operate from 1 January 2000. Changes to the Assisted Areas map must be agreed with the Commission, and they have asked for proposals from member states by 31 March. Ministers are currently considering which proposals they will put forward.

Unfair Dismissal

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what estimate he has made of the annual additional number of claims for unfair dismissal that will be made as a result of the reduction in the length of the qualifying period of employment to one year. [76669]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 16 March 1999]:* We shall be publishing estimates in the Regulatory Impact Assessment once the order has been laid before Parliament.

Maternity Leave

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what estimate he has made for *(a)* small and medium enterprises and *(b)* larger companies of the average cost resulting from an employee taking maternity leave. [76674]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 16 March 1999]:* The cost to an employer from an employee taking maternity leave will depend on many factors, most significantly, how many weeks of maternity leave are taken and what the employee's length of service is.

Minimum Wage

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment he has made of the impact of the minimum wage on organisations which offer board and lodging as part of their remuneration package. [75577]

Mr. Byers: The impact of the national minimum wage on organisations which provide board and lodgings as part of their remuneration package will vary in the light of their particular circumstances.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Foreign Language Broadcasting

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what representations he has received on the provision of foreign language broadcasting in the United Kingdom *(a)* on television and *(b)* on radio; and if he will make a statement. [72628]

Janet Anderson: The Independent Television Commission and the Radio Authority license a number of channels which provide foreign language services to UK audiences. The television channels are available on the satellite and cable medium, whilst the radio channels are aimed at local audiences.

My Department has not received any representations on the provision of foreign language broadcasting in the UK for either television or radio where the target audience is principally within the UK. I have received several representations in respect of foreign language satellite television stations broadcasting from within the UK but aimed primarily at audiences abroad.

I am writing to the hon. Member with details of the licensed services and will place copies of my reply in the Libraries of the House.

Wembley Stadium

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) when the contract to establish the Wembley Trust with the FA and the English Sports Council will be announced; [75852]

(2) how much money has been spent on the purchase of Wembley plc by *(a)* the English Sports Council and *(b)* the Government. [75853]

Mr. Banks: Lottery funding of £120 million has been awarded by the English Sports Council towards the purchase of the existing Wembley stadium from Wembley plc, and its reconstruction as a National Stadium for football, rugby league and athletics. No Government funding has been provided.

The English National Stadium Development Company is responsible for taking reconstruction work forward. The English National Stadium Trust, which already exists as a charitable company limited by guarantee, will act as a watchdog for the public interests in the project.

The Wembley sale was finalised on 15 March. We now have a firm foundation from which to drive the National Stadium project forward which is great news for the 2006 World Cup bid, and our efforts to bring major international sporting events to this country.

Millennium Experience

Joan Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will announce the ticket prices for the Millennium Experience at Greenwich. [78042]

Janet Anderson: The New Millennium Experience Company (NMEC) has today announced the pricing structure for entrance to the Millennium Experience at

Greenwich. This includes attractive discounts for families and groups. I have placed the full text of the NMEC's News Release in the Libraries of the House.

Prices for the Millennium Experience at the Dome were confirmed as:

	£
Group rates	
'Family Five' ticket: (2 adults + 3 children or 1 adult + 4 children)	57.00 (@ 11.40 each)
Senior Citizens Groups (of 15 or more)	12.00 each
Adult Groups (of 15 or more)	17.50 each
Individual rates	
Single adult	20.00 each
Children under 5	Free of charge
Children ages 5 to 15 inclusive	16.50 each
Student card holders	16.50 each
Senior Citizens	18.00 each
JS40 holders	12.00 each
Education rates	
Student group/college group visits	14.50 each
School visits (all ages)	8.00 each
Education Tours Scheme for Schools (ages 8 to 16)	[1]Free of charge

[1] As part of the NMEC's pricing strategy up to 1 million free tickets will be made available for children through the Education Tours Scheme for schools

The NMEC has announced the prices seven months ahead of tickets going on sale to the public to allow the travel industry to finalise its prices. The NMEC is also in detailed negotiations with rail and coach operators about discounted travel to the Dome. National Express coach operators have confirmed that they are proposing to offer, subject to negotiation, a discount travel deal offering a combined return coach ticket and admission to the Dome for £29.99 from anywhere in England, Scotland or Wales.

The Government agree with the NMEC that these prices represent value for money and will enable the Company to achieve its forecast 12 million visitors to what will be the largest concentration of educational, inspirational and entertaining attractions under one roof anywhere in the world during 2000.

Athletics

Mr. Leslie: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what proposals he has for the World Class Performance Programme for the United Kingdom's top athletes. [78043]

Mr. Chris Smith: The Sports Cabinet met for the second time on Wednesday last week and decided on a package of Lottery support to back our top sportsmen and women.

The Government will shortly lay before Parliament an Order which will make the UK Sports Council a Lottery distributor and earmark a percentage of the Lottery Sports Fund for them to distribute for the UK's best sportsmen and women for them to train and prepare for competition.

A joint scheme has already been pioneered by the four Sports Councils for England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

This decision builds on that scheme and its success, makes a strong commitment to future funding, and, for the first time, ensures that the top UK athletes from whatever part of the country are backed by a single unified and well run scheme.

Regular and independent reports to Ministers and to the UK Sports Council on the way the money is being spent, and its effectiveness in helping the UK's top athletes to maximise their potential and achieve sporting success, and in bringing medals and championship titles to the UK, will be built in from the outset.

This programme will be closely linked to the development of the UK Sports Institute. The Government has already announced the new direction it is giving with more of the Institute's facilities built throughout the country where athletes actually want to live and train, and a strategic Headquarters to co-ordinate services and set standards across the national network.

As a consequence, the balance of expenditure between Headquarters and regions will change with more being spent on the regional facilities in line with the results of wide consultation of athletes and governing bodies which the Sports Councils have carried out, and the required funding for capital work on the Headquarters building being accordingly substantially reduced. The Headquarters will concentrate on its crucial role of oversight of the provision of the best in sports science and medicine, and quality assurance of the network sites, and will now be the direct responsibility of the UK Sports Council.

In line with that policy, Ministers have now decided that greater emphasis should be placed on training and preparation programmes. The proposed Order will earmark a percentage of Lottery funding, which should generate £20.5 million for the World Class Performance and Events Programmes.

Within this sum of Lottery funding, it is expected that the UK Sports Council should have about £2 million annually to help attract to and stage major sporting events in this country. The Sports Cabinet sees a close link between these programmes. They will both benefit all parts of the UK fairly, where close joint working is needed if we are to succeed on the international scene—and the best possible place for a top performance is in front of an enthusiastic home crowd against the best world competition.

These two programmes will be closely co-ordinated with the work of the four Home Country Sports Councils, who will continue to back excellence in sports which compete separately as England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland and in helping to identify and support up-and-coming talent.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Immigration and Nationality Directorate

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made of the number of applicants' passports held at the Immigration and Nationality Directorate awaiting a decision; what arrangements he will make for temporary travel documents to be issued for those whose applications are

delayed as a result of reorganisation at IND; and what proposals he has for offering compensation to those who are disadvantaged as a result of the delays. [76615]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The Immigration and Nationality Directorate has estimated the approximately 22,000 passports are currently being held. Travel Documents will be issued only to people who have valid leave to remain in the United Kingdom. It is, therefore, not possible to issue documents where an application for leave remains outstanding, although passports will be returned to applicants when they need to travel. Compensation will be paid only in cases of maladministration where the costs are reasonable and have been actually and necessarily incurred: each case will be treated on its merits.

Suicides (Prisons)

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many suicides there have been in prisons, remand centres and youth detention centres in each of the last 10 years; and how many were of persons under the age of 21 years. [76936]

Mr. George Howarth: The information is given in the table.

Year	Number of SIDs in prisons of persons aged under 21 years	Number of SIDs in remand centres of persons aged under 21 years	Number of SIDs in young offender institutions of persons aged under 21 years	Total number of SIDs	Number of SIDs of prisoners aged under 21 years
1988	8	—	1	37	9
1989	9	1	2	48	12
1990	5	3	2	50	10
1991	1	—	4	42	5
1992	1	2	4	41	7
1993	1	1	1	47	3
1994	6	3	1	62	10
1995	4	2	2	59	8
1996	5	1	6	64	12
1997	—	4	5	68	9
1998	6	3	5	83	14

SIDs—self-inflicted deaths

Notes:

1. Establishments have been categorised according to their main role only. Establishments that have more than one role have been placed in the category that represents their primary function (i.e. Doncaster is a local prison which also holds a significant number of young offenders).
2. Not all self-inflicted deaths conclude with a verdict of suicide.

Thomas Tangney

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department for what reasons Thomas Tangney was considered suitable for transfer to Ford Open Prison. [77321]

Mr. George Howarth: Mr. Tangney met the criteria which need to be satisfied before a transfer to open prison conditions takes place. These criteria were set out in my reply to the hon. Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Hancock) on 11 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *332*. The decision to transfer Mr. Tangney to open prison conditions was taken by Ministers on the recommendation of the Parole Board in line with normal practice in these cases.

Europol

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 10 March 1999, *Official Report*, columns *267–68*, if the National Criminal Intelligence Service can access the Schengen Information System without the unanimous agreement of the Schengen states. [77165]

Kate Hoey: Direct access to the Schengen Information System (SIS) by the National Criminal Intelligence Service and other law enforcement agencies could be secured only if the United Kingdom was a member of the SIS. The SIS is part of the Schengen acquis, which will be incorporated into the European Union on the entry into force of the Treaty of Amsterdam. In accordance with Article 4 of the Schengen Protocol, any request by the United Kingdom to take part in some or all of the existing provisions of the Schengen acquis is subject to the agreement of the thirteen Schengen states. As my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary stated in his reply to the right hon. Member on 12 March 1999, *Official Report*, columns *380–82*, the SIS is one of the areas of the acquis in which the United Kingdom intends to seek participation.

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 10 March 1999, *Official Report*, columns *267–68*, what initial increased use of Europol facilities and sharing of information has taken place since the signing of the Treaty of Amsterdam. [77166]

Kate Hoey: Although the Treaty of Amsterdam was signed on 2 October 1997, it has not yet been ratified by all member states. It is not therefore in force.

As I indicated in my reply of 10 March 1999, *Official Report*, columns *267–68*, Europol has not yet taken up its full range of activities. Increased use is generally being made of the Europol Drugs Unit (EDU). In 1997, the EDU handled a total of 2,608 requests for information from member states' law enforcement agencies, compared with 2,053 requests in 1996. Of these, 984 requests (453 in 1996) emanated from the United Kingdom, channelled through the National Criminal Intelligence Service on behalf of United Kingdom law enforcement agencies. In 1998, the United Kingdom was the second largest user of the information exchange facilities provided by the EDU.

From a total of 2,298 requests for information, 394 originated in the United Kingdom. The majority of requests relate to illegal trafficking.

New Prison, Peterborough

Sir Brian Mawhinney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) when he expects to make an announcement about his proposal to build a new prison in Peterborough; [77446]

(2) on whose authority labour councillors in Peterborough have been informed that an announcement on a proposed new prison in Peterborough will be delayed until after the European election in June. [77447]

Mr. George Howarth: I understand that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions expects to determine within the next three weeks the Prison Service's appeal against Peterborough City Council's refusal to grant planning permission for the construction of a new prison in Peterborough. I am not aware that any information about that decision has been given to local councillors.

"Jailbirds: Through the Gates"

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if each of the prisoners appearing in the BBC1 documentary, Jailbirds: Through the Gates, on 15 March, had individually given permission to be filmed; and if he will make a statement. [77463]

Mr. George Howarth: Yes. Prisoners individually featured in the programme gave their written consent. Prisoners were warned, where possible, prior to filming taking place and all prisoners were given the opportunity not to appear.

Asylum and Immigration Appeals

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will pay compensation to those whose applications to the Immigration and Nationality Department have been delayed by the failure to operate the full casework information technology application and changeover to the new system. [76442]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: We very much regret the current delays to applications being considered in the Immigration and Nationality Directorate. It has always been our practice to consider making ex gratia payments in individual cases where applicants are able to demonstrate, with full supporting evidence, that they have actually and necessarily incurred additional costs.

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 16 February 1999, *Official Report*, column *651*, what has been the extent of the temporary reduction in service standards and numbers of casework decisions in the Immigration and Nationality Department; and when he expects the full casework information technology application to be operational and the previous throughput of casework to be achieved. [76441]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The temporary reduction in service standards does not apply to all areas in the new Directorate. The Public Caller Unit, for example, has been able to maintain productivity throughout the reorganisation, and indeed it is now exceeding previous productivity rates. However, in other areas there has been a fairly significant reduction in service and productivity during the months of January and February, when we were moving offices. Now that much of the move has been made, the position is improving: productivity has been rising and we are mounting special exercises to target priority cases such as work permits. Our aim is to reach the levels of throughput previously achieved within a few weeks.

In recent discussions with my officials, Siemens Business Services have maintained that the revised schedule for introduction of the full Information Technology solution will be achieved. This would mean pilot implementation beginning in the summer with roll-out being completed early next year.

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made of the extra time applicants are having to wait for the Immigration and Nationality Department to resolve their cases as a result of the failure to operate the full casework information technology application. [76443]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The disruption caused by the reorganisation of the Immigration and Nationality Directorate (IND) has meant some temporary delay in the processing of cases, particularly during the months of January and February. The position is improving: productivity has been rising and we are mounting special exercises to target priority cases. In the majority of straight forward cases, the delay is now a matter of weeks only. The expectation is that the situation will continue to improve.

We do, however, recognise that there is a large backlog of IND cases, the great majority preceding the reorganisation. There are, for example, currently 104,356 cases in IND's central Work in Progress Store, many of which are over five years old. Our plans for dealing with this backlog are set out in the Government's White Paper "Fairer, Faster and Firmer—A Modern Approach to Immigration and Asylum".

ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND THE REGIONS

Packaging Industry

Mr. Bill O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what action he is proposing to tackle the devices used by companies to avoid making contributions under the packaging waste regulations; and if he will make a statement. [76382]

Mr. Meacher: The Environment Agency and the Scottish Environment Protection Agency have a duty to monitor compliance with the packaging Regulations. In the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Elmet (Mr. Burgon) on 28 January 1999, *Official Report*, columns *335–37*, I welcomed the efforts being made by the Agencies to strengthen their enforcement programmes and I understand that the Environment Agency has started the process for taking proceedings against a number of companies which failed to register in 1998.

I also said that I would be asking the Agencies to publish their monitoring programmes and report half-yearly as to the number, size and sector of businesses checked for registration, data provision and for compliance with the recovery and recycling obligations.

Mr. Bill O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what representations he has received over his proposed changes to the share out of the percentage activity obligations within the packaging industry; and what plans he has to review the percentages. [76383]

Mr. Meacher: As I stated in my answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Elmet (Mr. Burgon) on 28 January 1999, *Official Report*, columns *335–37*, my Department will very shortly be issuing a consultation document on the proposed changes to the percentage activity obligations. All responses to the document will then be taken into consideration.

Urban Parish Councils

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many urban parish councils he has approved within the boundaries of unitary councils; if he will list the council areas concerned; and if he will make a statement on the statutory powers given to the urban parish councils. [76619]

Ms Armstrong: Under the Local Government and Rating Act 1997, the Secretary of State has approved 8 new parishes within unitary authority areas: Allerton Bywater, and Horsforth in Leeds; Southsea in Portsmouth; Beverley, and Cottingham in the East Riding of Yorkshire; Headland in Hartlepool; East Cowes on the Isle of Wight; and Mossley in Tameside. Using the Department's standard statistical definition of urban areas and population from the 1991 census, with the exception of Allerton Bywater, all the new parishes can be defined as urban. These parishes have the same statutory powers as any other parish council.

Telecommunications Developments

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what guidance his Department has issued to planning authorities about their consideration of new telecommunications developments and the controls which they have over their siting. [76628]

Mr. Raynsford: Planning policy guidance on telecommunications development is set out in Planning Policy Guidance note 8 (revised December 1992), supplemented by Appendix E to DoE Circular 9/95 and by the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Regions, Regeneration and Planning on 4 November 1997, *Official Report*, columns *152–53*. Copies of that answer were circulated to local planning authorities at that time. In addition, my Department has published in March 1996 a Code of Best Practice for local planning authorities and telecommunications code system operators on telecommunications prior approval procedures as applied to mast/tower development. We intend to consult shortly on draft guidance to accompany the changes to the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 1995 announced by my right hon. Friend in a written answer on 16 November 1998, *Official Report*, columns *343–44*.

Public Rights of Way

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he plans to announce proposals to extend access to the countryside for horse riders, cyclists and recreational vehicles; and if he will make a statement. [76613]

Mr. Meacher: The Government's "Framework for Action" for improving access to the countryside, which I announced to the House on 8 March 1999, *Official Report*, columns 21–33, comprises a package of measures intended to benefit all those who enjoy informal recreation in the countryside. Horse riders, cyclists and users of recreational vehicles gain access mainly through the rights of way network and the improvements proposed to the network will therefore be of particular interest to them. We are keeping their interests in mind in developing detailed proposals.

Working Time Directive

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many civil servants in his Department have been invited to waive the Working Time Directive requirement to work less than 48 hours a week on 17 consecutive weeks; how many civil servants in his Department have refused to waive the requirement; and what is the total cost of compliance with the Directive. [76809]

Mr. Meale: As the Secretaries of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, for Trade and Industry, and for Education and Employment share responsibility for the Government Offices in England, this answer also covers the Government Offices.

The following numbers of staff in DETR(C) and its Agencies, and in the Government Offices, have signed an agreement to disapply the 48 hour limit:

	Number of staff
DETR(C)	37
Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency	28
Driving Standards Agency	0
Highways Agency	0
Maritime and Coastguard Agency	1
Planning Inspectorate	1
Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre	49
Vehicle Certification Agency	0
Vehicle Inspectorate	0
Government Office for the East of England	0
Government Office for the East Midlands	3
Government Office for London	1
Government Office for the North East	0
Government Office for the North West	4
Government Office for the South East	3
Government Office for the South West	0
Government Office for the West Midlands	3
Government Office for Yorkshire and the Humber	7

[1] Currently ten staff are discussing whether there are sound operational reasons to sign a waiver

The standard terms and conditions of service for staff are well within the limits set by the Working Time Regulations 1998. The Regulations do not require employers to keep records of the number of workers who refuse to sign an opt-out agreement and therefore no central records have been kept. Compliance costs are not kept centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Waste Paper Processing

Mr. Horam: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the implications of the High Court judgment of November 1998 on the dispute between the Environment Agency and Mayer Parry Recycling Ltd.; and if he will make contact with representatives of the waste paper processing industry on this matter. [76968]

Mr. Meale: A statement on the High Court judgment in the Mayer Parry case, which took account of judgments by the European Court of Justice, was issued by the Environment Agency on 16 November 1998. As matters stand, we do not have anything to add to that statement. We have no plans to make contact with the waste paper processing industry on this matter but we are considering representations which this industry has made about the implications of the judgment.

"A New Deal for Transport"

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has *(a)* to approve and *(b)* to initiate developments relating to airports before the completion of the economic impact studies covering airports and air services announced in "A New Deal for Transport"; and if he will make a statement. [76986]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Airport development is promoted by developers through the normal planning process, though major schemes will usually be decided by the Secretary of State following a public inquiry. Airports projects for which planning applications have already been made, or are expected to be made shortly, will not be within the scope of the Regional Air Services studies, because it would cause duplication and delay if we were to study projects which are being considered in the land use planning system at the same time; the study will therefore examine a range of scenarios based on those projects either going ahead or not going ahead, and will concentrate on strategic medium and long term issues.

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what progress has been made on the study of the economic impact of regional airports and regional air services announced in "A New Deal for Transport"; when these studies will be completed in the *(a)* North of England, *(b)* Midlands and *(c)* South West; and if he will make a statement. [76985]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The studies of regional airports and air services in the North of England, Midlands and South West announced in the "A New Deal for Transport" White Paper have all now been commissioned and are expected to report in the summer. In line with our White Paper commitments, each study will include an examination of the link between air services, economic growth and regeneration in the regions concerned. In accordance with our integrated transport policy, the studies will also consider surface access to the airports concerned.

Mercury Pollution

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he has made of *(a)* the level of mercury pollution in groundwater, *(b)* its source and *(c)* the remedial action needed. [76952]

Mr. Meale: Environment Agency monitoring of groundwater has not shown concentrations above the analytical detection limit, and mercury is generally not present in groundwater. However, there may be sites where processes using mercury (including parts of the millinery and electrical industries) have resulted in contamination, with consequent risks to groundwater, although mercury contamination from such sites would not be widespread. The Groundwater Regulations 1998 prohibit the discharge of mercury to groundwater, and provide for controls over activities which might result in the discharge of mercury to groundwater.

Air Rage

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many incidents classified as air rage there have been on UK carriers in each year since 1990; and if he will make a statement. [76949]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Under the Mandatory Occurrence Report Scheme currently established by article 106 of the Air Navigation (No. 2) Order 1995, the commander of a UK registered or operated aircraft must report to the Civil Aviation Authority any incident

"endangering, or if not corrected would endanger, the aircraft, its occupants or any other person".

The CAA's MORS database does not have a classification of "air rage" and it is therefore not possible to provide the figures requested. However, we have recently reviewed the 1997 MORS reports relating to passenger behaviour. This revealed some 88 incidents of disruptive behaviour by passengers which had actual or potential safety implications. Of these, some 24 incidents involved physical violence or the need by the crew to restrain a passenger.

It is because of the lack of accurate information on the scale of the problem that we have established a new system for airlines to report to the CAA all incidents of disruptive behaviour by passengers on board UK aircraft. The first figures from this new reporting system should be available later this year.

Leasehold Reform

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many responses he has received to his consultation document on leasehold reform; and if he will publish them. [77123]

Mr. Raynsford: We had received 643 responses to the consultation paper by the requested date of Friday 12 March, and we are likely to receive some additional late ones. All responses will be made available to the

public, barring those which we have been asked to treat as confidential. We will announce the arrangements for their inspection in due course.

Waste Incinerators

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what incentives the Government are providing to increase the use of waste incinerators. [75962]

Mr. Meale *[holding answer 16 March 1999]:* The Government are considering the role of waste incinerators with energy recovery as part of the review of the waste strategy for England and Wales. Their consultation paper *Less Waste: More Value* published in June 1998 said:

The Government's view is that, alongside a move to a higher level of recycling, a move to a higher level of incineration with energy recovery is necessary over the next 10–15 years in order to move to a more sustainable waste management system.

They also sought views on this approach and asked how the role of energy recovery as part of an integrated approach to waste management could be enhanced.

A draft of the new waste strategy which takes into account the responses to the consultation document will be published later in the spring.

Buses (Access)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what discussions he has had with bus manufacturers on the development of buses to provide improved facilities for *(a)* elderly and *(b)* disabled people. [77274]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Manufacturers have been closely involved throughout the process of developing standards for accessible buses. Meetings have taken place with a cross section of representatives of industry and with individual bus manufacturers on both technical and operational matters. An informal consultation on regulations under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 to require improved access to buses and coaches took place in 1998, and a formal consultation on the draft regulations is planned for this year.

The regulations will progressively require a lower first step height, provision for wheelchair users and other passengers with a wide range of disabilities, starting in January 2000. End dates are also being proposed for all regulated buses and coaches to ensure that over a reasonable timescale they all become fully accessible.

Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty

Mr. Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he expects to announce his response to the Countryside Commission's report on the future funding and management of Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. [77272]

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he expects to make a decision about the future status and management of the South Downs. [77313]

Mr. Meale: We are still looking carefully at the issues dealt with in the Countryside Commission's advice relating both to Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty generally and to the South Downs in particular. We hope to announce some conclusions soon.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the *(a)* borrowings and *(b)* borrowing limits of each local authority for each year for which figures are available since 1990. [77440]

Ms Armstrong: The latest information on levels of debt outstanding for each local authority in England relates to 31 March 1997. I have today placed this information in the Library of the House. Information for earlier years could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Under Part IV of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989, local authorities may borrow for any purpose relevant to their statutory functions. Their total liabilities in respect of outstanding borrowing and other forms of credit must not exceed their Aggregate Credit Limit. The main effect is that authorities may borrow for capital expenditure up to the amount of the credit approvals issued to them by the Government. They may also undertake very limited temporary borrowing for revenue purposes. The Aggregate Credit Limit changes frequently and figures are not collected centrally.

Heathrow (Terminal 5)

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he expects the public inquiry on Heathrow's proposed Terminal 5 to reach a decision. [77310]

Mr. Caborn: The public inquiry closed on 17 March and the Inspector has said that he expects to take up to two years to produce his report. The Secretary of State will need to give the report full consideration before reaching a decision.

Planning

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many representations he has received from hon. Members concerning planning matters in 1999. [77309]

Mr. Raynsford: Comprehensive information is not available in the form requested and could not be provided except at disproportionate cost.

Green Belt (Leicestershire)

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many acres of Green Belt there were in Leicestershire at the latest available date. [77311]

Mr. Raynsford: There is no designated Green Belt land in Leicestershire.

Bengal Tigers

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment

he made during his visit to India of the prospects for the future of the Bengal tigers and the steps India is taking to protect them. [75690]

Mr. Prescott: During my visit to India I addressed the Millennium Tiger Conference and, as a guest of the Indian Government, visited Ranthambore Tiger Reserve where tiger numbers are slowly recovering as a result of positive protection and co-operation to meet the needs of local people.

I was impressed by the clear commitment to tiger conservation shown by the Indian Government and in particular, by Suresh Prabhu, the Indian Environment Minister, and Director of Project Tiger, Mr. P. K. Sen. However, in spite of their efforts, and those of many committed Indian officials, reserve wardens and NGOs, tigers in India still face serious threats. These are set down in the Millennium Tiger Conference's final communiqué and include the loss of habitat to large scale development projects; habitat degradation from livestock grazing and increased human population; and poaching to supply the continuing demand for tiger body parts.

The Conference agreed to address these by recommending that land use policies recognise the importance of tiger habitats and that revenues from Protected Areas be reinvested in tiger conservation. The meeting also emphasised the importance of improving legislation and strengthening enforcement. The Declaration calls for more effort from consumer countries in controlling domestic trade in tiger parts and derivatives, an issue that the CITES Tiger Missions, launched in London by my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment and the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, my right hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, Central (Mr. Fatchett), will pursue when visiting range states including India, and consuming countries such as Japan, in the early summer.

Whilst in India, I announced the UK's intention to join the Global Tiger Forum, together with a new grant of £50,000 to go towards enforcement work in India and an Indonesian project to protect the Sumatran tiger. This brings the UK's total contribution to tiger conservation to £200,000 over the past two years.

Oceans (Environmental Protection)

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on his discussion with Vice-President Gore about protecting the world's oceans. [75692]

Mr. Prescott: During Vice-President Gore's visit to London on Saturday 30 January 1999, we discussed protection of oceans. I stressed to him the opportunity offered by this year's consideration of oceans and seas by the UN Commission on Sustainable Development to make progress both on the protection of the world's marine environments and the way in which the UN system handles the issue.

Housing Policy Green Paper

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) if the Housing Policy Green Paper will consult on proposals to help homeless people; and if he will make a statement; [77303]

(2) when he expects to publish the Housing Policy Green Paper; and if he will make a statement. [77304]

Mr. Raynsford: The Housing Policy Green Paper will be published later this year. It will consult on a number of proposals to help meet our objective to offer everyone including homeless people the opportunity of a decent home.

As I indicated in my earlier reply to a Question from my hon. Friend on 1 March 1999, *Official Report*, columns *519–20*, we intend to consult widely on any proposals for strengthening the assistance and protection available to homeless people but no date has been set for completion of the necessary consideration of the steps that might be taken in this respect.

Travellers (Millennium Celebrations)

Mr. Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) if his Department, in conjunction with the Ministry of Defence, will carry out an audit of sites within the ownership of the Crown which could be made available for the temporary encampment of travellers over the period of Christmas 1999 and the millennium celebrations; [77478]

(2) how many authorised sites for travellers exist within England and Wales large enough to accommodate more than 150 caravans and several hundred people over the period of Christmas 1999 and the millennium celebrations; [77477]

(3) what arrangements are in hand within his Department, the Home Office and the Welsh Office jointly to identify sites which could offer temporary provision for large gatherings of travellers over the period of Christmas 1999 and the millennium celebrations; [77476]

(4) what arrangements his Department and the Welsh Office have made to use *(a)* the National Gypsy Council and *(b)* other bodies to ensure that travelling families are made aware of facilities that the Government propose to make available to travellers over the period of Christmas 1999 and the millennium celebrations. [77475]

Mr. Raynsford: There are over 300 authorised local authority Gypsy caravan sites in England and Wales although we know of none which would accommodate more than 150 caravans. My Department does not hold data on the capacity of privately owned Gypsy caravan sites. The Government have no plans to make Crown land available specifically for Gypsies and Travellers proposing to celebrate the millennium.

My Department and the Home Office have recently published joint good practice advice for local authorities and the police for managing unauthorised camping by travellers generally. The good practice was developed with the assistance of a number of groups representing Gypsy/Traveller interests, including the National Gypsy Council.

We want local authorities and the police to develop joint protocols to ensure proper and sensitive management of traveller encampments, including effective handling of any problems of crime and disorder which may arise particularly with large encampments. As part of this exercise, local authorities should be identifying acceptable stopping places for travellers.

The Home Office are also undertaking a series of visits to local authorities to ensure their preparedness to deliver emergency planning responsibilities over the period of the millennium celebrations. Areas under consideration include the management of serious public disorder resulting from large gatherings of people, irrespective of whether Travellers are involved or not.

Floorcoverings Classifications

Mr. Sutcliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the request by the British Carpet Manufacturers Association for a delay in making a decision on the European Classifications of Floorcoverings for reaction to fire. [77298]

Mr. Raynsford: The decision on the reaction to fire for floorcoverings was postponed in December 1998 to permit consultation with industry and will be tabled again in April 1999. In the meantime, I have met the British Carpet Manufacturers Association and they are aware that a further delay is unlikely to be supported by the European Commission or other Member States.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Running Costs

Mr. William Ross: To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood), representing the House of Commons Commission, what was the annual cost of running the House of Commons in each of the last five years; and what was the cost excluding major new building work for the latest available period. [76937]

Mr. Kirkwood: The administrative cost of running the House of Commons is given in the table.

Costs of running the House of Commons 1993–98

£000

Vote	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1996–97*	*1997–98*
Administration	62,738	65,302	68,190	68,290	72,878
Works	23,762	26,497	28,416	31,900	35,068
Sub Total	86,500	91,799	96,606	100,190	107,946
Portcullis House	7,662	6,292	15,633	30,002	37,281
Total	94,162	98,091	112,239	130,192	145,227

Figures are outturn figures. This excludes the cost of the pay and allowances of Members of Parliament.

Early-day Motions

Mr. Butterfill: To ask the Chairman of the Administration Committee what, in each of the three most recent years for which figures are available, were *(a)* the total costs relating to early day motions and *(b)* the average cost of the reprinting of individual motions when names were added. [77436]

Mr. Kirkwood: I have been asked to reply.

I will write to the hon. Member as soon as possible and place a copy of my reply in the Library of the House.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Police Complaints

Judy Mallaber: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when she will lay before Parliament the 1998 Annual report of the Independent Commission for Police Complaints for Northern Ireland; and if she will make a statement. [77926]

Marjorie Mowlam: The 1998 Annual Report of the Independent Commission for Police Complaints is being laid before Parliament today. The Report, which follows the format of previous years, comments on the work of the Commission in 1998, its 11th year dealing with alleged complaints against the RUC.

I should like formally to record the Government's thanks to the Chairman and Members of the Commission and to the staff for their continued excellent work during this past year and for producing this Report. In this respect, I would like to highlight and endorse the Chairman's introduction to the Report in which he says that in spite of the already heavy workload of (Commission members and) staff, and the extra demands on them in facilitating the transition to the establishment of the Ombudsman's office, their

"commitment, professionalism and enthusiasm stand as a tribute to each and every one of them."

I know that the police, particularly in Complaints and Discipline Department, have shown similar commitment, and I would like to place that on record also.

The work on establishing the Office of the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland is continuing and we will be re-advertising the Ombudsman post shortly. This is an important new office, which, along with the other changes in policing that are in train, should contribute further to improving public confidence in the police in Norther Ireland.

The 1998 Report notes that there was a reduction of nearly 15 per cent. in the number of cases of complaint received by the Commission, compared with the number received in 1997, down from 3,111 to 2,651. The figures since 1991, however, have remained around the 2,500 level. It also notes that the number of cases for mandatory supervision has remained at about 100 and the number of discretionary cases was lower than expected at 171. Of the 2,383 cases closed in 1998, 562 were withdrawn, 682 were dispensed with (usually because a complainant would not co-operate with an investigation) and disciplinary action was considered in over 1,000. The DPP directed 5 criminal charges, there were 19 formal disciplinary charges and 104 informal disciplinary actions.

In light of the appalling murder of Rosemary Nelson, I think it important and appropriate to highlight the reference in the report to the complaints made by and on behalf of Mrs. Nelson. The Commission refer to their "serious concern" about the conduct of the investigation. They raised these with the Chief Constable and me last Summer. As a consequence, the Chief Constable appointed Commander Mulvihill, with the approval of the ICPC, to continue the investigation. The ICPC will shortly be issuing its statutory statement on the conduct of this to

the Chief Constable and complainants. As is normal the investigation file will then be sent to the Director of Public Prosecutions for consideration.

A number of additional points are worth recording. One is the Commission's helpful historical analysis of the evolution of the complaints system in Northern Ireland. Another is the decision to supervise all complaints alleging intimidation of solicitors. As we have already told the Commission, this is a sensible and helpful approach to a contentious subject. A third is the decision to take on a small number of cases concerning incivility. These may be regarded by some as less serious allegations, but to complainants they are all serious, and I think it important to audit such cases in the way the ICPC has done.

Finally, the Government echoes the concluding words of the Chairman that:

"The Commission has been variously described over the years by some as "toothless" and often as "ruthless". In fact, it has been neither."

Boundary Commission

Jane Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will announce the names of the two newly appointed members of the Northern Ireland Boundary Commission. [77927]

Marjorie Mowlam: I am pleased to announce that I have recently issued warrants of appointment for the Northern Ireland Boundary Commission to Mrs. Joan Elizabeth Ruddock and Richard McLaughlin QC. I have also been informed by the Lord Chief Justice for Northern Ireland that he has appointed hon. Mr. Justice Coghlin to the position of Deputy Chairman of the Commission.

Incontinence Beds

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many beds dealing with incontinence are available in Northern Ireland in *(a)* all service hospitals, *(b)* general hospitals, *(c)* specialist hospitals, *(d)* teaching hospitals and *(e)* hospitals in other categories. [77032]

Mr. McFall: The information requested is not collected.

Parades Commission

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when the preliminary view of the coming year's parades is to be published by the Parades Commission; to whom the preliminary view of the coming year's parades is formally submitted; to whom the Parades Commission is formally accountable; on what parades the Parades Commission has issued a formal determination since its inception; how many parades have taken place which have contravened rulings made by the Commission; and if she will make a statement on the work of the Parades Commission over its first 12 months. [76930]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 16 March 1999]:* The current text of the Procedural Rules, one of the three statutory documents published under the Public Processions (Northern Ireland) Act 1998, indicates that the Commission will

"express an informal broad view of the overall pattern of parades in the areas in which they are contentious"
(Procedural Rules, p1, para. 1.2).

The Commission is currently reviewing the Procedural Rules, together with the Code of Conduct and the Guidelines, in line with its statutory remit, and has issued its proposed changes to the documents in draft form for consultation. One of the proposed changes to the Procedural Rules is the removal of the requirement to make a preliminary view. In reaching its decisions in respect of contentious parades in the 1998 season, the Commission set out clearly the action it considered necessary by parties to parades disputes in order to remove the need for Commission involvement. Therefore, it considers that to issue a preliminary view in 1999 would simply be to restate what is already in the public domain.

The Chairman and his colleagues on the Commission will, of course, consider carefully the responses they receive in relation to the documents, including proposals relating to the preliminary view. The revised documents are, as the hon. Gentleman knows, subject to Parliamentary approval before publication.

In relation to accountability, the Commission was established by Parliament under the Public Processions (Northern Ireland) Act 1998 as an independent body. In addition to the statutory requirements in relation to the Code of Conduct, Procedural Rules and Guidelines, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is required to present to Parliament the Commission's Annual Report on the discharge of its functions for that year.

I have placed in the Library of the House a list of parades in relation to which the Parades Commission has issued a determination since receiving its statutory powers enabling it to impose conditions on parades.

Statistics on the number of parade which have contravened the Commission's rulings are not available.

Finally, I wish to congratulate the Parades Commission for their integrity and commitment over the last year. They have a difficult job and they have carried out their role in a totally fair and impartial manner in the best interests of all the people of Northern Ireland.

HEALTH

Waiting Periods (Heart Conditions)

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the waiting periods for *(a)* angioplasty, *(b)* angiogram procedures and *(c)* heart by-pass surgery in each health trust. [74887]

Mr. Hutton: Available information on the number of patients waiting for angioplasty and heart by-pass surgery by health authority is shown in the table.

An angiogram or angiography is the main means of investigating the need for these procedures. Dye is injected into the blood stream and radiology is used to view the vessels. This is not a surgical procedure and information on waiting lists is not available centrally.

Specialty: Cardiothoracic Surgery

Name	*Total*	*0–2 months*	*3–5 months*	*6–8 months*	*9–11 months*	*12–14 months*	*15–17 months*	*18+ months*
Bradford Hospitals NHS Trust	58	17	13	11	9	5	3	0
South Tees Acute Hospitals NHS Trust	488	198	148	81	61	0	0	0
East Yorkshire Hospitals NHS Trust	460	217	100	84	59	0	0	0
Leeds Teaching Hospital NHS Trust	707	200	199	161	111	26	10	0
The Newcastle Upon Tyne Hospitals NHS Trust	572	203	161	128	79	1	0	0
Northern and Yorkshire Region total	2,285	835	621	465	319	32	13	0
Northern General Hospital NHS Trust	671	223	174	155	97	14	8	0
Nottingham City Hospital NHS Trust	311	177	83	37	12	1	1	0
Scunthorpe and Goole Hospitals NHS Trust	7	7	0	0	0	0	0	0
Glenfield Hospital NHS Trust	452	230	120	74	27	1	0	0
Trent Region total	1,441	637	377	266	136	16	9	0
North Staffordshire Hospital NHS Trust	411	148	76	76	66	41	4	0
Walsgrave Hospitals NHS Trust	327	134	96	43	39	15	0	0
Birmingham Children's Hospital NHS Trust	104	56	33	10	3	2	0	0
Birmingham Heartlands and Solihull Hospitals NHS Trust	181	129	41	9	2	0	0	0
University Hospital Birmingham NHS Trust	775	53	206	238	229	49	0	0
West Midlands Region total	1,798	520	452	376	339	107	4	0
Cardiothoracic Centre, Liverpool NHS Trust	696	349	134	108	43	49	13	0
Royal Liverpool Children's NHS Trust	43	16	12	6	8	1	0	0
Central Manchester Healthcare NHS Trust	600	185	168	103	86	49	9	0
South Manchester University Hospitals NHS Trust	884	260	196	170	126	93	39	0
Blackpool Victoria Hospital NHS Trust	363	161	100	66	26	6	4	0
Manchester Children's Hospitals NHS Trust	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
North West Region total	2,586	971	610	453	289	198	65	0
Papworth Hospital NHS Trust	811	345	200	148	106	12	0	0
Ipswich Hospital NHS Trust	2	1	1	0	0	0	0	0
Norfolk and Norwich Healthcare NHS Trust	54	39	6	4	3	2	0	0
Eastern Region total	867	385	207	152	109	14	0	0
Royal Free Hampstead NHS Trust	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Wellhouse NHS Trust	2	1	1	0	0	0	0	0
Guy's and St. Thomas' Hospital NHS Trust	1,009	350	266	194	166	28	5	0
St. Mary's NHS Trust	84	54	20	8	2	0	0	0
St. George's Healthcare NHS Trust	384	137	114	94	34	4	1	0
King's Healthcare NHS Trust	222	130	80	11	1	0	0	0
Royal Hospitals NHS Trust	974	333	207	170	177	87	0	0
Great Ormond Street Hospital for Children NHS Trust	107	94	10	1	1	0	1	0
Hammersmith Hospitals NHS Trust	69	56	7	4	0	1	1	0
University College London Hospitals NHS Trust	396	157	102	77	46	7	7	0
Royal Brompton and Harefield NHS Trust	837	346	209	132	84	52	14	0
London Region total	4,084	1,658	1,016	691	511	179	29	0
Mid-Kent Healthcare NHS Trust	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Brighton Healthcare NHS Trust	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Southampton University Hospitals NHS Trust	575	220	146	100	55	36	18	0
The Oxford Radcliffe Hospital NHS Trust	310	134	71	42	51	12	0	0
South East Region total	886	355	217	142	106	48	18	0
United Bristol Healthcare NHS Trust	526	288	141	73	22	2	0	0
Royal Cornwall Hospitals NHS Trust	37	33	3	0	1	0	0	0
Royal Devon and Exeter Healthcare NHS Trust	10	9	0	1	0	0	0	0
Plymouth Hospitals NHS Trust	584	149	145	109	94	72	15	0
South West Region total	1,157	479	289	183	117	74	15	0
England total	15,104	5,840	3,789	2,728	1,926	668	153	0

Suicide

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to raise public awareness of the rate of suicide by young men; and what support he will give to the Doctor Patient Partnership Campaign, Suicide: Helping Men Cope. [76741]

Mr. Hutton: The Department continues to work in collaboration with users of mental health services, the voluntary sector and professional bodies with a view to reducing discrimination, improving the lives of people with mental health problems and contributing to a reduction in suicide rates. We welcome the campaign

launched by the Doctor Patient Partnership. This campaign complements other efforts to focus upon the mental health needs of young men, such as the Department's own helpline Campaign Against Living Miserably, launched in December 1997 in Manchester, which targets young men at the onset of depression. We regularly meet the Samaritans, who backed the Doctor Patient Partnership campaign, to look at other initiatives to reduce suicide rates in young men.

Dr. Stoate: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the Doctor Patient Partnership's campaign Suicide: Helping Men Cope. [76577]

Mr. Hutton: We welcome the campaign launched by the Doctor Patient Partnership to reduce suicide rates among young men. It complements other efforts to focus on the mental health needs of men such as the Department's own helpline Campaign Against Living Miserably, launched in December 1997 in Manchester and aimed at young men. The Department continues to work in collaboration with users of mental health services, the voluntary sector and professional bodies with a view to reducing discrimination, improving the lives of people with mental health problems and contributing to a reduction in suicide rates.

Nurses

Mr. Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many former nurses, who had been out of the profession for more than five years, have *(a)* been charged and *(b)* not been charged for back to nursing courses since his announcement that they should be provided free of charge. [76389]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 12 March 1999]:* The information requested is not available centrally.

Education consortiums are working with National Health Service trusts and education providers to ensure that refresher training is available free of charge to nurses seeking to return to NHS employment.

Long-term Care

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 9 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *205*, concerning the Royal Commission on Long-Term Care if he will set out a timetable for his consideration of, and taking of decisions on, the Commission's recommendations. [77111]

Mr. Hutton: There is already action in hand relating to several of the Royal Commission's recommendations. Others will require fuller consideration over the coming months.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 9 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *205*, concerning the special grant for carers if the remaining £424,673 will be paid in 2000–01 and 2001–02. [77112]

Mr. Hutton: Payment of allocations of a special grant to local authorities is dependent each year on Parliamentary approval. In the case of the carers' special grant, payment will, subject to approval by Parliament of the special grant report for 1999–2000, be dependent on a number of conditions including provision of an action plan and demonstration of progress on that plan. The allocations to individual local authorities of the funding of £50 million for 2000–01 and £70 million for 2001–02 will be determined according to a formula, using the most recent data available. It is therefore not possible to confirm detailed final allocations for future years at this stage.

Dental Services

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what changes have taken place, by health authority area, in the number of child dental registrations since June 1996; and what steps have been taken to encourage the registration of children up to five years of age with a general dental practice; [75441]

(2) what changes, by health authority area, have taken place in the number of dental registrations of *(a)* children and *(b)* adults since the introduction of the 15 month registration period. [75432]

Mr. Denham: *[holding answer 15 march 1999]:* Information on the number of child patients registered with a General Dental Service (GDS) dentist at 30 June 1996 and 31 January 1999 by health authority (HA) in England, together with the percentage changes, has been placed in the Library.

The comparisons between June 1996 and January 1999 are affected by the reduction in the registration period to 15 months for all new registrations from September 1996 and by a reduction in the number of duplicate entries. The introduction of the Personal Dental Service (PDS) in October 1998 will also have affected figures since some GDS practices which became PDS pilots transferred their patients into the PDS.

Dentists are given monthly payments for registering children, and for children up to 5-years old these payments are higher in deprived areas to encourage dentists to register more children in these areas of high oral health need.

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list, by health authority area, the number of dental practices *(a)* which accept all NHS patients, *(b)* whose NHS lists are closed, *(c)* which accept on NHS lists additional family members only and *(d)* which accept children for NHS treatment only if their parents are private patients. [75431]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 15 March 1999]:* The information requested is not available centrally. It is the responsibility of each health authority to be aware of the availability of dental services in their area.

Xenotransplantations

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the independent assessors to be used to scrutinise clinical trials relating to xenotransplantation, indicating which has expertise in animal welfare issues. [76502]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 16 March 1999]:* As is common practice in peer review, the names of independent external assessors appointed to advise on applications submitted to the United Kingdom Xenotransplantation Interim Regulatory Authority (UKXIRA), are not disclosed. As a condition of their

appointment, all assessors are required to sign an undertaking confirming that they have no conflicts of interest which might affect their assessments.

Regulatory control of the welfare of animals potentially to be used as sources for xenotransplantation lies with the Home Office. A Code of Practice on the welfare of high health status pigs as xenotransplantation source animals is currently being developed by the Home Office (Scientific Procedures) Inspectorate. In considering any application, the UKXIRA would expect to see evidence of animal welfare standards at least equal to those to be included in the Code of Practice. However, the UKXIRA also recognises that there may be circumstances in which advice on the animal welfare aspects of specific applications is required. The appointment of appropriate assessors is currently being pursued.

North Durham Health Care NHS Trust

Kali Mountford: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he plans to respond to the recent report on the PFI Scheme at North Durham Healthcare NHS Trust. [77987]

Mr. Denham: I have today placed copies of a response to the report in the Library.

Incontinence Beds

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many beds dealing with incontinence are available in England and Wales in *(a)* all service hospitals, *(b)* general hospitals, *(c)* specialist hospitals, *(d)* teaching hospitals and *(e)* hospitals in other categories. [77031]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is not available in the form requested. Bed data are collected by broad ward classification rather than by clinical specialty. The data are also collected only from National Health Service trusts and there is no split between the different types of hospitals. The publication, "Bed availability and Occupancy for England" contains information for individual NHS trusts along with summary tables for England.

Correspondence

Mrs. Browning: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to reply to the letter of 11 January from the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton in respect of Mr. N. Peed and dentistry in Crediton. [77452]

Mr. Denham: I replied to the hon. Member on 17 March.

Clinical Negligence Costs

Mr. Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list for each health authority the expenditure on *(a)* damages for negligence and *(b)* out-of-court settlements for each of the last five years. [77305]

Mr. Hutton: Until recently, health authority accounts did not separate clinical negligence costs from others made under legal liability and personal injury. We cannot, therefore, give figures going back 5 years. In addition, the accounts do not distinguish between costs incurred through court awarded damages and those arising from out of court settlements. We are, however, able to give details of total clinical negligence costs by health authority (HA) for the last two years, and these are in the table.

Health authority total expenses in respect to clinical negligence

£000

Health authority code	*Health authority*	*1996–97 Haa04c—mc9–340*	*1997–98 Haa04c—sc340*
QA2	Hillingdon HA	(7)	(423)
QA3	Kensington, Chelsea & Westminster HA	2,016	511
QA4	Enfield & Haringey HA	6,834	362
QA5	Redbridge & Waltham Forest HA	—	(111)
QA6	Bedfordshire HA	—	500
QA7	Berkshire HA	(733)	738
QA8	Buckinghamshire HA	1,108	2,923
QA9	Cambridge & Huntingdon HA	—	624
QAA	Bexley & Greenwich HA	(480)	(1,301)
QAC	Bromley HA	(442)	48
QAD	Croydon HA	418	(787)
QAE	East Kent HA	2,377	1,150
QAF	West Kent HA	—	2,199
QAG	Kingston & Richmond HA	—	2,327
QAH	Lambeth, Southwark & Lewisham HA	580	98
QAJ	Merton, Sutton & Wandsworth HA	173	481
QAK	East Surrey HA	(126)	75
QAL	West Surrey HA	1,787	(716)
QAM	East Sussex, Brighton & Hove HA	202	801
QAN	West Sussex HA	965	208
QAP	Barking & Havering HA	—	431
QAQ	Barnet HA	389	572
QAR	Brent & Harrow HA	1,608	508
QAT	Camden & Islington HA	1,604	1,222
QAV	Ealing, Hammersmith & Hounslow HA	10	210
QAW	East London & The City HA	348	1,023
QAX	North Essex HA	715	763
QAY	South Essex HA	1,144	596
QC1	South Lancashire HA	57	(113)
QC2	Liverpool HA	642	(228)
QC3	Manchester HA	—	1,193
QC4	Morecambe Bay HA	117	295

Health authority total expenses in respect to clinical negligence

£000

Health authority code	*Health authority*	*1996–97 Haa04c—mc9–340*	*1997–98 Haa04c—sc340*
QC5	St. Helens & Knowsley HA	1,033	(418)
QC6	Salford & Trafford HA	—	979
QC7	Sefton HA	381	174
QC8	Stockport HA	—	(1,051)
QC9	West Pennine HA	—	(124)
QCA	East Norfolk HA	1,189	1,400
QCC	Northamptonshire HA	1,541	1,615
QCD	North West Anglia HA	482	403
QCE	Oxfordshire HA	1,480	54
QCF	Suffolk HA	982	534
QCG	Barnsley HA	926	18
QCH	North Derbyshire HA	1,269	(343)
QCJ	South Derbyshire HA	(38)	3
QCK	Doncaster HA	939	(46)
QCL	Leicestershire HA	—	780
QCM	Lincolnshire HA	(360	843
QCN	North Nottinghamshire HA	533	419
QCP	Nottingham HA	611	347
QCQ	Rotherham HA	3,814	1,117
QCR	Sheffield HA	—	398
QCT	Bury & Rochdale HA	—	491
QCV	North Cheshire HA	307	1,179
QCW	South Cheshire HA	976	515
QCX	East Lancashire HA	682	(2,017)
QCY	North West Lancashire HA	—	557
QD1	North & Mid Hampshire HA	683	86
QD2	Portsmouth & South East Hampshire HA	1,572	602
QD3	Southampton & South West Hampshire HA	—	456
QD4	Isle of Wight HA	79	31
QD5	Somerset HA	367	201
QD6	South & West Devon HA	3,448	699
QD7	Wiltshire HA	—	41
QD8	Avon HA	371	684
QD9	Birmingham HA	3,577	2,526
QDA	Wigan & Bolton HA	—	1,892
QDC	Wirral HA	635	309
QDD	Bradford HA	3,757	202
QDE	County Durham HA	1,318	1,008
QDF	East Riding HA	1,441	420
QDG	Gateshead & South Tyneside HA	697	82
QDH	Leeds HA	1,315	1,810
QDJ	Newcastle & North Tyneside HA	5,957	—
QDK	North Cumbria HA	—	539
QDL	South Humber HA	(586)	968
QDM	Northumberland HA	—	122
QDN	Sunderland HA	52	980
QDP	Tees HA	2,272	1,293
QDQ	Wakefield HA	1,374	(652)
QDR	North Yorkshire HA	526	264
QDT	Calderdale & Kirklees HA	—	245
QDV	Cornwall & Isles of Scilly HA	—	1,064
QDW	Dorset HA	543	(578)
QDX	North & East Devon HA	183	294
QDY	Gloucestershire HA	497	217
QEA	Coventry HA		
QEC	Dudley HA	688	2,196
QED	Herefordshire HA	(35)	149
QEE	Sandwell HA	521	514
QEF	Shropshire HA	698	562
QEG	Solihull HA	—	919
QEH	North Staffordshire HA	435	1,667
QEJ	South Staffordshire HA	—	594
QEK	Walsall HA	403	227
QEL	Warwickshire HA	—	(261)
QEM	Wolverhampton HA	800	85
QEN	Worcestershire HA	—	236
QEP	East & North Hertfordshire HA	342	216
QEQ	West Hertfordshire HA	2,298	498
Total		74,281	47,688

Notes:

1. Clinical Negligence was not separately identified in the accounts prior to 1997–98
2. Figures in brackets are where over provision has been made in previous years accounts

Source:

Health Authority Annual Accounts 1997–98

Barnet Health Authority

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people were on the waiting list in Barnet Health Authority's area on 31 March 1998. [77578]

Mr. Denham: Barnet Health Authority's waiting list as at 31 March 1998 was 7,571.

Barnet Hospital

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the construction of Phase 1b of Barnet Hospital is expected to *(a)* commence and *(b)* be completed. [77585]

Mr. Denham: Work on site on the Phase 1b development at Barnet General Hospital began in February 1999. It is due to be completed in spring 2002.

Anaesthetists

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many consultant anaesthetists posts are currently vacant in each NHS trust in the North West Region. [77360]

Mr. Denham: The information requested is not available. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health indicated to the Health Committee recently, a survey of National Health Service staff shortages will be conducted shortly. The results of this survey will be discussed with interested organisations.

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many whole-time equivalent anaesthetists are employed by each NHS trust in the North West Region; and what is the average number of clinical sessions scheduled per week by each trust. [77361]

Mr. Denham: The latest available information about the numbers of whole-time equivalent anaesthetists employed by each National Health Service trust in the North West Region is shown in the table. Information about the number of clinical sessions scheduled per week by each trust is not available.

NHS Hospital Medical Staff in Anaesthetics in the North West Region of England by NHS trust at 30 September 1997

Whole time equivalents

Trusts in North West Region	*All staff*
All Hospital Medical Staff in Anaesthetics	880
Aintree Hospitals NHS Trust	40
Blackburn Hyndburn and Ribble Valley Health Care NHS Trust	30
Blackpool Victoria Hospital NHS Trust	40
Bolton Hospitals NHS Trust	30
Burnley Healthcare NHS Trust	20
Bury Healthcare NHS Trust	20
Central Manchester Healthcare NHS Trust	60
Chorley and South Ribble NHS Trust	20
Countess of Chester Hospital NHS Trust	20
East Cheshire NHS Trust	10
Furness Hospitals NHS Trust	10
Halton General Hospital NHS Trust	10
Lancaster Acute Hospitals NHS Trust	20
Liverpool Womens Hospital NHS Trust	10
North Manchester Healthcare NHS Trust	30
Oldham NHS Trust	30
Preston Acute Hospitals NHS Trust	40
Rochdale Healthcare NHS Trust	20
Royal Liverpool and Broadgreen University Hospitals NHS Trust	40
Royal Liverpool Children's NHS Trust	20
Salford Royal Hospitals NHS Trust	40
South Manchester University Hospitals NHS Trust	70
Southport and Formby Hospitals Services NHS Trust	10
St. Helens and Knowsley Hospitals NHS Trust	30
Stockport Acute Services NHS Trust	30
Tameside and Glossop Acute Services NHS Trust	20
The Cardiothoracic Centre—Liverpool NHS Trust	10
The Manchester Children's Hospitals NHS Trust	20
The Mid Cheshire Hospitals NHS Trust	20
Trafford Healthcare NHS Trust	20
Walton Centre for Neurology and Neurosurgery NHS Trust	0
Warrington Hospitals NHS Trust	20
West Lancashire NHS Trust	10
Wigan and Leigh Health Service NHS Trust	20
Wirral Hospital NHS Trust	30
Wrightington Hospital NHS Trust	10

Notes:

1. Figures rounded to nearest ten
2. '0' denotes 5 or less
3. Totals may not equal sum of components due to rounding

Source:

Department of Health Annual Medical and Dental Workforce Census

Operating Department (Staff)

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research his Department has commissioned into the possible benefits of multi-skilling for operating department practitioners and theatre nurses; and if he will make a statement. [77359]

Mr. Denham: The Department has not commissioned any specific research on this topic. National Health Service employers are encouraged to develop multi-skilled employees where this is the best way to meet health service needs.

WALES

Fur Farming

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the future of fur farming. [76997]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: There are no fur farms in Wales.

The Government support the Private Member's Bill to prohibit fur farming which received its Second Reading on 5 March, and is now proceeding to Committee Stage.

Following the transfer of functions, this issue will be a matter for the National Assembly.

Organic Farming

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the prospects for organic farming in Wales. [76993]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: The Welsh Organic Food Sector Action Plan was launched by Mr. Gareth Rowlands, Chairman of the Organic Working Group, Mr. David Rowe-Beddoe, Chairman of the Welsh Development Agency, and by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales, on 8 March.

The industry-led Plan sets out an agenda for developing the organic sector in Wales, with the aim of encouraging an expansion of organic farming to 10 per cent. of the Welsh agricultural produce.

The Organic Conversion Information Service provides free advice to prospective organic farmers and the Organic Aid Scheme provides direct support for conversion. Subject to the approval of the European Commission, the new payments rates available under the Organic Aid Scheme are as follows:

£ per hectare

	APPS eligible land	*Ineligible land*	*Unimproved grassland/ rough grazing*
Year 1	225	175	25
Year 2	135	105	10
Year 3	50	40	5
Year 4	20	15	5
Year 5	20	15	5
Total	450	350	50

In future, following the transfer of functions, these issues will be a matter for the National Assembly.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assistance he will give to beef farmers to switch into *(a)* organic beef and *(b)* other products; and if he will make a statement. [76994]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: The Welsh Lamb and Beef Sector Action Plan was launched by Mr. John Lloyd Jones, Chairman of the Lamb and Beef Working Group, Mr. David Rowe-Beddoe, Chairman of the Welsh Development Agency and by my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Wales, on 8 March. The industry-led Plan sets out an agenda for developing the Lamb and Beef sector in Wales, and the assistance that will be available to farmers.

Subject to agreement by the European Commission, the payment rate available under the Organic Aid Scheme for beef farmers converting to organic production will be increased to £350 per hectare paid over five years. The current rate is £250 per hectare in non Less Favoured Areas and £50 in Less Favoured Areas.

In future, following the transfer of functions, this issue will be a matter for the Assembly.

CAP Reform

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the effect of the CAP Reform, on environmental improvement. [76996]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: The new integrated rural development regulation, part of the Agenda 2000 CAP reform package agreed last week, makes it mandatory to introduce new agri-environmental schemes in all parts of all member states. In Wales, this is already in place in the form of Tir Gofal.

The regulation will also allow the UK to introduce a new scheme to replace Hill Livestock Compensatory Allowances and deliver support to hill farmers more effectively while taking account of environmental protection requirements. The new scheme can be tailored to cater for differences and priorities in different areas within member states.

The creation of the new integrated rural development regulation creates a good basis on which future reforms will be able to implement a switch from supporting agricultural production to environmental measures. The current reforms have not moved very far in this regard and the significant shift to environmental measures is a matter which will have to be pressed further in reform of the CAP in future.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the recently announced Reform of the CAP and its effect on the farming community of Alyn and Deeside. [76995]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: The provisional agreement reached by the Agriculture Council represents a significant change in the direction of the CAP—a direction for which the UK Government have been strongly pressing. The Welsh Office is assessing how the proposed reforms will affect farmers in Wales.

Rural Development Grants

Mr. Livsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many Round 7 EAGGF Objective 5b rural development grants have to date received matched funding. [76302]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is currently considering applications for Round 7 EAGGF Objective 5B rural development grants. Applicants will be notified shortly of decisions on their bids.

In future, following the transfer of functions, this issue will be a matter for the National Assembly.

Mr. Livsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales on what date (i) the Welsh Office Internal Review will be completed and (ii) rural development grants will be allocated. [76303]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is currently considering the allocation of Rural Development Grants. Applicants will be notified of the decisions on their bids shortly.

In future, following the transfer of functions, this issue will be a matter for the National Assembly.

Mr. Livsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much money has been allocated in rural development grants in each of the last four years. [76304]

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: The rural development grant scheme started in the financial year 1996–97, since when £2.345m has been allocated to match projects funded

under Rounds 1 to 6 of the EAGGF Objective 5b programme. The allocations for each of the years to date are:

£

Financial year	Allocation
1996–97	911,353
1997–98	1,209,668
1998–99	[1]224,184

[1] These projects were submitted under Round 6 and were given conditional approval in 1997–98.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has completed his consideration of the applications for Round 7 EAGGF Objective 5B rural development grants and applicants will be notified shortly of decisions on their bids.

In future, following the transfer of functions, this issue will be a matter for the National Assembly.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Foreign Workers (Rights)

Mr. Alan Simpson: To ask the Minister of State, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans he has to introduce legislation restricting the rights of foreign workers to sue their employers in British courts; and what assessment he has made of the implications of such legislation in respect of trade and human rights obligations. [76998]

Mr. Hoon: The Government have no plans to introduce legislation restricting the rights of foreign workers to sue in the British courts.

Cabinet Office Expenditure

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Minister of State, Lord Chancellor's Department, pursuant to his answer of 17 December 1998, *Official Report*, columns *724–24*, if he will list the expenditure not included in his answer incurred by *(a)* his agencies and non-departmental public bodies and *(b)* the Central Office of Information for relevant work carried out for his Department. [71030]

Mr. Hoon *[holding answer 15 February 1999]:* The information sought regarding the expenditure incurred by my agencies and non-departmental bodies is in the table.

On behalf of my Department, £422,000 has been expended with the Central Office of Information for the production of a lay magistrates' recruitment campaign which began on 15 March 1999. This sum included national media placement in newspapers and magazines.

Publications and publicity expenditure agencies and non-departmental bodies

(1) The Court Service

(a) Nil

(b) This amount could only be provided at a disproportionate cost as staff recruitment is carried out within local budgets and therefore the overall cost is not readily available.

(c) Nil

(d) Nil

(e) Nil

(2) The Northern Ireland Court Service

(a) £10,000 (public opinion research)

(b) £14,844 (primarily staff recruitment—newspaper advertising)

(c) Nil

(d) Nil

(e) Nil

(3) The Public Trust Office

(a) £2,922 (public opinion survey on Charter standards)

(b) £6,874 (staff recruitment—newspaper advertising)

(c) Nil

(d) £68,823—see table

(e) Nil.

The Public Trust Office—Publicity expenditure

Department	£
Protection Division	
Printing of booklets (includes Handbook for Receivers, EPA booklet, Fees, Duties of Reciever etc)	28,300.10
Newsletter	15,195.00
	43,495.10
Receivership Division	
Printing of booklets (includes Charter Statement, Information for Nursing Homes etc)	2,500
	2,500
Trust Division	
Printing of Charter Statements	2,063
	2,063
Court Funds Office	
Printing of Charter Statements and Newsletter	3,695
	3,695
Corporate Publications	
Printing of Annual Report, Business Plan, Corporate Plan and How to Complain Leaflet	12,069
	12,069
Total	63,823

(4) The Public Record Office

(a) Nil

(b) £178,000 (of which £177,200 was expended for staff recruitment)

(c) £220 (mailing labels)

(d) £13,000

'Preserving our Common Past for our Children's Future' (£5,000)

Readers' Bulletin (£6,000)

Education leaflet (£2,000)

(e) Nil

(5) Her Majesty's Land Registry

(a) Nil

(b) £97,657 for newspaper advertising (of which £61,000 relates to staff recruitment)

(c) £9,988

(d) £328,800 (including exhibitions and video production)

(e) £38,640. A breakdown per item could only be provided at a disproportionate cost. However, £24,128 relates to the design and printing of literature (included in (d)) and £4,955 relates to advertising placed through the COI (included in (b)).

(6) The Legal Aid Board

(a) £11,197

public awareness survey of legal aid and of LAB franchising (£7,197)

survey of legal aid practitioners re: services provided by LAB (£4,000)

(b) £513,635

staff recruitment—newspaper (£481,937)

staff recruitment—radio (£868)

Franchising freephone number (£30,830)

(c) Nil

(d) £399,187 (see below)

(e) £2,177—for displaying legal aid information on videotaxt screens and the Internet.

The Legal Aid Board

Publicity expenditure	£
General	1,196
Press Cuttings	3,878
Duty Solicitor Newsletter	868
Focus Newsletter to legal aid Practitioners (seven issues)	115,032
Leaflets/Posters:	
'How to get free or low cost legal help'	
'A practical guide to legal aid'	141,304
'Criminal legal aid at the police station and in court'	
'What happens next?' leaflet	7,998
'Customer care—Legal Aid Board' leaflet	2,564
'Paying back the Legal Aid Board—the Statutory Charge'	3,429
'If you need this [LAB logo] look for this [franchising logo]'	36,017
Design of franchising logo	876
Posters and leaflets advertising the clinical negligence exclusive franchise launch	33,462
'Mediation—reaching agreements over divorce and separation' leaflet and poster	15,051
Conferences—national mediation launch	14,000
Regional Legal Services Committees—shaping the future of legal aid'	5,969
RLSC information pack	12,518
'Representations—what we do when you think legal aid should not be granted' leaflet	2,008
Duty Solicitors posters	3,017
Total	399,187

(7) The Law Commission

(a) £3,685 (public opinion survey on empirical research on aspects of the law of damages)

(b) £4,678 (staff recruitment—newspaper advertising)

(c) Nil

(d) Nil

(e) Nil

(8) The Lord Chancellor's Advisory Committee on Legal Education and Conduct (ACLEC)

(a) Nil

(b) Nil

(c) Nil

(d) £2,560

'Guide to making an application' (£1,[illegible])

'The Committee: It's work and it's membership' (£1,236)

(e) Nil

(9) The Judicial Studies Board

(a) Nil

(b) Nil

(c) Nil

(d) Nil

(e) Nil

(10) The Magistrates' Court Service Inspectorate

(a) Nil

(b) £8,994 (staff recruitment)

(c) Nil

(d) Nil

(e) Nil

(11) The Civil Justice Council

(a) Nil

(b) Nil

(c) Nil

(d) Nil

(e) Nil.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Data Collection

19. **Mr. Baker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what recent assessment he has made of the amount of administrative work required to be undertaken by teachers in connection with collecting data for his Department. [75594]

Mr. Charles Clarke: The Department keeps under constant review the amount of administrative work required to be undertaken by teachers.

National Grid for Learning

20. **Mr. Healey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on progress in the implementation of the National Grid for Learning. [75595]

Mr. Mudie: Plans for the National Grid for Learning are developing towards achievement of the targets announced in the National Grid for Learning Challenge "Open for Learning, Open for Business", launched in November 1998 by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister.

Over £700 million will be allocated for schools purchase of ICT networking and infrastructure by the year 2002. This funding will enable all schools to be connected to the grid by 2002, and will provide them with on-line access to a wide range of educational and managerial resources.

The Department published last year the results of a survey of ICT provision in schools, which indicated that 17 per cent. of primary schools and 83 per cent. of secondary schools were connected to the Internet by March 1998. This is in comparison to the previous year's survey (published in 1997), which indicated that 5 per cent. of primary schools and 47 per cent. of secondary schools were connected to the Internet at that time. Subsequent annual surveys will indicate the growth of schools with such connections. The latest estimates are that approximately 30 per cent. of primary schools, 90 per cent. of secondary schools and 45 per cent. of special schools in England may currently have some form of Internet access. The Government are committed to ensuring that all schools are connected to the Internet by 2002.

Employment Statistics

21. **Mr. John Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many people are currently in employment in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement. [75596]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Over 27¼ million people, the highest on record.

SSA Formula

22. **Mr. Gray:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans he has to review the education element of the SSA formula. [75597]

Ms Estelle Morris: The Government will not seek to change the system of calculating standard spending assessments for the three years up to 2001–02. It will, nevertheless, be subject to review. Ministers at the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions will take the lead. This will involve local government representation and Ministers with local government service interests.

Education (Financing)

23. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment when he last met the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals to discuss the financing of education. [75598]

Mr. Mudie: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State had a useful meeting with the CVCP yesterday. The discussion ranged widely over a number of issues, including funding for higher education.

Numeracy Hour

24. **Liz Blackman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what progress has been made in implementing the numeracy hour in primary schools. [75599]

Ms Estelle Morris: Daily dedicated mathematics lessons will formally begin in primary schools this September. In practice many schools have already introduced them, alongside the literacy hour. Earlier this week, schools received copies of a teaching framework designed to support the introduction of the mathematics session.

New Deal (Education and Training)

25. **Mr. Hawkins:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what representations he has received on the education and training options of the new deal. [75600]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Views on the education and training options offered under the New Deal are regularly received from a wide variety of education and training bodies, including Further Education Colleges, TECs and private training providers.

Disability Rights Commission

26. **Mr. Ben Chapman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what progress has been made in establishing the Disability Rights Commission. [75601]

Ms Hodge: Subject to Parliament enacting the Disability Rights Commission Bill, which was introduced into another place on 3 December 1998, we expect the Commission to be established in April 2000. Initial planning for the establishment of the Commission has begun. However, much of the work cannot commence until after Royal Assent of the Bill and the Chairman, Chief Executive and Commissioners have been appointed. We intend to make these appointments as soon as practicable after Royal Assent.

Personal Job Accounts

27. **Mr. Hepburn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans he has to introduce personal job accounts for the unemployed. [75602]

Mr. Andrew Smith: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave earlier to my hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth, North (Mr. Rapson), *Official Report*, column 1254.

New Deal (Young People)

28. **Miss McIntosh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on progress with the new deal for the young unemployed. [75603]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The New Deal for young people has made an encouraging start since its national roll-out in April 1998. The latest Government Statistical Service figures to the end of December 1998, and provisional Management Information to the end of January 1999, show that in Great Britain over 231,000 young people have already joined New Deal for 18 to 24-year-olds. Of these 43,330 have found unsubsidised employment, 15,170 subsidised employment and 49,590 have joined one of the other three options.

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will estimate the numbers of young people who have joined the New Deal. [75579]

Mr. Blunkett: The latest figures to the end of January show that 231,740 young people have joined the New Deal.

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how much has been spent to date on *(a)* subsidies, *(b)* allowances and *(c)* administration for the new deal for young people. [77181]

Mr. Andrew Smith *[holding answer 16 March 1999]:* Responsibility for the subject of these questions has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its Chief Executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Leigh Lewis to Mr. David Maclean, dated 18 March 1999:

As the Employment Service is an Executive Agency, the Secretary of State for Education and Employment has asked me to reply to your question about how much has been spent on subsidies, allowances and administration for the New Deal for 18 to 24 year olds. This is something which falls within the responsibilities delegated to me as Chief Executive of the Agency.

To the end of February, £16.2m has been brought to account on employment subsidies for young people and £28.6m on allowances for those participating in the training and work experience options under the programme. The cost so far of implementing and

managing New Deal has been £146.1m. This includes the initial expenditure on marketing, premises and IT equipment to establish the New Deal in its first year. All of these figures exclude the cost of payments to providers of New Deal.

I hope this is helpful.

Administrative Burdens (Schools)

29. **Mr. Ruffley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what representations he has received regarding administrative burdens on schools; and if he will make a statement. [75604]

Mr. Charles Clarke: We have met a wide range of teachers and organisations representing teachers over the past two years, and administrative burdens on schools were discussed at several of those meetings. We also answer many letters on the subject.

In all of these meetings and correspondence, we have made it clear that we recognise the need to keep unnecessary burdens on teachers to a minimum to enable them to focus on raising standards. We have been working vigorously to do so and set out much of the detail of that work during the Opposition day debate on the subject on 2 March.

Oversubscribed Schools

30. **Mr. Beard:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what progress he has made in enabling oversubscribed schools *(a)* to take in more pupils and *(b)* to keep their class sizes down. [75605]

Ms Estelle Morris: We are allocating over £150 million of funding for 1999/2000 to reduce infant class sizes for 5, 6 and 7-year-olds. This will enable over 1,600 popular schools to increase their intakes. The number of pupils in infant classes of over 30 will also fall from around 485,000 in January 1998 to under 200,000 in September 1999.

New Deal (Statistics)

31. **Mr. Dismore:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many young people have obtained employment through the new deal to date. [75606]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The latest Government Statistical Service figure to the end of December 1998, and provisional Management Information to the end of January 1999, show that 58,500 young people have already found employment through or with the help of the New Deal initiative.

New Deal (Disabled People)

33. **Dr. Palmer:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what support and advice is given by new deal advisers to disabled people seeking employment. [75608]

Ms Hodge: People with disabilities who are eligible for New Deal for 18 to 24-year-olds and those over the age of 25 receive the same range of support as other participants in these age groups. Those who would benefit from more specialist help and advice receive support from an Employment Service Disability Employment Adviser, who can offer access to the full range of disability programmes. In addition, New Deal for Disabled People offers those claiming Incapacity Benefit a client-focused service based on individual requirements and access to an extensive range of specialist disabled programmes.

The latest Government Statistical Service figures to the end of December 1998 show that 13 per cent. of those who joined New Deal for 18 to 24-year-olds and 19 per cent. of those who joined the New Deal for the 25-plus age group are recorded by the Employment Service as having a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term effect on their ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.

Child Care Information Services

34. **Mrs. Anne Campbell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what progress has been made on the development of child care information services. [75609]

Ms Hodge: Good progress is being made to develop Children's Information Services that meet local needs. Partnerships in every area are developing information services, which will be supported by a joint project between the Department and the Department of Social Security to set up local internet-linked databases.

Students (Hardship)

35. **Mr. Swayne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement about the extent of hardship among students. [75610]

Mr. Mudie: The most recent Student Income and Expenditure Survey for the academic year 1995–96 found no evidence of widespread student hardship. The next survey is now under way for the 1998–99 academic year.

We have uprated students' total resources for 1999–2000 in line with forecast inflation, thus protecting their value in real terms. We have almost doubled the Access Funds to £44 million and have made hardship loans available for new students.

School Governing Bodies

36. **Mr. Sawford:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assessment he has made of the impact on *(a)* school costs and *(b)* school administration of the new provisions for additional parent representatives on school governing bodies. [75611]

Ms Estelle Morris: Most schools will have to recruit only one more parent governor, and the value of additional parent representation should more than outweigh the cost of recruitment.

Class Sizes

37. **Mr. Edwards:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement about the implementation of the Government's policy to reduce class sizes to below 30 for five, six and seven-year-olds. [75612]

Ms Estelle Morris: We are providing a total of £620 million to enable the limit to be met ahead of schedule. The £150 million allocation we have announced for 1999–2000, which will provide an extra 2,500 teachers and build over 1,000 extra classrooms next year, will reduce the number of pupils in infant classes from

485,000 in January 1998 to fewer than 200,000 pupils in September 1999. The limit will be achieved in full in September 2001, ahead of our pledge to the electorate.

38. **Mr. Amess:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what recent representations he has received on classroom sizes. [75613]

Ms Estelle Morris: The Department has received just one representation as part of our autumn 1998 review of The Education (School Premises) Regulations 1996.

New Deal (Staff)

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many extra staff have been taken on by the Employment Service to administer the new deal and at what cost; and how many of those were taken on under the new deal scheme itself. [77182]

Mr. Andrew Smith *[holding answer 16 March 1999]:* Responsibility for the subject of this question has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its Chief Executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Leigh Lewis to Mr. David Maclean, dated 18 March 1999:

As the Employment Service is an Executive Agency, the Secretary of State for Education and Employment has asked me to reply to your question about how many extra staff have been taken on by the Employment Service to administer the New Deal and at what cost; and how many of those were taken under the New Deal scheme itself. This is something which falls within the responsibilities delegated to me as Chief Executive of the Agency.

Currently, there are some 3,500 Personal Advisers in the Employment Service working on the New Deals for young and older unemployed people, for Lone Parents and for people with disabilities, the great majority of whom have been recruited from within the Service. In addition many other staff are involved to some degree as part of their normal jobs in the support or management of New Deal programmes. Over the past year total staffing in the Employment Service has risen from around 34,000 to 36,000 reflecting the increasing demands on the Service as a whole, having reduced from a peak of over 50,000 in 1993–94.

As part of the overall increase in staffing over the past year, the Employment Service has so far recruited 289 young people through the New Deal, of whom a number are involved in New Deal support functions.

I hope this is helpful.

Electronic Red Boxes

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will name the Ministers in his Department who are regular users of electronic Red Boxes. [76174]

Mr. Mudie: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office on 16 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *651*.

Pupil Funding

Mr. Stevenson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how much funding has been provided per pupil in each type of school in Stoke-on-Trent over the last two years; and what is the planned allocation for each of the next three years. [76279]

Ms Estelle Morris: Funding per pupil at different types of school ultimately depends on decisions taken by Stoke-on-Trent local education authority in allocating its budget under fair funding. The following table sets out the education SSA per pupil allowances for Stoke-on-Trent over the last two years and the amount the authority will receive in 1999–2000. It is too soon to say what the amounts might be in 2000–01 and beyond. In addition, pupils in Stoke-on-Trent in 1999–2000 have benefited from £5,486,000 in the Standards Fund and £1,530,000 for capital.

Year	*Primary*	*Year-on-year increase*	*Secondary*	*Year-on-year increase*
1997–98	2,043	—	2,692	—
1998–99	2,155	112 (5.5%)	2,818	125 (4.6%)
1999–2000	2,281	125 (5.8%)	2,940	123 (4.4%)

School Inspectors

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) if he will provide a breakdown of the ethnic origins of inspectors carrying out Ofsted inspections of schools in each of the last three years; [77207]

(2) what training is provided by Ofsted for inspectors carrying out inspections of schools; [77208]

(3) what procedures Ofsted uses to monitor how many of its inspectors have experience of work in areas with significant ethnic minority communities. [77209]

Ms Estelle Morris: These are matters for Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools and I have therefore asked Chris Woodhead to write to my hon. Friend and to place a copy of his letter in the Library.

Employment Zones

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many employment zones have been established to date; and what assessment he has made of their effectiveness. [76434]

Mr. Andrew Smith: To date, five prototype Employment Zones have been established in Glasgow, Liverpool and Sefton, North-West Wales, Plymouth and South Tees. Three smaller projects are also underway in Birmingham and Solihull, Wembley and Doncaster and Wakefield.

The effectiveness of the prototypes is constantly being reviewed and evaluated. A qualitative evaluation is being undertaken jointly by Manchester and Leeds Metropolitan Universities and a quantitative survey is planned to run from May 1999 to June 1999. The outcome of the evaluation will be published at the end of the year.

The lessons learned from the prototypes will feed into the framework for fully fledged Employment Zones, which will run on the personal job account model from April 2000.

Single Currency

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list the subject areas

within his Department's responsibilities which will be covered by the information campaign on Britain's membership of a single currency. [73666]

Mr. Mudie: Her Majesty's Treasury will continue its dialogue with key external bodies to determine what information the public and business would need at each stage of the changeover process. Any information campaign would cover key concerns that the public and business may have. Chapter eight of HMT's "Outline National Changeover Plan" provides further information. Copies of the Plan are available in the Library.

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans he has to issue information from his Department to help the public make an informed decision when they vote on the single currency. [73589]

Mr. Mudie: Any plans by the Government to issue information during a referendum campaign on whether or not the UK should join the single currency would be made in light of the Government's response to the recommendations from the Neill Committee on the conduct of referendums. The Government will announce their conclusions on those recommendations when my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary publishes a White paper and draft Bill before the summer recess.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Turkey

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the financial assistance given to Turkey by his Department in each of the last three years, stating *(a)* the amount of funding, *(b)* the projects for which the funding was allocated and *(c)* what supervision his Department conducted on the development of these projects. [74638]

Ms Quin: The information is as follows:

£

	FY 98–99	*FY 97–98*	*FY 96–97*
Sponsored visits from Turkey to the UK	18,927	12,818	unavailable
Chevening Scholarships for Turkish students	230,146	123,214	58,000
Police training (under the ASSIST scheme, previously UKMTAS)	[1]43,460	0	0
Command programme budgets (including training, environmental and human rights projects)	[2]91,880	27,375	25,678
Human Rights Project Fund (established 1998)	[1]65,700	—	—

[1] Provisional
[2] Provisional figures including funding allocated in 1997–98 but dispersed in 1998–99 or not yet dispersed

All applications for financing projects under the Human Rights Project Fund, the Command Programme Budgets and ASSIST are considered against a range of criteria, which themselves derive from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's Objectives.

Projects once authorised are subject to supervision by the Embassy in Akara. The Embassy provides reports to relevant FCO departments on projects as they develop and assessments of projects on completion.

Electronic Red Boxes

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will name the Ministers in his Department who are regular users of electronic Red Boxes. [76177]

Mr. Fatchett: I refer the right hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office, *Official Report*, 16 March 1999, columns *651–52*.

European Commission Funding

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the position of his Department on the amendment to European Communities budget line B3–306 proposed by the Commission, to remove reference to any prohibition on these funds being used for propaganda purposes; what representations he made on the issue; and what assessment he has made of alternative uses for the funds. [76276]

Ms Quin: The notes in the EC Budget have no legal status and are indicative only. Under Article 205, the Commission retains the obligation to implement the budget as adopted on its own authority. The notes are proposed by the Commission and amended by either arm of the budgetary authority (Council or European Parliament). For non-compulsory expenditure, as in the case of this budget line, the Parliament has the final say.

The Government believe that information spending from the Community budgets should not be used for propaganda, but should contribute to increased transparency and understanding of the EU, its activities, its structure and its functions, by the citizen. This is a view shared by the Commission.

James Miles and Paul Loseby

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what contact there has been between his Department and the parents of Paul Loseby and James Miles since 1 January 1999. [76427]

Mr. Fatchett: Since 1 January, consular staff have been in frequent contact with the parents of Paul Loseby and James Miles.

Gibraltar

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the legislative steps required to enable citizens of Gibraltar to vote in elections of the European Parliament. [76638]

Ms Quin: Extension of the European Parliamentary franchise to Gibraltar will require amendment of the 1976 EC Act on Direct Elections. This will require the agreement of all EU Member States. HMG will seek such an amendment in the current negotiations in Brussels on establishing Common Principles for EP Elections. Once an amendment Act is agreed, it will require ratification in all Member States. We will also need to amend UK domestic legislation.

Travel (Millennium Date Change)

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to inform the public about the potential problems associated with *(a)* travelling, *(b)* living and *(c)* doing business overseas during the millennium date-change period. [77195]

Mr. Fatchett: We are issuing two sets of advice about potential Millennium Bug disruptions overseas. The first will alert British nationals who plan to travel, or will be resident overseas in the period late 1999 to early 2000 to the problem. The second will address the possible international consequences of the Millennium Bug for British businesses. Copies of these advice notices have been placed in the Libraries of the House.

Rambouillet

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the response of his Department to the letter of 5 March from the Serbian presidency on Rambouillet. [77155]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: Officials discussed the issues raised in the letter with the Yugoslav Ambassador on 8 March. They made it clear that the Rambouillet agreement was a fair and balanced text, following extensive consultations with both sides. The Contact Group was not now prepared to renegotiate the text.

The officials also pointed out that the Serbian delegation at Rambouillet had agreed to discuss the scope and character of an international presence in Kosovo necessary to implement the agreement.

Democratic Countries

Mr. Fallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list those countries that Her Majesty's Government classes as democratic. [77435]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: The large majority of states now, at least in principle, aspire to democratic government. But this involves much more than just holding free and fair elections. Transparent and accountable government, freedom of expression and association, and the rule of law are also essential to genuine democracy. Rather than producing league tables, which are liable to be misleading, we are working, through political pressure and practical assistance, to promote the establishment and strengthening of such democratic systems around the world.

Ambassadors for British Business

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the visits undertaken by each business ambassador. [77341]

Mr. Fatchett: The Ambassadors for British Business have participated in more than 120 events in 35 countries. The visits undertaken by each of the Ambassadors for British Business are listed.

Sir Christopher Benson—Albright and Wilson plc
- India—February 1999

Sir John Browne—BP Amoco
- Kuwait—June 1998

Allan Gormly—BPB plc
- Brazil—March 1999

Lord Marshall of Knightsbridge—British Airways plc
- Malta—March 1997
- Peru—December 1997
- Italy—March 1998
- USA—March 1998
- USA—June 1998
- Switzerland—September 1998
- USA—September 1998
- USA—November 1998
- USA—January 1999
- India—February 1999
- Hong Kong—March 1999

Tony Pedder—British Steel plc
- India—February 1998
- Turkey—July 1998
- Taiwan—October 1998
- Turkey—November 1998

Sir Iain Vallance—British Telecommunications (BT)
- Germany—April 1998
- France—May 1998
- China—June 1998
- Spain—September 1998

Lord Paul—Caparo Group Ltd.
- India—December 1997
- Nepal—January 1998
- USA—January 1998
- India—May 1998
- Germany—September 1998
- Finland—September 1998
- USA—October 1998
- Bangladesh—December 1998
- India—January 1999
- Turkey—March 1999
- Hong Kong—March 1999
- India—March 1999

Adair Turner—CBI
- Austria—January 1998
- Brazil—September 1998
- Egypt—October 1998
- USA—March 1999

Sir David Alliance—Coats Viyella
- Israel—May 1998
- USA—November 1998

Sir Colin Southgate—EMI Group plc
- Czech Republic—October 1998

Martin Sorrell—WPP Group plc

Japan—February 1998

USA—April 1998

Brazil—April 1998

Egypt—May 1998

USA—October 1998.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the cost to public funds of the business ambassador scheme. [77342]

Mr. Fatchett: The Ambassadors for British Business meet their own travel and accommodation costs on their overseas trips. There are some administrative costs to the department in staff time and for the initial meeting and follow up reception in London. In addition our Ambassadors at overseas posts sometimes make use of their entertainment budgets to host an event in connection with the scheme.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many business ambassadors there are currently. [77340]

Mr. Fatchett: There are currently 36 Ambassadors for British Business. They include the Chairman or Chief Executive of some of Britain's largest and internationally successful companies and represent a wide cross-section of the British private sector.

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how the role of Ambassadors for British Business will change following the creation of British Trade International; and what changes there have been in the list of these ambassadors in the past year. [77551]

Mr. Fatchett: The Ambassadors for British Business scheme will be administered by British Trade International. There will be no change in the role of the Ambassadors for British Business.

There have been two deletions to the list during the past year; Mr. James Leek, McLeod Russel Holdings plc, in June 1998 and Lord Sainsbury in July 1998 when he became a member of the Government.

Iraq

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the explanation given to the UN by the Iraqis for the non-distribution of $275 million worth of medicinal supplies; and what reports he has received concerning incomplete apparatus and quality control tests on these supplies. [77254]

Mr. Fatchett: I share my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's assessment, as set out in the answer of 16 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *573*, of the Iraqi memorandum about the non-distribution of $275m worth of medical supplies. It is an unconvincing attempt by Iraq to divert responsibility for the distribution problems in the centre and south on to others. In the northern governorates, where distribution is carried out by UN agencies, no problems in the distribution of medical goods were noted in the UN Secretary-General's report.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action the British delegation at the UN has taken to implement UN resolutions in regard to the children in Iraq. [77327]

Mr. Fatchett: HMG has always worked to ensure that UN Security Council resolutions on Iraq are implemented. We were at the forefront of efforts to introduce the UN "oil for food" humanitarian programme and continue to do all we can to help the Iraqi people. Recently, the UK mission has been working at the UN to press Iraq to prioritise contracts effectively, so that the food and health needs of the Iraqi people, including vulnerable groups such as infants, are put first. They have, for example, raised concerns that Iraq has not so far submitted contracts to the Sanctions Committee for high protein biscuits (for pregnant and lactating mothers) and has submitted contracts for only $1.5 million (out of $8.7 million) for high protein milk for infants.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports he has received concerning the killing by Western aircraft of an oil-for-food programme monitor. [77358]

Mr. Fatchett: None.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the basis is in international law for the concept of no-fly zones. [77354]

Mr. Fatchett: The No Fly Zones were established in April 1991 and August 1992 in support of UN Security Council resolution 688 which called on Iraq to end its repression of the civilian population. The No Fly Zones are justified under international law in response to a situation of overwhelming humanitarian necessity.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has obtained on the categories of information exchanged between the US and UNSCOM. [77260]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister gave on 8 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *15*, and the answer I gave him on 9 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *181*.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports he has received about possible external involvement in the murder of Ayatollah Muhammed Saddiq al-Sadr at Najaf. [77253]

Mr. Fatchett: We have seen press reports that the Government of Iraq have blamed external forces for the murder of Ayatollah al-Sadr. But others, including credible Iraqi Shia sources, hold the Iraqi regime responsible for the assassination. The UN Special Rapporteur previously expressed his fears that such killings formed part of a systematic attack on the independent leadership of Shia muslims in Iraq. We urge the Iraqi authorities to conduct a full investigation into al-Sadr's death and bring the perpetrators to justice.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs for what reasons *(a)* disinfectant and *(b)* coffins are included in UN sanctions on Iraq. [77328]

Mr. Fatchett: Under the UN "oil for food" programme, Iraq is allowed to import goods for essential civilian needs, such as disinfectant and coffins.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs for what reasons the supply of radiotherapy equipment, chemotherapy drugs and analgesics to Iraq has been blocked by British advisers. [77255]

Mr. Fatchett: 96 per cent. of the contracts submitted by Iraq to the Security Council under the UN "oil for food" programme have been approved. The majority of holds are put in place because paperwork is either incorrect or insufficient. The UK currently has holds on six contracts for medical supplies because the full details required by the UN have not been provided (and in one case because the contract is illegible). I can assure my hon. Friend that the equipment and drugs he specifies do not feature on any of these contracts.

Overseas Trade Services

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the overseas trade services provided to companies in the last year to which figures are available together with the revenue received by his Department *(a)* by service and *(b)* by company. [77489]

Mr. Fatchett: 5,179 chargeable export services were performed for UK companies during financial year 1997–98 yielding a total of £1.23 million. This revenue accrues to the Department of Trade and Industry. These services fall into two main categories: Tailored Market Information, which can include basic market information, identification and assessment of potential agents/ distributors, market assessments for a company's product or service, advice on a company's market approach and general information on local investment opportunities; and Commercial Publicity Services. To provide a breakdown of the services provided to individual companies during this period would involve disproportionate cost.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Central Asia

Mr. Howard: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps she has taken to encourage British business to enter into joint ventures and invest in Central Asia. [63546]

Clare Short: An important element of the White Paper's objective of reducing global poverty, is socially responsible partnership with British Business. In Central Asia, we are hoping to work with British Gas. Through a special scheme, we have helped British companies investigate investment opportunities. Our main programmes of assistance in these countries necessarily focus on supporting their transition (to market economies and pluralist democracies) in an equitable and sustainable manner. To this end, in Central Asia we are working with governments to tackle agriculture and health reform, whilst at the same time also helping build civil society.

Zimbabwe

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the current status of the organisational development project with the Zimbabwe Republic police. [77247]

Clare Short: The project was approved in December 1996. It aims to provide efficient and accountable police services to the people of Zimbabwe, especially the poor and disadvantaged. Recent reviews by the Department for International Development indicate that the project is making good progress and is likely to achieve its aim. The Zimbabwe Republic Police are already working more closely with local communities in the planning and delivery of improved police services.

Nigeria

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development when she next plans to visit Nigeria. [76966]

Clare Short: I have no firm plans to visit Nigeria but would aim to do so if a visit would help take forward a Nigerian programme to reduce poverty.

Iraq

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will meet Karol Sikora, Chief of the WHO Cancer Programme and Professor of International Cancer Medicine, to discuss the cancer situation in Iraq. [77256]

Mr. Foulkes: The Department for International Development has not been asked to meet Karol Sikora, but my officials are in contact with WHO about the health care needs of Iraqi people, including cancer. Discussions are at an early stage, but we hope they will lead to a joint project.

Organisation of African Unity

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will place a copy of the agreement made in February 1999 between her Department and the Organisation of African Unity in the Library. [77490]

Clare Short: In February the Department for International Development entered into an agreement with the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) to provide initial support to their Conflict Management Centre as part of a longer term partnership approach to building OAU capacity in the area of conflict prevention and peace-building. This initiative is part of our conflict reduction strategy: specifically our aim to support the role of regional and sub regional organisations in conflict prevention.

We are providing USD 515,800, equivalent to approximately £320,000, over 20 months for human resource capacity building in the OAU Conflict Management Centre. Our contribution covers recruitment and salary costs for 4 advisers—i.e., one senior political officer and three regional desk officers—who will be contracted by the OAU for a period of 18 months. In addition, we are providing technical advice to assist in completion of the OAU Conflict Management Centre's Capacity Building Programme document which will be presented to OAU Member States and potential funding partners.

A copy of the exchange of letters with the Organisation of African Unity, including the Project Memorandum for the Capacity Building Programme, which constitutes our agreement with them will be placed in the Library of the House.

TREASURY

European Structural Funds

Mr. Livsey: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many times *(a)* he and *(b)* his officials have met Welsh Office (i) Ministers and (ii) officials within the last six weeks to discuss matched funding for (1) Objective 1 and (2) Objective 2 in Wales. [76902]

Mr. Milburn *[holding answer 15 March 1999]:* Ministers and officials are in regular dialogue on all matters of policy.

Millennium Compliance

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps are being taken *(a)* nationally and *(b)* internationally to avert a liquidity crisis in the event of the millennium non-compliance of computer systems. [76058]

Mrs. Roche: The best way to proceed is for financial institutions to achieve a high degree of Year 2000 compliance. The primary responsibility for achieving that lies with the industry. The Financial Services Authority regards this as a major supervisor priority and has made it clear that firms which fail to implement appropriate measures face regulatory intervention. The Bank of England has been making strenuous efforts to ensure that payment and settlement systems are well prepared. The UK financial services sector is generally regarded as a leader in working towards Year 2000 preparedness.

Internationally, there are a number of groups working on increasing awareness and promoting preparedness, including the Joint Year 2000 Council of the international regulatory organisations, on which the FSA is represented.

ECOFIN

Mr. Hood: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the outcome of the ECOFIN Council held in Brussels on 15 March; and if he will make a statement. [77267]

Ms Hewitt: The Chancellor and I attended the Economic and Financial Council—ECOFIN—of the European Union in Brussels on 15 March 1999.

There was a discussion of both expenditure and resources under Agenda 2000, which led to Presidency conclusions. These noted that while Ministers favoured the maintenance of the compromise package for agriculture, there was "broad support" for measures to reduce its budgetary cost.

The Commission and the Chairman of the Economic and Finance Committee presented draft Opinions on the Stability programmes of Spain, Germany, Belgium, France and Luxembourg. The Council adopted the Opinions on each.

There was an orientation debate on the structural aspects of the Broad Economic Policy Guidelines, based on preparatory reports by the Commission and the Economic Policy Committee. These analyse Member States' assessments of their product, capital and labour markets which were produced in response to a request by the Cardiff European Council

The President of the Court of Auditors, Mr. Jan Karlsson, introduced the report of the Court of Auditors for 1997. The Council adopted a recommendation for the discharge of the 1997 Budget.

The Council adopted conclusions calling for a strengthening of the fight against fraud.

The Commission presented its Communication to the Council on Duty Free in response to a remit from Vienna European Council which was published very recently. No decision was taken.

The Council noted an interim report by the Presidency of discussions of the draft directive on the taxation of energy products and invited the Committee of Permanent Representatives to continue its work.

The Commission presented a proposal for an optional, experimental and time limited reduced rate of VAT on labour intensive services, in response to a request from the Vienna European Council.

Flexible Mortgages

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what measures he has taken to encourage the provision of flexible mortgages; and if he will make a statement. [77012]

Ms Armstrong *[holding answer 16 March 1999]:* I have been asked to reply.

In meetings and other engagements, I have encouraged mortgage lenders to develop and market more mortgage products with flexible repayment arrangements. My Department is continuing to pursue this through discussions with lenders and insurers aimed at providing better protection for home buyers.

SCOTLAND

Press Releases

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will set out the conventions governing the propriety and cost of press releases issued by his Department, its agencies and non-departmental bodies; and what is the total cost of the press releases issued since May 1997. [71468]

Mr. Dewar *[holding answer 16 February 1999]:* The rules governing the work of the Government Information and Communication Service (GICS) are laid down in the Guidance on the work of the Government Information Service published by the Cabinet Office in July 1997. More specific guidance on the writing and issuing of press releases is given in the working guide for Government Information Officers. Copies of both documents are in the Library of the House.

The cost of press releases issued by my Department and its agencies since May 1997 is £119,182.

I will ask Chief Executives of non-departmental bodies to write to the hon. Member shortly on this matter.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many press releases have been issued by his Department, its agencies and non-departmental bodies in each of the years 1990 to 1998. [71453]

Mr. Dewar *[holding answer 16 February 1999]:* The number of press releases issued by my Department and its agencies is set out in the list. I will ask Chief Executives of non-departmental bodies to write to the hon. Member shortly with this information.

Number of press releases

1990: 2,101
1991: 2,040
1992: 2,098
1993: 2,101
1994: 1,820
1995: 2,028
1996: 2,487
1997: 2,314
1998: 2,896.

Departmental Cars

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the cars owned by his Department, its agencies and public bodies, giving in each case the *(a)* age, *(b)* purchase cost and *(c)* annual running cost; how many of these cars have chauffeurs; and at what annual cost in each of the last five years. [69203]

Mr. Dewar *[holding answer 8 February 1999]:* The information requested about cars owned by my Department and its Executive Agencies is listed in the table. Information about cars owned by other public bodies is not held centrally.

Model	*Number*	*Age (years)*	*Total purchase price £*	*Total annual running cost (£) (1 February 1998 to 31 January 1999)*
Small/medium saloon	5	Over 9	34,515	3,141
Small/medium saloon	5	8 to 9	39,429	4,588
Small/medium saloon	23	7 to 8	191,236	25,594
Small/medium saloon	18	6 to 7	151,358	23,976
Small/medium saloon	27	5 to 6	242,965	38,099
Large saloon	4	5 to 6	65,500	12,700
Small/medium saloon	28	4 to 5	260,307	41,899
Large saloon	1	4 to 5	15,200	2,450
Small/medium saloon	16	3 to 4	187,400	26,110
Small/medium	39	2 to 3	345,982	49,130
Small/medium	68	1 to 2	604,987	76,421
Large saloon	5	1 to 2	85,340	10,690
Small/medium saloon	5	Under 1	49,380	1,152

The large saloon cars are used for the Government Car Service (GCS) in Scotland. At present, 8 chauffeurs are employed to provide this service. The number of chauffeurs has varied depending on demand on the GCS. The total annual cost of employing chauffeurs during the past five years is detailed in the table.

Year	*Cost (£)*
1994	150,000
1995	156,000
1996	165,000
1997	155,000
1998	160,000

From 1 July 1999, this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

Accident and Emergency Departments

Mrs. Laing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the *(a)* average and *(b)* longest waiting time for each accident and emergency department in Scotland in each year since 1996. [74513]

Mr. Galbraith *[holding answer 10 March 1999]:* Centrally held information on waiting times in Accident and Emergency (A&E) Departments is derived from a series of week-long surveys of patients carried out in the 32 A&E Departments across Scotland.

Data at the level of detail requested are not held centrally. Information on the median and the time which 95 per cent. of patients waited from arrival at A&E to completion of treatment, since 1996, is provided in the table. Information on the Accident and Emergency Surveys is published annually in Scottish Health Statistics, copies of which have been placed in the Library.

NHS in Scotland: A&E Waiting Times: Time from arrival to completion of treatment by survey [1] and type of patient

	June 1996 Survey			
	Trolley cases		Walking wounded	
Hospital	*Median wait (minutes)*	*95th percentile [2] (minutes)*	*Median wait (minutes)*	*95th percentile [2] (minutes)*
Crosshouse Hospital	45	154	63	162
The Ayr Hospital	81	197	97	212
Borders General Hospital	98	235	60	160
Vale of Leven District General Hospital	69	166	69	193
Inverclyde Royal Hospital	55	128	37	84
Royal Alexandra Hospital	69	171	59	148
Victoria Hospital	69	200	71	150
Queen Margaret Hospital	67	170	49	115
Glasgow Royal Infirmary	85	235	74	163
Stobhill Hospital	55	154	50	130
Victoria Infirmary Hospital	22	88	22	66
Southern General Hospital	71	158	50	179
Royal Hospital for Sick Children, Glasgow	74	155	55	145
Glasgow Western Infirmary	85	185	95	215
Raigmore Hospital	67	174	35	111
Monklands District Hospital	100	222	73	175
Law Hospital	48	95	40	107
Hairmyres Hospital	50	101	39	110
Aberdeen Royal Infirmary	112	266	95	274
Royal Aberdeen Children's Hospital	38	115	49	120
Dr. Gray's Hospital	85	219	49	129
Belfour	[3]—	[3]—	15	36
Royal Hospital for Sick Children	71	175	55	163
Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh	93	225	89	227
St. John's at Howden, Livingston	66	154	62	167
Dundee Royal Infirmary	74	182	48	130
Perth Royal Infirmary	72	155	68	194
Falkirk and District Royal Infirmary	65	140	45	113
Stirling Royal Infirmary	70	180	70	161
Western Isles Hospital	50	210	30	135
Dumfries and Galloway Royal Infirmary	71	141	35	116
Gilbert Bain Memorial Hospital	[3]—	[3]—	27	105

NHS in Scotland: A&E Waiting Times: Time from arrival to completion of treatment by survey [1] and type of patient

	March 1997 Survey			
	Trolley cases		Walking wounded	
Hospital	*Median wait (minutes)*	*95th percentile [2] (minutes)*	*Median wait (minutes)*	*95th percentile [2] (minutes)*
Crosshouse Hospital	32	150	49	132
The Ayr Hospital	71	162	64	139
Borders General Hospital	75	183	50	144
Vale of Leven District General Hospital	67	170	45	144
Inverclyde Royal Hospital	66	167	46	132
Royal Alexandra Hospital	90	204	84	199
Victoria Hospital	75	195	83	168
Queen Margaret Hospital	67	190	43	135
Glasgow Royal Infirmary	110	239	92	223
Stobhill Hospital	60	160	46	120
Victoria Infirmary Hospital	38	107	29	86
Southern General Hospital	72	146	45	119
Royal Hospital for Sick Children, Glasgow	28	92	37	117
Glasgow Western Infirmary	85	210	82	175

NHS in Scotland: A&E Waiting Times: Time from arrival to completion of treatment by survey [1] and type of patient

Hospital	March 1997 Survey			
	Trolley cases		Walking wounded	
	Median wait (minutes)	95th percentile [2] (minutes)	Median wait (minutes)	95th percentile [2] (minutes)
Raigmore Hospital	88	217	41	120
Monklands District Hospital	94	239	77	204
Law Hospital	66	155	46	137
Hairmyres Hospital	75	184	48	130
Aberdeen Royal Infirmary	121	287	98	212
Royal Aberdeen Children's Hospital	40	111	38	101
Dr. Gray's Hospital	85	197	45	120
Belfour	[4]—	[4]—	21	65
Royal Hospital for Sick Children	80	159	58	149
Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh	112	283	118	274
St. John's at Howden, Livingston	67	195	58	174
Dundee Royal Infirmary	84	210	45	115
Perth Royal Infirmary	65	138	43	136
Falkirk and District Royal Infirmary	75	205	70	170
Stirling Royal Infirmary	59	153	70	171
Western Isles Hospital	80	120	39	97
Dumfries and Galloway Royal Infirmary	62	197	35	106
Gilbert Bain Memorial Hospital	[3]—	[3]—	35	130

NHS in Scotland: A&E Waiting Times: Time from arrival to completion of treatment by survey [1] and type of patient

Hospital	November/December 1997 Survey			
	Trolley cases		Walking wounded	
	Median wait (minutes)	95th percentile [2] (minutes)	Median wait (minutes)	95th percentile [2] (minutes)
Crosshouse Hospital	41	129	51	150
The Ayr Hospital	63	138	52	139
Borders General Hospital	90	219	53	171
Vale of Leven District General Hospital	84	179	47	161
Inverclyde Royal Hospital	80	189	[illegible]	136
Royal Alexandra Hospital	79	206	60	159
Victoria Hospital	83	194	81	182
Queen Margaret Hospital	90	193	47	121
Glasgow Royal Infirmary	71	183	46	131
Stobhill Hospital	50	155	50	120
Victoria Infirmary Hospital	33	91	22	84
Southern General Hospital	72	161	62	158
Glasgow Western Infirmary	86	214	84	203
Raigmore Hospital	60	149	33	107
Monklands District Hospital	76	195	66	174
Law Hospital	55	160	44	108
Hairmyres Hospital	75	223	60	137
Aberdeen Royal Infirmary	111	236	84	193
Royal Aberdeen Children's Hospital	[3]—	[3]—	39	95
Dr. Gray's Hospital	80	184	45	126
Belfour	[4]—	[4]—	34	[4]—
Royal Hospital for Sick Children	86	197	50	163
Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh	97	265	71	242
St. John's at Howden, Livingston	69	193	51	163
Dundee Royal Infirmary	96	222	57	135
Perth Royal Infirmary	62	207	47	150
Falkirk and District Royal Infirmary	75	196	40	110
Stirling Royal Infirmary	60	160	45	115
Western Isles Hospital	65	140	35	130
Dumfries and Galloway Royal Infirmary	60	168	34	103
Gilbert Bain Memorial Hospital	[3]—	[3]—	35	100

[1] Figures based on week-long surveys in A&E Departments
[2] Time in which 95% of all patients treatment was completed
[3] Not shown—number of cases less than or equal to 10
[4] Not applicable
Source:
ISD, Scotland

From 1 July 1999, this will be a matter for the Scottish parliament.

Assisted Areas

Mr. Canavan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many written representations the Scottish Office has received which support assisted area status funding for the Falkirk Council area. [75928]

Mr. Dewar *[holding answer 17 March 1999]:* Some 26 written representations in support of the continuing designation of the Falkirk area as an Assisted Area have now been received by The Scottish Office. Comments have been made on the criteria which might be used in designating the new Assisted Areas and the geographical units which could be employed, and all such representations, of course, imply support for regional aid towards investment assistance to industry to continue to be made available. The main form of this aid is currently Regional Selective Assistance, which may only be granted in the Assisted Areas.

Mr. Canavan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the written representations received by the Scottish Office regarding the allocation of assisted area status funds in Scotland following the current review. [75927]

Mr. Dewar *[holding answer 17 March 1999]:* No such representations have been received.

Mr. Canavan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations the Scottish Office has made to the Department of Trade and Industry in relation to the review of assisted area status. [75925]

Mr. Dewar *[holding answer 17 March 1999]:* The Department of Trade and Industry is conducting the review of the GB Assisted Areas map jointly with The Scottish Office and other Government Departments.

Mr. Canavan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recommendations the Scottish Office has made to the Department of Trade and Industry regarding the allocation of assisted area status funds in Scotland following the current review. [75926]

Mr. Dewar *[holding answer 17 March 1999]:* None. The overall level of investment assistance to industry in the designated Assisted Areas of Scotland, primarily through the operation of the Regional Selective Assistance scheme, is met from the Scottish Block.

Royal Commission on Long-term Care

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what estimate he has made of the cost of implementing paragraph 6.53 of the report by the Royal Commission on Long-term Care *(a)* to the Scottish Executive and *(b)* to local authorities. [75493]

Mr. Galbraith *[holding answer 10 March 1999]:* Paragraph 6.53 of the Royal Commission report recommends that personal care should be free both in residential settings and at home and estimates the UK cost at £1.12 billion. The approximate Scottish share of this total, based on the proportion of people over 65 living in Scotland, would be £94.4 million.

We are undertaking work at present to refine this figure further to take into account the differences in relative wealth, cost of residential and home based care and service provision in Scotland.

From 1 July 1999, these matters will be for the Scottish Parliament.

Care and Repair Grants

Mr. Davidson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his answer of 9 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *133*, on care and repair grants, if he will break down the sum spent from revenue funding in 1997–98 by local authority. [76373]

Mr. Macdonald: The total value of works completed in 1997–98 was around £6 million, covering some 1,400 homes. Revenue funding in 1997–98 amounted to £1.2 million. Scottish Homes and Local Authorities normally fund the revenue costs on a 50/50 basis. However, the break-down by local authority is not held centrally.

From 1 July 1999, this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

Pupil-teacher Ratios

Mr. Gorrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what the pupil-to-teacher ratios were in Scottish *(a)* primary schools and *(b)* secondary schools for (i) 1998–99 and (ii) the four previous years. [76243]

Mrs. Liddell: The available information is set out in the table.

Pupil-teacher ratios in publicly funded primary and secondary schools in Scotland

	Primary	*Secondary*
1994–95	19.5	12.9
1995–96	19.5	12.9
1996–97	19.6	13.0
1997–98	19.9	13.2
1998–99[1]	19.4	[2]—

[1] Provisional
[2] Not yet available

As from 1 July 1999, this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

Salaries (Education)

Mr. Gorrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what are the current salaries of the principals of the institutions of further and higher education in Scotland. [76241]

Mrs. Liddell: It is for individual Boards of Management of incorporated further education (FE) colleges to determine the remuneration of college Principals. Information on their current salaries will not be available centrally until colleges 1998–99 annual accounts are submitted next year. The remuneration

(including benefits-in-kind, taxable expense allowances and bonuses) of Principals for 1997–98, as shown in the colleges 1997–98 accounts, is as follows:

£000

College	Salary excluding pension contribution 1997–98
Aberdeen College	79
Angus College	51
Anniesland College	51
Ayr College	70
Banff and Buchan College of Further Education	57
The Barony College	47
Bell College of Technology	60
Borders College	53
Cardonald College	74
Central College of Commerce	60
Clackmannan College of Further Education	50
Clydebank College	57
Coatbridge College	52
Cumbernauld College	52
Dumfries and Galloway College	59
Dundee College	68
Elmwood College	56
Falkirk College of Further and Higher Education	68
Fife College	62
Glasgow College of Building and Printing	68
Glasgow College of Food Technology	50
Glasgow College of Nautical Studies	56
Glenrothes College	62
Inverness College	49
James Watt College of Further and Higher Education	75
Jewel and Esk Valley College	61
John Wheatley College	48
Kilmarnock College	64
Langside College	67
Lauder College	57
Lews Castle College	48
Moray College	[1]65
Motherwell College	59
North Glasgow College	63
Oatridge Agricultural College	47
Perth College	66
Reid Kerr College	60
South Lanarkshire College[2]	53
Stevenson College	62
Stow College	71
Edinburgh's Telford College	63
Thurso College	54
West Lothian College	51

[1] Moray College has not yet submitted approved Annual Accounts for 1997–98 to the Department. The figure shown is the salary for 1996–97.

[2] Formerly called Cambuslang College.

The Department does not collect information about the salaries of Principals of higher education institutions in Scotland nor of FE institutions other than incorporated FE colleges. These are autonomous bodies responsible for the pay and conditions of their staff.

From 1 July 1999, this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

Autism

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what statutory provisions require an education authority to provide a relevant education service for an individual child with autistic spectrum disorder; and if he will make a statement. [76404]

Mrs. Liddell: Education authorities have a duty under section 1 of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980 to secure the adequate and efficient provision of school education for the children in their area, including children with special educational needs. This includes children with autistic spectrum disorders.

The Government are implementing a number of measure, announced in November 1998, to assist authorities to improve provision for children with special educational needs. This includes increased investment of £2.5 million per year in in-service development and training for staff working with children with special educational needs, including those with autism.

Electronic Red Boxes

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will name the Ministers in his Department who are regular users of electronic Red Boxes. [76172]

Mr. Dewar: I refer the right hon. Member to the reply given on 16 March 1999, *Official Report*, column 65, by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office.

Agri-Environment Programme

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the Scottish Agri-Environment Programme. [76364]

Mr. Macdonald: The number of participants in the Scottish Agri-Environment Programme is increasing and we have responded by making extra resources available. Expenditure was £9.7 million in 1997–98 and is planned to reach £13 million this year and £22 million by 2001–02. A number of improvements to existing schemes are planned for this year and a new all-Scotland scheme is on course for introduction during the Spring of 2000 under Agenda 2000.

From 1 July 1999, this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

Infective Salmon Anaemia

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to seek recategorisation of infective salmon anaemia as a List 3 disease. [76214]

Mr. Macdonald: None. We remain committed to the eradication of infectious salmon anaemia from our waters.

From 1 July 1999, this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what measures he is taking to promote vaccination of salmon against infective salmon anaemia. [76211]

Mr. Macdonald: Vaccination against infectious salmon anaemia is not compatible with our strategy of eradication and is not permitted by EC and domestic legislation.

From 1 July 1999, this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

Working Time Directive

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many civil servants in his Department have been invited to waive the Working Time Directive requirement to work less than 48 hours a week on 17 consecutive weeks; how many civil servants in his Department have refused to waive the requirement; and what is the total cost of compliance with the Directive. [76801]

Mr. Dewar: 36 staff have signed an agreement to disapply the 48-hour limit. Two staff have declined.

The standard terms and conditions of service for staff employed by the Scottish Office are well within the limits set by the Working Time Regulations. Compliance costs are not kept centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Waiting Lists

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what were the average waiting times for each health board for *(a)* knee and *(b)* hip joint replacement operations for September (i) 1992, (ii) 1993, (iii) 1994, (iv) 1995 and (v) 1996. [76152]

Mr. Galbraith *[holding answer 15 March 1999]:* The mean waiting time for knee and hip joint replacement operations by Health Board for the years ending 30 September for the period requested, is provided in the table.

From 1 July 1999, this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

NHS in Scotland: Mean waiting times by Health Board for knee and hip joint replacements for the year ended 30 September 1992–96

Year ending/health board	*Knee replacement mean wait (days)*	*Hip joint replacement mean wait (days)*
1992		
Argyll and Clyde	168	127
Ayrshire and Arran	124	121
Borders	96	63
Dumfries and Galloway	224	216
Fife	151	115
Forth Valley	168	137
Grampian	81	93
Greater Glasgow	130	140
Highland	193	168
Lanarkshire	114	110
Lothian	168	137
Orkney	32	24
Shetland	32	31
Tayside	163	112
Western Isles	233	113
1993		
Argyll and Clyde	140	131
Ayrshire and Arran	129	109
Borders	60	66
Dumfries and Galloway	236	214
Fife	149	128
Forth Valley	233	157
Grampian	101	89
Greater Glasgow	124	114
Highland	206	150
Lanarkshire	142	140
Lothian	167	140
Orkney	40	36
Shetland	70	57
Tayside	100	93
Western Isles	261	163
1994		
Argyll and Clyde	152	116
Ayrshire and Arran	125	100
Borders	82	65
Dumfries and Galloway	267	237
Fife	138	129
Forth Valley	219	180
Grampian	100	88
Greater Glasgow	181	161
Highland	190	140
Lanarkshire	144	141
Lothian	145	138
Orkney	28	25
Shetland	99	100
Tayside	111	105
Western Isles	103	95
1995		
Argyll and Clyde	153	129
Ayrshire and Arran	104	93
Borders	84	85
Dumfries and Galloway	276	196
Fife	141	129
Forth Valley	260	212
Grampian	79	80
Greater Glasgow	163	148
Highland	191	187
Lanarkshire	180	149
Lothian	178	159
Orkney	60	50
Shetland	124	96
Tayside	99	106
Western Isles	114	75
1996		
Argyll and Clyde	125	116
Ayrshire and Arran	101	87
Borders	100	84
Dumfries and Galloway	235	169
Fife	87	82
Forth Valley	236	186
Grampian	100	84
Greater Glasgow	186	167
Highland	197	198
Lanarkshire	174	123
Lothian	176	150
Orkney	23	44
Shetland	123	79
Tayside	116	95
Western Isles	117	64

Source:
ISD, Scotland

NHS Trusts

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish a table showing the salaries *(a)* with and *(b)* without pension contributions for the Chief Executive and Chair of each NHS trust in Scotland for each year since 1992–93. [76115]

Mr. Galbraith *[holding answer 15 March 1999]:* The information requested is published and can be obtained from the individual trust Annual Report. Chief Executives who are members of the NHS pension scheme pay the same rate of contribution as other NHS staff.

The level of remuneration paid to Chairmen of NHS Trusts is determined by legislation and has been unchanged since 1992. The payments made, which are not eligible for pension contribution, are set out in the attached table according to the financial year in which the Trust was established.

From 1 July 1999, this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

NHS trust chairmen remuneration

NHS trust	£
1992–93	
Aberdeen Royal Hospital	19,285
South Ayrshire Hospital	17,145
1993–94	
Ayrshire and Arran Community Health	17,145
Caithness and Sutherland	15,125
Dundee Teaching Hospitals	19,285
Grampian Healthcare	19,285
Monklands and Bellshill	19,285
Moray Health Service	17,145
North Ayrshire and Arran Community	19,285
Raigmore	17,145
Royal Alexandra Hospital	17,145
Southern General Hospital	19,285
Stirling Royal Infirmary	17,145
Victoria Infirmary	19,285
West Lothian	19,285
Yorkhill	19,285
1994–95	
Angus	17,145
Central Scotland Healthcare	19,285
Dumfries and Galloway Acute and Maternity Hospitals	17,145
Dundee Healthcare	19,285
East and Midlothian	17,145
Edinburgh Healthcare	19,285
Edinburgh Sick Children's	15,125
Falkirk and District Royal Infirmary	17,145

NHS trust chairmen remuneration

NHS trust	£
Fife Healthcare	19,285
Glasgow Royal Infirmary	19,285
Greater Glasgow Community and Mental Health Services	19,285
Hairmyres and Stonehouse	17,145
Highland Communities	17,145
Inverclyde Royal Hospital	17,145
Kirkcaldy Acute Hospitals	17,145
Law Hospital	17,145
Perth and Kinross	17,145
Queen Margaret Hospital, Dunfermline	17,145
Renfrewshire Healthcare	19,285
Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh	19,285
Stobhill	19,285
West Glasgow Hospitals	19,285
Western General Hospitals	19,285
1995–96	
Argyll and Bute	17,145
Borders Community Health Service	17,145
Borders General Hospital	17,145
Dumfries and Galloway Community Services	17,145
Glasgow Dental Hospital	15,125
Lanarkshire Healthcare	19,285
Lomond Healthcare	17,145
Scottish Ambulance Service	19,285

Health Boards (Debts)

Mr. Moore: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the amount of *(a)* bad debts and *(b)* claims abandoned for each health board broken down by category in the last year for which figures are available. [77143]

Mr. Galbraith: The information is set out in the table. Health Board Accounts detail claims abandoned into three categories: (1) Private Accommodation, (2) Road Traffic Acts and (3) Other. All items entered in these three categories are regarded as bad debts.

£

Health board	*Private accommodation*	*Road traffic acts*	*Other*	*Total*
Argyll and Clyde	16,938	—	5,256	22,194
Ayrshire and Arran	—	—	820	820
Borders	—	—	25	25
Dumfries and Galloway	—	—	404	404
Fife	—	—	196	196
Forth Valley	—	—	5,210	5,210
Grampian	—	—	478	478
Greater Glasgow	—	—	1,606	1,606
Highland	—	—	3,060	3,060
Lanarkshire	—	—	1,307	1,307
Lothian	20	—	—	20
Orkney	—	21	972	993
Shetland	—	660	366	1,026
Tayside	—	—	632	632
Western Isles	154	511	719	1,384
Total	17,112	1,192	21,051	39,355

The information has been taken from the Health Boards Annual Accounts for 1997–98.

From 1 July 1999, this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

NHS Surplus Properties

Mr. Moore: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list for the last 10 years how much money was raised from the sale of surplus properties in the NHS; if

he will estimate the amount to be raised in the next 10 years and what use has been made of the proceeds of these sales. [77142]

Mr. Galbraith: Information is not held centrally on the disposal proceeds of surplus properties but the NHSiS has raised the sums in the table over the last 10 years from the sale of surplus land, buildings, vehicles and equipment.

£000

Year	
1988–89	10,124
1989–90	17,550
1990–91	11,408
1991–92	10,344
1992–93	9,705
1993–94	14,362
1994–95	26,119
1995–96	49,083
1996–97	39,248
1997–98	31,407

All sale proceeds have been used for the benefit of the NHSiS by augmenting the public and private sector capital available to the Service.

Estimates of receipt proceeds for the next 10 years are not available. However the recent NHSiS capital planning exercise estimated receipts of the magnitude detailed in the table for the current year and the next five years. These receipts are from all asset disposals and again will be used to benefit the NHSiS.

£000

Year	
1998–99	20,787
1999–00	17,210
2000–01	19,185
2001–02	31,093
2002–03	20,513
2003–04	13,670

Airports and Air Services

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what progress has been made on the study of the economic impact of regional airports and regional air services announced in "A New Deal for Transport"; when these studies will be completed in Scotland; and if he will make a statement; [76987]

(2) what plans he has *(a)* to approve and *(b)* to initiate developments relating to airports before the completion of the economic impact studies covering airports and air services announced in "A New Deal for Transport"; and if he will make a statement. [76988]

Mr. Macdonald: The Scottish Airports and Air Services Study was commissioned in November 1998 by The Scottish Office and the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions. The Study is being undertaken by Environmental Resources Management. An extensive consultation exercise is under way and a Reference Group has been established to provide a forum for particularly interested parties to contribute. Seminars are being held in Edinburgh (29 March) and Inverness (30 March) to widen debate.

The Study is intended to inform policy on meeting future demand for sustainable air travel and to consider the economics and costs of providing improve airport facilities. The consultants will report in July 1999.

My right hon. Friend has no plans, however, to initiate airport development and has received no approaches to approve such developments at the major airports in central Scotland. Developments at airports operated by the Government owned company, Highlands & Islands Airports Limited, will take place as required to meet operational needs.

From 1 July 1999, development of airports will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

Reforestation

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what has been the acreage of reforestation undertaken in the United Kingdom during each of the last three years; and if he will list the areas of the country where this has taken place. [77002]

Mr. Macdonald: The area of woodland planted in the United Kingdom by, or with the aid of grants from, the Forestry Commission or the Department of Agriculture for Northern Ireland, is given in the table, broken down by country. Trees have been planted in almost all parts of the United Kingdom and a more detailed list is not available.

All areas in hectares

Year ended 31 March	*New planting*	*Replanting*	*Total*
United Kingdom			
1996	16,350	13,891	30,241
1997	17,187	14,995	32,182
1998	16,656	14,101	30,757
Scotland			
1996	10,560	6,828	17,388
1997	11,669	7,202	18,871
1998	11,406	6,330	17,736
England			
1996	4,378	4,154	8,532
1997	4,352	4,262	8,614
1998	4,139	4,309	8,448
Wales			
1996	442	2,269	2,711
1997	411	2,964	3,375
1998	498	2,733	3,231
Northern Ireland			
1996	970	640	1,610
1997	755	567	1,322
1998	613	729	1,342

Local Authority Budgets

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the Scottish Office budget foreach local authority in Scotland in cash terms and at 1998–99 prices for *(a)* 1995–96, *(b)* 1996–97, *(c)* 1997–98 and *(d)* 1998–99; and what is his estimate for (i) 1999–2000, (ii) 2000–01 and (iii) 2001–02. [76865]

Mr. McLeish *[holding answer 16 March 1999]:* Each local authority in Scotland is responsible for setting its own budget. The Scottish Office provides funding to authorities through Aggregate External Finance (AEF) in support of their net current expenditure. The table shows AEF funding at cash and constant 1998–99 prices by local authority for 1995–96 to 1999–2000. The distribution of AEF at a local authority level for 2000–01 and 2001–02 is not yet decided, but overall support for local authority expenditure for each of these years is planned to increase by 3.0 per cent. and 2.7 per cent. respectively.

Summary of AEF

£000

	1995–96 AEF (cash)	*1995–96 AEF (constant)*
Aberdeen	30,697	33,245
Angus	11,422	12,370
Annandale/Eskdale	3,686	3,992
Argyll/Bute	14,011	15,174
Badenoch/Strathspey	1,402	1,518
Banff/Buchan	10,568	11,445
Bearsden/Milngavie	4,330	4,689
Berwickshire	2,314	2,506
Caithness	3,575	3,872
Clackmannan	7,093	7,682
Clydebank	7,787	8,433
Clydesdale	8,126	8,800
Cumbernauld	7,877	8,531
Cumnock	6,140	6,650
Cunninghame	20,912	22,648
Dumbarton	10,440	11,306
Dundee	29,984	32,473
Dunfermline	15,860	17,176
East Kilbride	9,338	10,113
East Lothian	11,854	12,838
Eastwood	4,952	5,363
Edinburgh	77,938	84,406
Ettrick/Lauderdale	3,982	4,312
Falkirk	18,932	20,503
Glasgow	158,560	171,720
Gordon	9,004	9,751
Hamilton	15,000	16,245
Inverclyde	15,362	16,637
Inverness	7,221	7,820
Kilmarnock	10,448	11,315
Kincardine/Deeside	5,785	6,265
Kirkcaldy	18,416	19,944
Kyle/Carrick	14,879	16,114
Lochaber	3,081	3,337
Midlothian	10,287	11,141
Monklands	17,445	18,893
Moray	11,094	12,015
Motherwell	21,872	23,687
Nairn	1,181	1,279
Nithsdale	6,671	7,225
North East Fife	9,273	10,043
Perth/Kinross	16,770	18,162
Renfrew	29,383	31,822
Ross/Cromarty	8,280	8,967
Roxburgh	4,454	4,824
Skye/Lochalsh	2,381	2,579
Stewartry	2,421	2,622
Stirling	13,688	14,824
Strathkelvin	10,692	11,579
Sutherland	2,260	2,448
Tweeddale	1,855	2,009
West Lothian	20,324	22,011
Wigtown	4,092	4,432
	775,399	839,753
Orkney Isles	35,758	38,726
Shetland Isles	46,706	50,582
Western Isles	66,143	71,632
	148,607	160,941
Borders	97,293	105,368
Central	222,881	241,379
Dumfries and Galloway	134,799	145,987
Fife	287,186	311,021
Grampian	410,359	444,416
Highland	211,943	229,533
Lothian	583,705	632,149
Strathclyde	2,022,459	2,190,312
Tayside	335,503	363,348
	4,306,128	4,663,512
Scotland	5,230,134	5,664,206

Note:
The AEF figures are as announced at the time of the settlements

£000

	1996–97 AEF (cash)	*1996–97 AEF (constant)*	*1997–98 AEF (cash)*	*1997–98 AEF (constant)*	*1998–99 AEF (cash/constant)*	*1999–2000 AEF (cash)*	*1999–2000 AEF (constant)*
Aberdeen, City	195,282	205,168	190,338	195,096	185,886	192,480	187,784
Aberdeenshire	199,986	210,110	202,767	207,836	205,386	213,112	207,913
Angus	99,503	104,540	101,928	104,476	104,519	108,762	106,109
Argyll and Bute	111,481	117,125	109,325	112,058	107,728	110,884	108,179
Clackmannanshire	46,878	49,251	46,523	47,686	46,658	48,430	47,249
Dumfries and Galloway	151,508	159,178	151,565	155,354	152,465	159,723	155,827
Dundee	169,403	177,979	168,511	172,724	167,497	174,018	169,773
East Ayrshire	123,630	129,889	123,915	127,013	122,861	126,160	123,082
East Dunbartonshire	92,508	97,191	93,619	95,959	90,690	97,122	94,753
East Lothian	78,669	82,652	79,614	81,601	78,998	83,321	81,288
East Renfrewshire	70,856	74,443	73,650	71,491	71,509	77,572	75,680
Edinburgh, City	398,977	419,175	408,344	418,553	408,887	426,157	415,761
Eilean Siar	67,123	70,521	66,887	68,559	68,581	70,424	68,706
Falkirk	130,501	137,108	130,673	133,940	133,235	136,312	132,987
Fife	333,212	350,081	330,150	338,404	328,919	344,529	336,124
Glasgow City	828,533	870,477	810,636	830,902	788,624	813,291	793,451
Highland	241,808	254,049	238,449	244,410	238,287	249,883	243,787
Inverclyde	101,591	106,734	101,623	104,164	96,505	98,391	95,991
Midlothian	78,036	81,987	76,261	78,168	77,389	80,531	78,566

£000

	1996–97 AEF (cash)	1996–97 AEF (constant)	1997–98 AEF (cash)	1997–98 AEF (constant)	1998–99 AEF (cash/constant)	1999–2000 AEF (cash)	1999–2000 AEF (constant)
Moray	85,968	90,320	85,749	87,893	85,047	89,039	86,867
North Ayrshire	137,970	144,955	141,448	144,984	137,018	143,556	140,054
North Lanarkshire	332,110	348,923	330,463	338,725	319,860	333,935	325,789
Orkney	37,975	39,897	38,201	39,156	39,508	40,424	39,438
Perth and Kinross	115,251	121,086	116,151	119,055	121,350	126,934	123,837
Renfrewshire	175,134	184,000	175,197	179,577	168,181	177,333	173,007
Scottish Borders	110,368	115,955	109,488	112,225	109,654	115,013	112,207
Shetland	48,224	50,665	55,873	57,270	55,984	57,130	55,736
South Ayrshire	107,128	112,551	109,304	112,037	105,599	112,248	109,510
South Lanarkshire	300,889	316,121	301,209	308,739	286,192	302,874	295,485
Stirling	84,103	88,361	85,579	87,718	83,787	88,856	86,688
West Dunbartonshire	114,739	120,548	110,845	113,616	105,610	110,152	107,465
West Lothian	147,235	154,689	147,257	150,938	149,299	156,250	152,438
Scotland	5,316,579	5,585,729	5,311,539	5,444,327	5,241,713	5,464,846	5,331,532

Note:
The AEF figures are as announced at the time of the settlements

From 1 July 1999, this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

New Deal (Gateway)

Mr. Gorrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the percentage level of attendance by trainees in Scotland at the Gateway stage of the New Deal. [77419]

Mr. Dewar: Of the 22,652 young people who started the New Deal in Scotland for the period to the end of December 1998, a total of 21,125 (93.3%) attended their first interview and entered the Gateway stage of the New Deal.

Children's Hearings

Mr. Russell Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what progress has been made on implementing measures to improve the throughput of cases entering the children's hearing system; and if he will make a statement. [78045]

Mr. Galbraith: Following receipt of the "Just In Time" report in December 1997, I asked Mrs. Sally Kuenssberg, Chairman of the Scottish Children's Reporter Administration to re-form her working group to consider with the agencies concerned how best to implement the report's recommendations.

At my request, Mrs. Kuenssberg's group has now produced a blueprint to apply to all relevant agencies. It consists of a code of practice and comprehensive standards and targets for the handling of all cases referred to the hearings system, whether on grounds of offending or care and protection. I have endorsed the Blueprint which is published today. Copies have been placed in the Libraries.

The care of our children, especially those at risk, is of greatest importance. Effective and early action in co-ordinated working for children and families is widely recognised as beneficial. I am determined to see improvements in services for children and families. This blueprint offers a systematic and innovative approach to tackling both quality and timing issues.

I have been very encouraged by the wide measure of support for the principles and practical measures contained within the blueprint and now look to the agencies concerned to take forward its introduction. The targets will be a challenge for some and progress towards achieving them will secure improvements over current arrangements. The key to successful introduction and further progress on the Blueprint depends on the active co-operation between the agencies to improve the delivery of their service. The blueprint paves the way for this and I look to Chief Executives and senior managers to take action to monitor its implementation and development within their agencies.

I have asked Sally Kuenssberg's group to continue to meet periodically to assess progress and, in the light of experience, where standards and targets might be reviewed and improved upon.

From 1 July 1999, this will become a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

Incontinence Beds

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many beds dealing with incontinence are available in Scotland in *(a)* all service hospitals, *(b)* general hospitals, *(c)* specialist hospitals, *(d)* teaching hospitals and *(e)* hospitals in other categories. [77009]

Mr. Galbraith: It is not possible to say how many beds are available for dealing with incontinence in Scotland, as most treatment is now carried out on an out-patient basis by specialist nurses and physiotherapists. Patients rarely require in-patient treatment for incontinence per se, but may require to be admitted for treatment of the underlying cause of the incontinence. The causes of incontinence are wide ranging, and treatment therefore takes place in many different settings. Beds are not specifically set aside for treatment of incontinence, in the same way as they are not specifically set aside for many other conditions.

From 1 July 1999, this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Bereavement Benefits

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate the present distribution of recipients of widow's benefits by income decile, distinguishing between those receiving widow's pension and those receiving Widowed Mothers Allowance. [76134]

Angela Eagle: I refer my hon. Friend to the written answer I gave to my right hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) on 1 March 1999, *Official Report*, columns *597–98*. Information on Widowed Mothers Allowance is not available.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate *(a)* the proportion of recipients of Widowed Mothers Allowance who are in receipt of occupational pension payments and *(b)* their distribution areas on the overall income range and across weekly incomes in the form set out in paragraph 13 and paragraph 14 of his consultation paper on bereavement support. [76104]

Angela Eagle: The information is not available as information on current Widowed Mothers Allowance recipients in receipt of Occupational Pensions is not available because the sample sizes involved are too small to allow a robust analysis.

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate the cost of extending the bereavement payment to those bereaved people of pension age who are also in receipt of Income Support. [76449]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 12 March 1999]:* It is estimated that extending eligibility for the Bereavement Payment would increase expenditure by up to £60 million for pensioners receiving Income Support (IS) in households in 2001–02.

Note:

This excludes IS pensioners who are in, or whose partners are in, residential care and nursing homes.

Source:

Income Support Quarterly Statistical Enquiries.

Mr. Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what proportion of respondents to the Green Paper, "Support in Bereavement", expressed opposition to the replacement of widow's pension with a time-limited bereavement allowance; and what proportion expressed support. [77300]

Angela Eagle: Of the 80 responses to the Support in Bereavement Green Paper received, 28 respondents expressed opposition to the principle of replacing Widows' Pension with a time-limited Bereavement Allowance. 5 respondents expressed support of this specific aspect of the proposals.

Appointments

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list those people he has appointed to public bodies since 1 November 1998, indicating the positions to which they have been appointed and if they receive remuneration. [76462]

Mr. Timms: The information is in the table.

Appointee	*Position and Non-Departmental Public Body*	*Remuneration*
Air Commordore J. G. Hargreaves CBE	Member, Central Advisory Committee on War Pensions	None
Brigadier H. L. B. Salmon OBE	Member, Central Advisory Committee on War Pensions	None
Jean Cooper	Member, Disability Living Allowance Advisory Board	£126 per meeting
Dr. Margaret du Feu	Member, Disability Living Allowance Advisory Board	£237 per meeting
Marilyn Howard	Member, Disability Living Allowance Advisory Board	£126 per meeting
Dr. Karin Moses	Member, Disability Living Allowance Advisory Board	£237 per meeting
Lisa Shend'ge	Member, Disability Living Allowance Advisory Board	£126 per meeting
Mr. Brendan Fenelon	Member, Industrial Injuries Advisory Council	£112 per meeting
Professor Eithne McLaughlin	Member, Social Security Advisory Committee	£128 per day
Dr. Adrian Stokes	Member, Social Security Advisory Committee	£128 per day
Miss Boyle	Vice-Chair, War Pensions Committees	None
Mr. W. Brown	Member, War Pensions Committees	None
Mr. Cartwright	Member, War Pensions Committees	None
Mr. Jones	Member, War Pensions Committees	None
Major Marshall	Member, War Pensions Committees	None
Mr. Proctor	Member, War Pensions Committees	None
Mr. C. Ruff	Member, War Pensions Committees	None
Dr. J. K. Anand	Medical Member, Disability Appeal Tribunals'	£201 per day
Dr. A. J. Hicks	Medical Member, Disability Appeal Tribunals'	£201 per day
Dr. C. E. John	Medical Member, Disability Appeal Tribunals'	£201 per day
Dr. P. Griffiths	Medical Member, Disability Appeal Tribunals'	£201 per day
Dr. E. B. Knight-Jones	Medical Member, Disability Appeal Tribunals'	£201 per day
Dr. F. Willis	Medical Member, Disability Appeal Tribunals'	£201 per day
Dr. R. D. Jones	Medical Member, Disability Appeal Tribunals'	£201 per day
Mrs. M. Bhatti	Carer Member, Disability Appeal Tribunals'	£124 day
Mr. B. Butler	Carer Member, Disability Appeal Tribunals'	£124 day
Mr. M. F. Cook	Carer Member, Disability Appeal Tribunals'	£124 day
Mr. A. Gupta	Carer Member, Disability Appeal Tribunals'	£124 day
Mrs. S. Horn	Carer Member, Disability Appeal Tribunals'	£124 day
Mrs. S. A. Howard	Carer Member, Disability Appeal Tribunals'	£124 day
Mr. C. C. Lea	Carer Member, Disability Appeal Tribunals'	£124 day
Mr. J. C. Locke	Carer Member, Disability Appeal Tribunals'	£124 day

Appointee	Position and Non-Departmental Public Body	Remuneration
Mr. D. J. Vinookumar	Carer Member, Disability Appeal Tribunals[1]	£124 day
Dr S. G. Cotton	Medical Member, Medical Appeal Tribunals[1]	£246 per day
Mr. P. W. Edwards	Medical Member, Medical Appeal Tribunals[1]	£246 per day
Dr. D. Goldin	Medical Member, Medical Appeal Tribunals[1]	£246 per day
Dr. J. Hancock	Medical Member, Medical Appeal Tribunals[1]	£246 per day
Dr. E. A. Morrison	Medical Member, Medical Appeal Tribunals[1]	£246 per day
Dr. J. E. Rees	Medical Member, Medical Appeal Tribunals[1]	£246 per day
Dr. P. M. Desai	Medical Assessor, Social Security Appeal Tribunals[1]	£201 per day
Dr. J. N. Smith	Medical Assessor, Social Security Appeal Tribunals[1]	£201 per day
Dr. W. T. Thom	Medical Assessor, Social Security Appeal Tribunals[1]	£201 per day
Miss V. Clare	Part-Time Chairman, Social Security Appeal Tribunals[2]	£270 per day
Mr. J. A. Lakin	Part-Time Chairman, Social Security Appeal Tribunals[2]	£270 per day
Ms M. Roberts	Part-Time Chairman, Social Security Appeal Tribunals[2]	£270 per day

[1] The President of the Independent Tribunal Service is responsible for the appointment of the Members to the five Appeal Tribunals that are within this Department's jurisdiction

[2] The Lord Chancellor is responsible for the judicial appointments to the five Appeal Tribunals that are within this Department's jurisdiction

Special Advisers

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the total number of occasions when *(a)* departmental and *(b)* non-departmental special advisers have travelled abroad in an official capacity since 2 May 1997. [76822]

Mr. Timms: Between 2 May 1997 and 28 February 1999, the special advisers from this Department have made one visit overseas in an official capacity. All travel complied with the requirements of the Ministerial Code and the Civil Service Management Code.

Means-tested Benefits

Mr. Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will breakdown the total of one in three persons living in households claiming at least one major means-tested benefit by the type of benefit claimed. [76208]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 12 March 1999]:* This Department's latest estimates do not suggest a total of one in three persons living in households claiming at least one major means-tested benefit.

Number of people claiming means-tested benefits as percentage of total population

Benefit(s)	Number of people as percentage of total population
Housing Benefit only	1
Council Tax Benefit only	3
Income Support only	3
Family Credit only	0
Housing Benefit and Family Credit only	—
Council Tax Benefit and Family Credit only	—
Income Support and Family Credit only	—
Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit only	4
Housing Benefit and Income Support only	1
Council Tax Benefit and Income Support only	3
Housing Benefit, Council Tax Benefit and Family Credit only	1
Housing Benefit, Income Support and Family Credit only	—
Council Tax Benefit, Income Support and Family Credit only	—
Housing Benefit, Council Tax Benefit and Income Support only	11

Number of people claiming means-tested benefits as percentage of total population

Benefit(s)	Number of people as percentage of total population
Housing Benefit, Council Tax Benefit, Income Support and Family Credit	—
Any of the above means-tested benefits	26

Notes:

1. A "major means-tested benefit" was defined as being one of Housing Benefit, Council Tax Benefit, Income Support (including Income Support for the unemployed, before October 1996), Family Credit or Jobseeker's Allowance (Income Based, from October 1996 onwards). However, on the 1996–97 Family Resources Survey dataset, it was not possible to distinguish Unemployment Benefit from Jobseeker's Allowance (Income Based), which was introduced in October 1996. Thus, Jobseeker's Allowance (Income Based) has not been included in analyses in the table. Analysis of the Family Resources Survey from April to September 1996 (inclusive) show that the proportion of people in households in receipt of at least one of the four means tested benefits given in the table was 27 per cent.
2. Estimates are subject to sampling error and to variability in non-response. Receipt of Social Security benefits are also based on respondents' own assessment and may be subject to misreporting.
3. Percentages are rounded to the nearest integer. The symbol "—" indicates less than 0.5 per cent.

Source:

1996–97 Family Resources Survey (GB).

Working Time Directive

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many civil servants in his Department have been invited to waive the Working Time Directive requirement to work less than 48 hours a week on 17 consecutive weeks; how many civil servants in his Department have refused to waive the requirement; and what is the total cost of compliance with the Directive. [76800]

Mr. Timms: 105 staff in this Department have signed an agreement to disapply the 48 hour limit.

The standard terms and conditions of service for staff employed by the Department are well within the limits set by the Working Time Regulations. The Regulations do not require employers to keep records of the number of workers who refuse to sign an opt-out agreement and no central records are kept by this Department. Costs of complying with the Directive are not available.

Water Charges

Mr. Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement of the future of the direct payment scheme for water charges; and what plans he has to increase the priority of water charges in the order of payments included in the direct payment scheme. [77078]

Angela Eagle: The provision for making direct payments from Income Support and income based Jobseeker's Allowance for water charges will continue to operate when disconnection of household water supplies is prohibited. We are considering how the scheme will operate in the light of this policy development. We do not have any plans to increase water charges in the priority order within the direct payment scheme.

Ministerial Meetings (US)

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many times Ministers in his Department have met their counterparts in the US Government since 1 June 1998; and if he will list the dates and locations of each meeting, the Ministers involved on each occasion, and the name of the US counterpart at each meeting. [77118]

Mr. Timms: None.

Standard Spending Assessments

Mr. Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if the standard spending assessment for councils incorporates moneys to compensate councils for disregarding war pensions for housing benefit and council tax benefit. [76982]

Angela Eagle: The mandatory War Pension disregards are funded in the same way as other expenditure for Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit. The bulk of this expenditure is met by central Government subsidy. Local authorities have discretionary powers to disregard up to the full amount of a War Disablement Pension and War Widow's Pension not already covered by the statutory disregard. However, any benefit payable as a result of such discretion is funded from local authorities' own resources. It is for each local authority to decide, how much, if anything, it can afford.

Newsletters

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what are the current security classifications of the newsletters produced for the staff of *(a)* the Benefits Agency and *(b)* the Child Support Agency; how often each newsletter is produced; and when each newsletter was first produced. [77119]

Angela Eagle: The Benefits Agency (BA) has two national newsletters produced for staff, "BA Weekly" and "BA News". The "BA Weekly" has been produced every week since the Agency was established in April 1991. "BA News" is produced monthly. It was first produced in 1991 and is intended to reach all staff in the BA.

The Child Support Agency (CSA) has two national newsletters produced for staff. "The Weekly" has been produced every week since the Agency was established in April 1993. "The Outlook" is produced monthly and was first produced in autumn 1996.

There are no security classifications on either the BA or CSA publications.

Tribunal Hearing (Aldershot)

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what the cost was to the public purse of the adjourned Independent Tribunal Service hearing into case No. S/45/167/1998/00627 at Aldershot on 10 March; [77099]

(2) what reasons his Department was not represented at the Independent Tribunal Service hearing into case No. S/45/167/1998/00627 at Aldershot on 10 March. [77100]

Angela Eagle: The President of the Independent Tribunal Service has advised that the cost of the adjourned hearing into case S/45/167/1998/00627 at Aldershot on 10 March 1998 was £33.48.

The tribunal had a written submission from the adjudication officer. Although it is normal practice for the Department to be represented at hearings, a presenting officer was unable to attend this hearing. The tribunal is able to hear an appeal without a presenting officer. Where a hearing is adjourned in these circumstances, a presenting officer will attend the re-hearing.

Adjourned Tribunal Hearings

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) at how many cases in the past 12 months his Department has failed to be represented at a scheduled hearing causing the tribunal to stand adjourned; and what percentage of the total number of hearings were so adjourned; [77098]

(2) what powers the Independent Tribunal Service has to make an award in favour of the applicant when the Department fails to be represented or present at hearings; [77102]

(3) if he will review the guidance given to the tribunal chairmen as to what award may be made when the Department of Social Security fails to appear and advance a reason to the tribunal for absence; and if he will make a statement. [77101]

Angela Eagle: Information about Departmental representation at hearings in the past 12 months cannot be provided and would be available only at disproportionate cost.

The Department is not obliged to provide a representative at tribunal hearings. However, under the new decision making and appeals arrangements, the Benefits Agency aims to provide a presenting officer at all hearings where a representative would add value to the proceedings.

The Social Security (Adjudication) Regulations 1995 allow a tribunal, in the absence of a party to the proceedings, to proceed with a hearing or to give such directions for the determination of the case as it thinks proper. Similar provision is made in the regulations for new decision making and appeal arrangements which will be debated in the House on 22 March. However,

regulations also provide for a tribunal to adjourn an oral hearing either on application of any party to the proceedings or of its own accord. The decision of the tribunal whether or not to adjourn a hearing will always be made on the circumstances of the individual case. The handling of such decisions is, of course, a judicial matter.

Guidance for tribunals is a matter for the President of the Independent Tribunal Service, Judge Michael Harris. I have asked Judge Harris to write to my hon. Friend.

Housing Benefit

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many housing benefit claims, in the last year for which figures are available, were subject to each rate of non-dependant deduction; at each rate how many claimants were living in *(a)* local authority properties, *(b)* housing association properties and *(c)* private properties; and what each figure represents as a percentage of total housing benefit claims. [77325]

Angela Eagle: The information is set out in the tables.

Housing benefit recipients, cases with non-dependant deductions, by tenure and rate of deduction, Great Britain—May 1998 (provisional)

Thousands

		Deduction					
	All cases	*£7.00*	*£16.00*	*£22.00*	*£36.00*	*£41.00*	*£45.00*
Total	187	121	19	17	10	6	14
Local authority	138	92	14	13	8	4	9
Housing association	28	18	2	2	1	2	3
Private tenants	21	12	3	2	1	..	3

Housing benefit recipients, percentage of cases with non-dependant deductions, by tenure and rate of deduction. Great Britain—May 1998 (provisional)

Percentage

		Deduction					
	All cases	*£7.00*	*£16.00*	*£22.00*	*£36.00*	*£41.00*	*£45.00*
Total	4.2	2.7	0.4	0.4	0.2	0.1	0.3
Local authority	3.1	2.0	0.3	0.3	0.2	0.1	0.2
Housing association	0.6	0.4	—	—	—	—	0.1
Private tenants	0.5	0.3	0.1	—	—	—	0.1

Notes:
1. Figures are rounded to the nearest thousand, percentages to one decimal place.
2. Recipients may be a single person or a couple.
3. "—" denotes nil or less than 0.1 per cent.
4. ".." denotes less than 500 cases.
5. Cases with more than one non-dependant deduction appear in the table once with only the first occurrence of a deduction being counted. The order of preference for this analysis is with the lowest deduction first.
6. Cases where the claimant or partner receives Attendance Allowance have been excluded.

Source:
Housing Benefit Management Information System, Annual 1 per cent. sample enquiries.

Single Gateway

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security on what subjects, other than employment opportunities, advice will be provided by the Single Gateway personal advisers. [77426]

Angela Eagle: The Personal Advisers' prime purpose will be to help clients explore ways in which they can overcome barriers that prevent participation in the labour market. However, the role will encompass much more than this. They will advise claimants on benefit entitlement, including any current welfare needs, and provide the first point of contact for any queries or difficulties. They will also help individuals gain access to a range of services, such as childcare provision, specialist counselling, housing support and training, and will be able to provide clients with information about their potential eligibility for in-work benefits so that clients can understand what their income levels might be if they moved into employment.

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what training will be given to the personal advisers who will conduct the new Single Gateway interviews; and if this training will be specific to particular claimant groups. [77429]

Angela Eagle: We are producing a programme of learning to ensure that all Personal Advisers will be able to provide advice, guidance and counselling to help clients identify and overcome their barriers to employment, and also to provide clients with access to a variety of help and information on work, benefits and services.

The programme will ensure that Personal Advisers have the necessary balance of skills in order to deal with a wide range of clients in differing circumstances, and will not be specific to particular client groups. This will be achieved through the active involvement in the programme of organisations with an understanding of the difficulties faced by different client groups, for example, carers and lone parents.

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security at what grade the personal advisers who will conduct the new Single Gateway interviews will be recruited. [77428]

Angela Eagle: Three partner organisations are working together to deliver the Single Work-Focused Gateway service. Each have their own banding or grading structure but the Personal Adviser post will be broadly equivalent to Executive Officer grade.

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what targets the Government have set in order to evaluate the success nationwide of the Single Gateway interview. [77427]

Angela Eagle: Single Work-Focused Gateway will be piloted in a range of different labour markets. The evaluation of these pilots will allow us to assess the potential impact of Single Work-Focused Gateway should it be extended nationwide.

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what reviews will be carried out, and which evaluation measures will be used, in assessing the success of the pilots of the Single Gateway. [77425]

Angela Eagle: The Single Work-Focused Gateway will be fully evaluated. The evaluation will compare the outcomes of participants in the pilot areas with those for similar people from other, comparable areas. The evaluation will use a range of standard evaluation techniques—quantitative and qualitative analysis, operational research, and cost-benefit analysis.

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what changes to working practices in the Benefits Agency and the Employment Service will be required in order to implement the Single Gateway. [77430]

Angela Eagle: All partners involved in the Single Gateway (Employment Service, Benefits Agency and Local Authorities) will deal with both a wider range of clients and with a wider range of issues affecting those clients. This will necessitate much closer working relationships, including improved communications; management arrangements and Information Technology links.

Existing business processes will be affected and work is currently underway to identify these, in particular the need for business information flows between the partners and effective integration between the new Personal Adviser service and existing processes. Changes to staff locations and office layout are also likely to be required—depending on local delivery arrangements—and work is also underway to identify these changes.

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has for additional information technology resources following the introduction of the new Single Gateway. [77431]

Angela Eagle: The proposed design for the pilot exercises is based on extensions of, and where possible some development of, existing Employment Service, Benefits Agency and other systems. It is based on providing support to the generic Single Gateway Process Model and comprises extending access to current systems into the basic model pilot sites. These are the Employment Services' Labour Market and Employment Service Communications Systems, and the DSS' Operational Strategy and Integrated Benefit Information Systems.

Taken together, these changes will form the "core IT" upon which further enhancements and support for the Call Centre and Private/Voluntary Sector variants will be developed. As the pilots develop, and when decisions are taken whether to proceed to national implementation, more longer-term solutions will be developed and implemented.

Housing Benefit Fraud

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the estimated cost of housing benefit fraud in each of the last 10 years. [76437]

Mr. Timms: Information about Housing Benefit fraud is not available for each of the last ten years. The first Housing Benefit Accuracy Review in 1995 estimated annual losses from fraud and strongly suspected fraud to be £905 million. The equivalent estimate from the second Review in 1997–98 is £600 million. However, due to the different methodology used in each review, it is not possible to state with an acceptable level of statistical certainty that there has been a decrease in the level of fraud and suspected fraud.

Note:

Conclusions about the level of incorrect Housing Benefit payments were derived from a sample of claims. For the Housing Benefit reviews, 95 per cent. confidence limits were calculated for each of the estimates. (£500 million to £1,300 million for the 1995 Review estimate and £410 million to £820 million for the 1997–98 Review estimate). These limits indicate the range within which it can be 95 per cent. certain that the true value for all Housing Benefit claims lie.

Sources:

Housing Benefit Review 1995 (DSS)

Housing Benefit Accuracy Review 1997–98 (GSS).

Private Pensions (National Insurance Rebate)

Mr. Duncan Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what the total annual national insurance rebate to private pensions paid from the national insurance fund has been for the last 10 years. [75847]

Mr. Timms *[pursuant to his reply, 12 March 1999, c. 397]:* The information is in the table.

The cost of the national insurance contribution rebates

£ billion

Tax Year	*Rebate*
1988–89	5.07
1989–90	7.68
1990–91	7.69
1991–92	8.43
1992–93	8.71
1993–94	7.78
1994–95	6.98
1995–96	7.09
1996–97	7.36
1997–98	7.58

Note:

The figures show the total rebates in respect of both occupational and personal pension schemes in GB and include:

(i) a 2 per cent. incentive paid to certain schemes on earnings accrued in tax years 1988–89 to 1992–93; and

(ii) a 1 per cent. age addition paid to all personal pension scheme holders aged 30 and over on earnings accrued in tax years 1993–94 to 1996–97.

Source:

Government Actuary's Department and the Contributions Agency.

Family Resources Survey

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the special analyses, including unpublished tabulations, of the Family Resources Survey which were undertaken by his Department for the Pension Provision Group. [76098]

Mr. Timms *[pursuant to his reply, 15 March 1999, c. 481]:* The following analyses of the 1995–96 Family Resources Survey were undertaken for the Pension Provision Group:

Tabulation of the incomes of single pensioners.

Tabulation of the average incomes of pensioner units by source and by marital status and gender.

Tabulation of the average incomes of pensioner units by source and by marital status and age under/over 75.

Estimation of the number of benefit units becoming entitled to means-tested benefits were upper capital limits to be removed and tariff income calculated for all capital above the lower capital limit.

Estimations of the numbers of people below State pension age in paid employment in the UK who are currently contributing to SERPS and occupational pension schemes and who have ever contributed to a personal pension scheme, by gender and full-time or part-time employment status.

DEFENCE

Army Base Storage and Distribution Agency

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which targets the Army Base Storage and Distribution Agency did not meet in 1997–98; and what monitoring he has undertaken for those targets in 1998–99. [71900]

Mr. Doug Henderson *[holding answer 24 February 1999]:* This is a matter for the Chief Executive of the Army Base Storage and Distribution Agency. I have asked the Chief Executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Foxton to Mr. Mike Hancock, dated 18 March 1999:

I refer to your question to the Secretary of State for Defence about those key targets the Army Base Storage and Distribution Agency (ABSDA) did not meet in 1997–98, and what monitoring has been undertaken for those targets in 1998–99. As Chief Executive of ABSDA I am replying as it falls within my area of responsibility.

As reported in the Agency's Annual Report and Accounts, ABSDA did not achieve, in part, 3 out of its 4 Key Targets (KT) set for 1997–98. These were:

Key Target 1—To deliver the required level of storage and to process receipts and returns as defined in agreements with the Agency's customers. This KT is made up of 20 parts and some of these were missed. Two Stores Unit Returns were missed; these are items returned to the base depots by Units. The procedure for returning items to stock is being re-evaluated by the Agency, its Customers and Consumers and are being addressed by the ABSDA/Defence Logistics Agency (USA) Benchmarking partnership. Indications for the current year are that performance for Stores Unit Returns has improved significantly. Two Vehicle Receipts targets were also missed due to the abnormally high number of vehicles received from trade and an excessive number of faults found by the Vehicle Inspectors at the ABSDA Base Vehicle Depot Ashchurch on vehicles supplied by external suppliers.

Key Target 2—To meet the Standard Priority System 96 Supply Chain Processing Times (SCPT) for material authorised for issue. This KT breaks down into 21 parts, of which the Agency missed 6. The Agency missed two targets primarily because of the low volumes of this type that exaggerated the impact of such few failures. The 2 lowest Stores non-operational low priority targets were not met but the non-compliance had the agreement of the supported commands and resulted from reduced resources being concentrated on meeting high priority operational demands. Two Vehicles Issue targets were missed mainly due to difficulties encountered with vehicles that had been mid life extended and refurbished. Vehicles classed as fit for issue on selection were found to have faults that required rectification. It has been a difficult balancing act between the achievement of improved performance via a process review and a significant reduction in resources. In the current year all Stores operational and high priority performances are within target.

Key Target 4—To implement the recommendations of the ABSDA Information Systems Strategy. This KT has 3 elements and the Agency missed one. The target has now been deferred to Mar 99.

Performance against the subsequent Key Targets for 1998–99 is monitored by the Chief Executive and the Management Board of the Agency on a monthly basis. This performance is reported quarterly to the Agency's Owner and annually to Ministers both in the Next Steps Review and the Agency's Annual Report and Accounts. Key Target Achievement is also considered by the National Audit Office during the annual submission of the Accounts for external audit. ABSDA will be absorbed into the new Defence Storage and Distribution Agency (DSDA) on 1 Apr 99; lessons learnt from ABSDA's Performance Review, conducted by Army Management Services, have been incorporated into the Key Targets Rationale Paper for the DSDA which is currently with the Agency's Owner prior to submission to Minister (Armed Forces).

Armed Forces Personnel Administration Agency

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) which targets the Armed Forces Personnel Administration Agency did not meet in 1997–98; and what monitoring he has undertaken for those targets in 1998–99; [72805]

(2) on what date the Armed Forces Personnel Administration Agency published its report for the year 1997–98; and what was the cost of production of the report. [72808]

Mr. Doug Henderson *[holding answer 24 February 1999]:* This is a matter for the Chief Executive of the Armed Forces Personnel Administration Agency. I have asked the Chief Executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from C. J. Boyle to Mr. Mike Hancock, dated 18 March 1999:

Further to your Questions to the Secretary of State for Defence about the Armed Forces Personnel Administration Agency (AFPAA), these matters fall within the Chief Executive's responsibility. However, as he is currently away from office, I am replying on his behalf.

Before I address your specific questions, you may find it useful to be aware that AFPAA was formed on 1 April 1997, following recommendations made by Sir Michael Bett in his report of March 1995 of the Independent Review of the Armed Forces' Manpower, Career and Remuneration Structures. A copy of the "Bett Report" may be found in the Library of the House.

The report of the Independent Review recommended that a Defence Agency should be set up to manage Service personnel administration (but not personnel management) and tasked with

progressively introducing unified systems and eventually an integrated computer system. The report also concluded that this area offered significant scope for Private Finance Initiative (PFI).

Amalgamating single Service pay, pensions and personnel administration functions into a tri-Service organisation in the first year of the Agency's operation, 1997/98, was an ambitious undertaking and I am pleased to report that this was undertaken successfully. Similarly, the parallel negotiation and implementation of a service based PFI agreement with EDS has also been completed successfully. The Agency's performance against its Key Targets must, therefore, be seen in this context.

Of those three Key targets that were not met in full, I hope that the following information provides a more detailed position:

Key Target 2—Accuracy of Personnel records and Liabilities Data.

Determine measures to set the baseline of completeness and accuracy of the record of service by Mar 1998—Partially Achieved.

This Key Target relates to the accuracy of personal and job related data held on the personnel administration IT systems maintained and developed by the Agency. I regret that this Key Target could not be completed within the timescale due to the pressures of other higher priority tasks. The Key Target was, however, carried forward into 1998. A work programme is being initiated with the 3 Services who have principal responsibility for the input, ownership and validation of this data.

Key Target 5—Customer Satisfaction.

Develop systematic and objective methods for measuring customer satisfaction in consultation with the Owner and customers by March 1998—Partially Achieved.

Whilst plans for measuring customer satisfaction were prepared during 1997/98, it was necessary to agree these with the Agency's public/private partner EDS. As the partnership did not become effective until 1 Jan 98, and with the pressure of other priority tasks, it was not possible to undertake this work before March 1998. The inaugural customer satisfaction survey was, however, completed in December 1998 and follow-up performance improvement plans are currently under development.

Key Target 7—Efficiency

Develop cost ratios and implement appropriate measures for benchmarking efficiency for AFPAA's services in core personnel administration by March 1998—Partially Achieved.

This Key Target relates to the establishment of detailed costs for services delivered by the Agency. Whilst cost ratios were developed in 1997 during the process of establishing AFPAA's PFI contract, other higher priority tasks meant that efficiency benchmarking was not achieved before March 1998. A plan for benchmarking AFPAA services has been produced during 1998/99. However, the Key Target was not carried forward to 1998/99, being replaced by an efficiency measure to reduce unit costs by 3%.

Progress against Key targets is monitored on behalf of the Defence Secretary by the Agency's Owner, Deputy Chief of the Defence Staff (Programmes and Personnel), through the medium of the Owner's Advisory Board, which meets at least three times a year.

AFPAA's performance during its first year of operation was reported in it's 1997/98 Annual Report. This report was published on 21 July 98 and copies were placed in the House Libraries. The report was not laid before Parliament as the Agency had not received a Treasury Accounts Direction at that time.

Finally, the total cost of producing of the Agency's Annual Report was £5,919 for 750 copies, equating to £7.89 per copy.

Aldermaston

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the safety performance of atomic weapons research establishment Aldermaston in the last calendar year. [73022]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 25 February 1999]:* Safety is of prime importance to all involved in the operation of the Atomic Weapons Establishment, AWE, Aldermaston. The AWE operating contractor, Hunting BRAE, publishes an annual report entitled "Environment, Safety and Health", which includes information on safety performance and the activities that are undertaken at Aldermaston to ensure that safety requirements are met. The 1998 Report is due to be published, as normal, early in the summer. This public report is underpinned by regular internal audits conducted by the contractor.

The Ministry of Defence on site Compliance Officer conducts regular confidential assessments of AWE's activities and was satisfied that they met the requirements of the Term Contract. Additionally independent assurance of the safety of AWE is provided by the Health and Safety Executive's Nuclear Installations Inspectorate NII. Aldermaston was awarded a licence to operate by the NII for the first time in July 1997. Maintenance of the licence is subject to the licensee's satisfying the licence conditions in the face of the NII's rigorous inspection regime.

Merchant Ships (Military Support)

Mr. Prosser: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the names, flags and dates of merchant ships chartered for defence exercises and military support operations in each year since 1996. [74964]

Mr. Doug Henderson: The information has been placed in the Library.

Soldiers' Accommodation

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many new units of *(a)* single soldiers' accommodation, *(b)* married quarters and *(c)* other new buildings will be required at (i) Tidworth and (ii) Larkhill to meet the needs of the new third mechanised brigades. [75272]

Mr. Doug Henderson: In my announcement on 2 March of the Army's basing proposals within the United Kingdom, I indicated that it was provisionally planned to deploy an AS-90 artillery regiment of around 700 personnel to Larkhill, a tank regiment of around 600 to Tidworth, an engineer regiment of around 550 men to Perham Down, and to increase the numbers of the existing REME regiment at Tidworth by some 100 men. Initial estimates are that this will lead to a requirement for 450 more single-soldier bed spaces at Larkhill, 350 single-soldier bed spaces at Tidworth and 350 new family quarters in the Tidworth, Bulford and Larkhill area. In addition, there will be a requirement to build garaging and stores for the extra vehicles and additional recreational and support facilities for the increased number of troops. These proposals are subject to planning agreement, and the detailed accommodation requirements for those units to be based at Tidworth and Larkhill will not be finalised until a strategic environmental assessment has been carried out and discussions with local planning authorities have been concluded.

Military Road Traffic Accidents

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many military road traffic accidents were reported

between April 1997 and March 1998; what was the road traffic accident rate per hundred thousand miles driven; what was the cost to *(a)* his Department and *(b)* the Army; and what was the cost of (i) compensation claims, (ii) loss of man hours, (iii) medical treatment, (iv) damage to other property, (v) damage to other vehicles and (vi) replacement vehicles. [75006]

Mr. Doug Henderson *[holding answer 8 March 1999]:* Between April 1997 and March 1998, there were a total of 9,075 road traffic accidents involving military personnel and MOD civilians. Based on the only available mileage data, for Royal Marine and Army units, this represents an estimated rate of two accidents per hundred thousand miles driven. The actual cost of insurance claims against the MOD, after taking into account costs recovered from third parties, was £13.62 million. The actual cost of MOD vehicle repairs was £5.07 million. The illustrative cost of fatalities and injuries to the Department, based on recognised costs provided by the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, was £34.9 million. The estimate total cost to the Department, using Health and Safety Executive research methodology, may be up to £149.52 million. The specific cost of accidents to the Army, for loss of man hours, medical treatment, damage to other property, damage to other vehicles and replacement vehicles, is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Note:

The MOD operates a 100 per cent. accident reporting policy for insurance purposes, irrespective of whether an accident results in a fatality or injury. This differs from the DETR whose statistics are based on reportable accidents only, ie; those which result in an injury or fatality. Accidents involving MOD vehicles in the UK which result in a fatality or injury are reported to the police and by default, would be included in the DETR's national road traffic accident statistics.

Military District Hospitals

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will state the terms agreed with the Department of Health on which his Department operates military district hospital units at *(a)* Derriford, *(b)* Frimley and *(c)* Peterborough, indicating the financial payments between departments thereunder and any guarantees of performance by his Department. [75212]

Mr. Doug Henderson *[holding answer 8 March 1999]:* The Service Level Agreements (SLA) between my Department and the NHS, which underpin the Ministry of Defence Hospital Units (MDHUs), were reviewed and renegotiated during 1998–99. While the initial agreements with our three original MDHU Trusts (Derriford at Plymouth, Frimley Park, and Peterborough) have been clinically highly successful, the financial and contract arrangements for these partnerships have, however, not been so successful.

The principles of a new SLA were developed to form a revised contract from 1999–2000. Following detailed discussions with the NHS at local, regional and national levels during 1976 and 1998, contracts based on these principles are currently being negotiated locally, and will be in place for 1999–2000 at the three original MDHUs and at the new MDHU at Northallerton. The new contract model will also form the basis for all future MOD contract relationships with the NHS for hosting staff or providing treatment and will underpin a new era in understanding and clinical relationship between the MOD and the NHS.

The financial arrangements for the new model will involve a Public Expenditure Survey (PES) transfer from the MOD to the Department of Health to compensate affected Health Authorities for the loss of free provision of MOD staff, and to enable the Defence Secondary Care Agency to negotiate directly with the relevant NHS Trust. The PES transfer will amount to some £3.5 million a year. There will also be direct payments by the MOD to NHS Trusts for Service staff and the treatment of Service patients.

Under the new arrangement, the financial cost and financial risk associated with the absence of military medical or nursing personnel falls on the MOD. In terms of treatment, the host Trust is expected to meet the throughput and waiting times targets set by the MOD, which are included in the contract with provision, as with any NHS purchaser, for appropriate financial adjustment if they are not met.

Women

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his policy on the deployment of women in the armed forces in front-line combat; and what plans he has to review that policy. [75305]

Mr. Doug Henderson *[holding answer 10 March 1999]:* The Armed Forces' position on the employment of women is quite clear; service-women are excluded from posts only where their presence would be to the detriment of combat effectiveness or on the ground of health and safety.

96 per cent. of posts in the RAF and 73 per cent. of posts in the Naval Service have been open to women for some time, but recently, as the result of a further review, 1,300 specialist posts, filled by Royal Navy and Army personnel attached to the Royal Marines, were opened to women. On 1 April 1998, the Army increased the posts open to women from 47 per cent. to 70 per cent. The remaining posts closed to women will remain closed until we can properly assess the impact on combat effectiveness of the recent changes; this work will be completed in two to three years.

Following recent studies by the Royal Navy, I announced on 24 February 1999, *Official Report*, columns *300–01*, that women will remain excluded from service in submarines and mine clearance diving for the present time.

Exercises

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which countries had armed forces involved in the armoured battlegroup exercises in Canada carried out between 1 April 1997 and 31 March 1998. [76609]

Mr. Doug Henderson: The armed forces of the United Kingdom only were involved in the exercises.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the cost of, and how many personnel were deployed on, the NATO joint exercise in South Africa carried out between 1 April 1997 and 31 March 1998. [76592]

Mr. Doug Henderson: There were no NATO joint exercises in South Africa between 1 April 1997 and 31 March 1998.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which countries had armed forces involved in the infantry battalion exercises in Kenya carried out between 1 April 1997 and 31 March 1998. [76610]

Mr. Doug Henderson: The Armed Forces of the United Kingdom took part in the infantry battalion exercises in Kenya carried out between 1 April 1997 and 31 March 1998. Each of the exercises deployed with a Kenyan liaison officer, who was attached for all or part of the exercise.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many personnel were deployed on the brigade exercise in Poland carried out between 1 April 1997 and 31 March 1998. [76612]

Mr. Doug Henderson: Exercise ULAN EAGLE, which took place at the Drawko-Pomorskie training area in North East Poland in October 1997, was a British Army exercise undertaken by 20th Armoured Brigade and it involved 3,518 personnel.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the cost of the jungle training exercise in Thailand carried out between 1 April 1997 and 31 March 1998. [72984]

Mr. Doug Henderson *[holding answer 2 March 1999]:* This exercise was a sub-element of exercise Ocean Wave, which took place in the Gulf, Far East and Asia Pacific regions between 13 January and 28 August 1997, see parliamentary answer, 26 February 1999, *Official Report*, column *471*. The additional costs separately identifiable for the jungle training exercise in Thailand were £27,000, which were included in the overall cost of exercise Ocean Wave.

Logistics Information Systems Agency

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on what date the Logistics Information Systems Agency published its report for 1997–98; and what was the cost of production of the report. [76892]

Mr. Doug Henderson: This is a matter for the Chief Executive of the Logistic Information Systems Agency. I have asked the Chief Executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from P. A. Flanagan to Mr. Mike Hancock, dated 18 March 1999:

I am replying to your question to the Secretary of State for Defence as to the date the Logistic Information Systems Agency published its report for 1997–98; and what the production costs for the report were.

The annual report was published on 9 July 1998 and the total cost to produce was £19,744.00.

Queen Victoria School

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many people are currently employed by the Queen Victoria School; what was the figure at its inception; on what date the Queen Victoria School published its report for 1997–98; and what was the cost of production of the report. [76898]

Mr. Spellar: This is a matter for the Chief Executive of the Queen Victoria School. I have asked the Chief Executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Brian Raine to Mr. Mike Hancock, dated 18 March 1999:

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about the number of employees and annual report as this matter falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of Queen Victoria School.

The number of people employed is currently 76 and was 70 at the inception of the Agency on 1 April 1992.

The Annual Report and Accounts for 1997–98 was published on 23 July and the cost of production was £1,000.

Meteorological Office

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many people are currently employed by the Meteorological Office; and what was the figure at its inception. [76888]

Mr. Doug Henderson: This is a matter for the Chief Executive of the Meteorological Office. I have asked the Chief Executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Ewins to Mr. Mike Hancock, dated 18 March 1999:

Parliamentary Question: Number of people employed by the Met. Office

I am replying to your question to the Secretary of State for Defence about the number of people employed by The Met. Office now and at its inception. This matter falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of The Met. Office.

As at 28 February 1999, The Met. Office employed 2234 staff. When we became an agency on 1 April 1990 the figure was 2447. A breakdown is given below.

	1.4.90	*28.2.99*
Senior Civil Service	10	8
Scientific, managerial, technical	1889	1622
Support	503	585
Locally employed civilians overseas	46	19
Total	2447	2234

You may be interested to know that when The Met. Office was formed in 1854, as part of the Board of Trade to provide meteorological and sea-current information to mariners, it employed just 4 people. Today, our activities include global weather forecasts for defence and civil aviation; specialist services to commerce and industry (including the utilities); a wide range of public meteorological services, including severe weather warnings; and a substantial climate research and prediction programme.

RAF Training Group Defence Agency

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many people are currently employed by the RAF Training Group Defence Agency; what was the figure at its inception; on what date the RAF Training Group Defence Agency published its report for 1997–98; and what was the cost of production of the report. [76878]

Mr. Doug Henderson: This is a matter for the Chief Executive of the Royal Air Force Training Group Defence Agency. I have asked the Chief Executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from A. J. Stables to Mr. Mike Hancock, dated 18 March 1999:

I am replying to your Question to the Minister of State for the Armed Forces about the number of people employed by the Royal Air Force Training Group Defence Agency and production of the Agency's Annual Report and Accounts, as these matters fall within my responsibility as Chief Executive of the Agency.

Data relating to staff numbers is collated on a quarterly basis, and the latest available figures are those for 31 December 1998. At this time the Agency employed 5,759 permanent staff of whom 3,572 were military personnel and 2,187 civilian staff. The Agency was formed on 1 April 1994 and during the first financial year of its operation the average number of permanent employees was 8,309 (6,035 military and 2,274 civilian).

I signed the Agency's annual report for 1997/98 in June 1998 and it was placed in the Library of the House on 14 July 1998. The direct cost of its production was just under £17,000.

UK Hydrographic Office

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many people are currently employed by the UK Hydrographic Office; what was the figure at its inception; on what date the UK Hydrographic Office published its report for 1997–98; and what was the cost of production of the report. [76874]

Mr. Spellar: This is a matter for the Chief Executive of the Hydrographic Office. I have asked the Chief Executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from John Clarke to Mr. Mike Hancock, dated 18 March 1999:

You recently asked the Secretary of State for Defence a Parliamentary Question relating to the United Kingdom Hydrographic Office (UKHO). As the matters you raise fall within my responsibility as Chief Executive of the UKHO, I have been asked to reply to you direct.

You requested details about the number of people currently employed at the UKHO and also at its inception. As at 1 March 1999, the total number of people employed at the UKHO was 916. In terms of the number of full time equivalent staff, this translates to a figure of 874. In terms of people employed at its inception, the Hydrographic Office was formed by an Order in Council in 1795; at that time it employed only 3 people, Alexander Dalrymple, the first Hydrographer of the Navy, and 2 other cartographic staff.

As you may know, the UKHO attained Trading Fund status on 1 April 1996, and on the basis that you might wish to compare the number of people employed then and now, I can advise you that as at 1 April 1996 the number of people employed was 883. In terms of the number of full time equivalent staff this translates to a figure of 842.

Turning now to your enquiries concerning the UKHO's Annual Report, I can tell you that the UKHO's Annual Report and Accounts for 1997/98 was laid before Parliament on Wednesday 15 July 1998. As regards the cost of production, this totalled some £26,626. That said, I think it might be useful to you if I were to qualify that figure to indicate, with a little more precision, what it covered. The cost of production included all production compilation effort, including the sub-contracted composing costs, printing, finishing and associated materials.

I hope this reply has been of assistance. Please do not hesitate to get in touch if you need any further amplification.

Naval Aircraft Repair Organisation

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many people are currently employed by the Naval Aircraft Repair Organisation; what was the figure at its inception; on what date the Naval Aircraft Repair Organisation published its report for 1997–98; and what was the cost of production of the report. [76885]

Mr. Spellar: This is a matter for the Chief Executive of the Naval Aircraft Repair Organisation. I have asked the Chief Executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from S. R. Hill to Mr. Mike Hancock, dated 18 March 1999:

1. I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about the Naval Aircraft Repair Organisation (NARO) as this matter falls within my areas of responsibility as Chief Executive of the NARO.

2. As at 1st March 1999, the NARO employed 1396 personnel, the figure at its inception of 1st April 1992 was 1618.

3. The NARO Annual Report for 1997–98 was laid in the library of the House on 1st July 1998 and the cost of production of the report was £2,900 for 500 copies.

Military Survey Defence Agency

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many people are currently employed by the Military Survey Defence Agency; what was the figure at its inception; on what date the Military Survey Defence Agency published its report for 1997–98; and what was the cost of production of the report. [76887]

Mr. Spellar: This is a matter for the Chief Executive of the Military Survey Defence Agency. I have asked the Chief Executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from P. R. Wildman to Mr. Mike Hancock, dated 18 March 1999:

I am replying to your question to the Secretary of State for Defence about the number of people employed by the Military Survey Defence Agency as this matter falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of the Military Survey Defence Agency.

The Military Survey Defence Agency currently employs 1,243 staff. At inception in 1991 the Agency employed 1,568 staff, although 250 of these staff were technically outside the Agency boundary at the time. These staff have since been amalgamated into the Agency.

The Agency Annual Report and Accounts were laid before Parliament on 28 January 1999. The cost of producing the Annual Report was £8,286.

RAF Signals Engineering Establishment

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many people are currently employed by the RAF Signals Engineering Establishment; what was the figure at its inception; on what date the RAF Signals Engineering Establishment published its report for 1997–98; and what was the cost of production of the report. [76879]

Mr. Doug Henderson: This is a matter for the Chief Executive of the Royal Air Force Signals Engineering Establishment Defence Agency. I have asked the Chief Executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from G. Jones to Mr. Mike Hancock, dated 18 March 1999:

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence in which you asked: how many people are currently employed by the RAF Signals Engineering Establishment; what the figure was at its inception; on what date the RAF Signals Engineering Establishment published its report for 1997–98; and what was the cost of production of the report, as these matters fall within my responsibility as Chief Executive of the Royal Air Force Signals Engineering Establishment Defence Agency.

The Agency currently has an authorised establishment of 977 personnel and the strength, as at 1 March 1999, was 929 made up of 339 RAF, 561 Civil Servants and 29 contractors employed to fill established specialist posts, for which suitably-qualified Civil Servants cannot be recruited, and for short-term requirements. At the launch of the Agency in November 1994 the authorised establishment was 1,570 personnel. The majority of the reduction has resulted from the placing of a Multi-Activity Contract with SERCO Defence Limited for the delivery of provisioning, stockholding, transportation, computer and administration services.

The Agency's Annual Report and Accounts was published on 12 August 1998 at a cost of £5,606 which covered the design and printing.

Ministry of Defence Police

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on what date the Ministry of Defence Police published its report for 1997–98; and what was the cost of production of the report. [76886]

Mr. Doug Henderson: This is a matter for the Chief Constable of the Ministry of Defence Policy Agency. I have asked the Chief Constable to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Walter Boreham to Mr. Mike Hancock, dated 18 March 1999:

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about the Ministry of Defence Police report for 1997–98 as this falls into my area of responsibility as Chief Constable/Chief Executive of the Ministry of Defence Policy Agency.

My 1997–98 annual report was laid before Parliament on 20 July 1998. The cost of production was £24,191.

RAF Performance

Ms Oona King: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will place in the Library copies of the RAF's end of year performance reports in 1996–97 and 1997–98. [76736]

Mr. Doug Henderson: The RAF End of Year Performance Report is a document designed to report on the Service's performance against its Management Plan over the past year, and identifies key issues and themes with major implications for the following year. As such it contains information on operational capabilities of elements of the Armed Forces.

For these reasons I am withholding these documents under Exemptions 1 (Defence, Security and International Relations) and 2 (Internal Discussion and Advice) of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

An unclassified account of the MOD's performance can be found in the Departmental Performance Report, which was published on 30 November 1998 and is available in the Library of the House.

EU Directives and Regulations

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list EU directives and regulations which impact on health and safety issues, working conditions and equality between men and women amongst military and civilian employees for whom he is responsible. [76961]

Mr. Doug Henderson: Unless they contain a specific exemption, all EU directives and regulations which impact on health and safety issues, working conditions and equality between men and women apply to service personnel and Ministry of Defence civilian employees.

Armed Forces (Compensation)

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he will publish a consultation document on the principles underlying a possible new structure of compensation arrangements for the armed forces. [76959]

Mr. Doug Henderson: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to my hon. Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Mr. Corbett) on 15 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *502*.

Common Leave Allowance

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if from April 1999 all ranks of all three services will move to a common leave allowance of 30 working days. [76958]

Mr. Doug Henderson: The "Policy for People" element of the Strategic Defence Review included a pledge that a Common Leave Allowance of 30 working days would be introduced for all Armed Forces personnel, regardless of rank or service, on 1 April 1999. The new policy will be introduced by the Naval Service and Royal Air Force on 1 March 1999, and by the Army on 1 April 1999. The date of introduction is governed by the Common Leave Year of each Service.

Defence Estate (London)

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects the Review of his Department's Estate in London to be concluded. [77314]

Mr. Spellar: The Review of the MOD Estate in London is continuing. On the basis of the work undertaken to date, I have asked for a report in July.

Iraq

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the strategy underlying the current bombing of Iraq. [77357]

Mr. George Robertson: The Government's aim in enforcing the no-fly zones is to continue the essential humanitarian task of preventing Saddam Hussein from using his airforce to repress his own people. In undertaking this mission, we have made it clear that we will take robust but appropriate defensive measures in response to any attempts by Iraq to threaten our aircrew. Current military action is purely in self-defence, and taken in response to threats to the coalition. Since the end of Operation Desert Fox, over 160 Iraqi aircraft have violated the no-fly zones and coalition aircraft have been shot at or threatened over 70 times.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Paveway III laser-guided bombs and Harm anti-radar missiles have been dropped on Iraq since Desert Fox. [77329]

Mr. George Robertson: Since Operation Desert Fox, military action by coalition aircraft has been taken only in self-defence in response to Iraqi attempts to shoot down or otherwise threaten our aircraft. RAF Tornados have dropped two Paveway III bombs and fired no High-Speed Anti-Radiation Missiles (HARM) on Iraq since Operation Desert Fox.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence for what reasons he did not seek UN approval for changing the rules of engagement on bombings of Iraq. [77259]

Mr. George Robertson: UK forces patrolling the no-fly zones in support of UN Resolution 688 are not under UN command. Their Rules of Engagement are therefore an entirely national matter.

Service Personnel (Social Security Benefits)

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will estimate the number of service personnel in receipt of social security benefits in each of the last five years. [77449]

Mr. Doug Henderson: Except in a limited number of circumstances, for example, when personnel are serving overseas, entitlement to DSS benefits is normally a matter between individual service personnel and the DSS, to which claims are made direct. Therefore, my Department has no overview of the extent of benefits being claimed by service personnel.

Widow's Pension

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has received concerning the loss of widow's and widower's pensions on post-retirement remarriage; and if he will make a statement on the progress of his review of widow's and widower's pensions. [77863]

Mr. Spellar: My right hon. Friend from time to time receives representations from hon. Members, the ex-service organisations and from individuals, on widow's and widower's pensions, including suggestions that the widows or widowers of post-retirement marriages to former members of the Armed Forces who left the Services before 6 April 1978 should be entitle to a Forces Family Pension. Widow's and widower's pensions will be examined as part of the review of the Armed Forces Pension Scheme, which is expected to report later this year. This will include a re-examination of the entitlement of such individuals, but I cannot yet predict the outcome. It would be a departure from normal practice to make retrospective improvements to the terms of pensions already in payment.

Kosovo

Mr. Maples: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the consequences for overstretch in the Army of the proposed deployment in Kosovo of British troops. [77302]

Mr. George Robertson: As I have said before, a deployment to Kosovo would represent a challenging new commitment for the Army, especially as implementation of the Strategic Defence Review is still at an early stage. The consequences for overstretch would obviously depend on the size and duration of any deployment, and on what happens to other commitments in the meantime.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

CAP

Mr. Hesford: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what the outcome of the discussions on reform of the CAP at the Council of Ministers was; and if he will make a statement. [74384]

Mr. Nick Brown *[holding answer 11 March 1999]:* The House was informed of the outcome of the negotiations on the reform of the Common Agricultural Policy in my statement to the House on 12 March 1999, *Official Report*, columns 626–40.

Date-based Export Scheme

Mr. Paice: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to the Prime Minister's oral answer to the hon. Member for North Dorset (Mr. Walter), 24 February 1999, *Official Report*, columns 385–86, when he issued the invitation to the European Commission to inspect the abattoirs which will be involved in the Date-based Export Scheme; and when he expects the inspections to take place. [74331]

Mr. Rooker *[holding answer 2 March 1999]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to the hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Mr. Hayes), on 3 March 1999, *Official Report*, column 774.

Pig Producers

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what action he is taking to ensure the repayment of subsidies which the Commission has deemed irregular which were paid to French and German pig producers; and if he will make a statement. [77130]

Mr. Rooker: In 1998, both the German and French Governments made announcements about the introduction of state aid schemes aimed at assisting their pig producers. Following representations from the UK and others, however, the German proposal was withdrawn. The EU Commission has expressed concern about some elements of the French proposal and has asked for further information under procedures laid down in Article 93(2) of the Treaty. The French Government have until the end of march to respond. We will, of course, continue to press the Commission to fulfil its obligations under the Treaty which include, if necessary, ordering the repayment of any state aid subsidies plaid illegally.

Tobacco

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on EU agricultural policy and its impact on the financial regime for tobacco grown in the EU. [76953]

Mr. Rooker: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to my hon. Friend the Member for Chorley (Mr. Hoyle) on 14 January 1999, *Official Report*, column *294*.

Pork Products

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will ban the sale of imported pork products which are of a type that cannot legally be produced in the United Kingdom. [76753]

Mr. Rooker *[holding answer 15 March 1999]:* I assume that the hon. Member is referring to imported pork products which were produced from pigs which may have been reared in stall and tether production systems or fed with pig feed containing meat and bone meal (MBM). An import ban on such products would be incompatible with our EU and World Trade Organisation obligations. I will, however, continue to urge retailers and caterers to take account of animal welfare and other considerations when sourcing pork and pork products. The hon. Member may be aware that major UK retailers have given voluntary assurances to Ministers that they will only source own label fresh pork, bacon, ham, sausages and pork pies from stall and tether and MBM free production systems.

Quarantine

Mr. Key: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when Ministers or officials wrote to the appropriate authorities in the European Commission seeking confirmation that proposals to proceed with UK legislation on animal quarantine reform based on the outcome of the Kennedy report *(a)* are compatible with single market requirements and *(b)* will not be opposed by the Commission. [76663]

Mr. Rooker *[holding answer 15 March 1999]:* We have kept the Commission closely informed about the Kennedy Report at meetings and through correspondence. If it became necessary to write along the lines suggested by the hon. Gentleman, we would do so.

Genetically Modified Food

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement about Government policy on the control of genetically modified food. [75373]

Mr. Rooker *[holding answer 17 March 1999]:* The Government's policy on the control of GM foods is first and foremost to protect public health and secondly to ensure that all such foods are clearly labelled so that consumers are able to make an informed choice about whether or not to consume them.

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment his Department has undertaken of the safety of genetically modified foods on a similar basis to those undertaken for pharmaceutical products. [75418]

Mr. Rooker: The authorisation of market release for new drugs and genetic modified (GM) foods are subject to different, but equally strict, criteria.

The assessment for new drugs is based on safety, quality and efficacy. The assessment of novel, including GM, foods is based on establishing that they do not present a danger to the public; that the public are not misled in any way about them; and that they do not disadvantage the public in terms of their nutritional content.

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to introduce regulations for the enforcement of EC Regulation 1139/98 concerning the labelling of genetically-modified soya and maize. [78044]

Mr. Rooker: I have laid before Parliament this morning the Food Labelling (Amendment) Regulations 1999, which will come into force tomorrow. These provide the means for Local Authorities to be able to enforce the EC Regulation that requires all foods containing genetically modified soya or maize ingredients to be clearly labelled. This Regulation, which took effect last September, applies to all foods produced and labelled from that date.

The Government are determined that consumers should be able to choose whether or not to eat genetically modified foods. This includes food sold in restaurants, cafes and takeaways and not just that available from supermarkets. The UK is the first member state in Europe to take steps to ensure that consumers eating out will have the same right to choose whether or not to consume foods containing GM ingredients as those buying from shops.

As a measure of how seriously the Government take the right of consumers to have clear, reliable information about the GM content of food they buy, we have decided not to wait the customary 21 days for these Regulations to come into force but to make them fully effective from tomorrow.

A letter is being sent today to interested parties advising them of the content of the Regulations and enclosing a copy of the text. Further copies of the Regulations are available from John Furzer or Raj Pal, MAFF, Room 239c, Ergon House, 17 Smith Square, London SW1P 3JR. In addition, the legislation can be viewed from this afternoon at MAFF Website "http://www.maff.gov.uk/food/novel/labelreg.pdf". A Regulatory Impact Assessment for the Regulations has been prepared and placed in the Library of the House.

Animal Feeding Stuffs

Mr. Steen: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the availability of organic high protein feed supplements for sheep over the lambing period; and if he will make a statement. [76795]

Mr. Rooker *[holding answer 17 March 1999]:* No specific assessment has been made. However inquiries have not indicated problems with the current availability of organic feeding stuffs for sheep.

Mr. Baker: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will estimate the volume of farm animal feed that has been consumed since the introduction of genetically modified material to such feed. [75106]

Mr. Rooker *[holding answer 8 March 1999]:* In total, about 20 million tonnes of animal feed were purchased in both 1997 and 1998 by livestock farmers for use on their farms, which included some 3.6 million tonnes of imported soya and maize products. A proportion of this would have been derived from GM crops. However, in the absence of crop segregation and specific labelling requirements, it is not possible to know the precise amount. In addition, farmers will have fed material from home-produced crops which would not have contained any genetically modified materials.

Food Standards Agency

Mr. Steen: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will invite Mrs. M. Kellie of Nelson House, Staverton, Totnes, Devon TQ9 6PA to take part in the open consultation process on the establishment of a Food Standards Agency; and if he will make a statement on the progress of the consultation process. [76794]

Mr. Rooker *[holding answer 17 March 1999]:* Mrs. Kellie attended a consultation meeting in Bristol on 15 March. She has also been sent a copy of the consultation papers dealing with the draft Food Standards Bill, on which her comments would be welcome.

By 16 March, 176 responses to this consultation exercise had been received. The deadline for responses to the consultation is 24 March.

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what responses he has received to date to the consultation exercise on a draft Food Standards Agency Bill. [76458]

Mr. Rooker: By 15 March, 158 responses had been received. The deadline for responses to the consultation is 24 March 1999.

Irradiated Food

Mr. Baker: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is his policy in respect of the draft Directive on Irradiated Food. [75090]

Mr. Rooker *[holding answer 8 March 1999]:* The Government consider that the recently adopted EC Directive on Irradiated Food represents an important step in harmonising food irradiation legislation across the EU. Amongst other things, this will require all irradiated foods to be clearly labelled in line with current UK requirements. The Directive will be implemented in the UK within the prescribed time frame of 18 months from the date when the Directive is published by the EC Commission.

Advisory Committee on Novel Foods and Processes

Mr. Baker: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the process following the nomination of Julie Shepherd to serve on the Advisory Committee on Novel Foods and Processes. [75087]

Mr. Rooker *[holding answer 8 March 1999]:* A number of candidates were considered for the post of consumer representative on the Advisory Committee on Novel Foods and Processes. The person chosen for this position by Ministers was particularly well qualified having both experience of consumer issues and a scientific qualification. If the hon. Member has particular concerns about this, perhaps he will write to me.

Genetic Modification

Mr. Baker: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list by title the unpublished reports into aspects of genetic modification which are held by his Department. [75098]

Mr. Rooker *[holding answer 8 March 1999]:* It is not the normal practice of governments to release details of information relating to internal policy analysis as is made clear in the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

This Department does, however, seek to make available as much information about genetic modification as possible. For example, the minutes of the meetings of the Advisory Committee on Novel Foods and Processes (ACNFP), and papers produced and considered by the Committee, are routinely published on the MAFF website. Reports of ACNFP assessments of novel food applications are also published in the Committee's annual reports.

Meat Inspection

Mr. Gill: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what information his Department has collated on the charges levied on abattoirs in other EU member states for meat inspection as prescribed by the EU Directive. [76288]

Mr. Rooker: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for South-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Paice) on 9 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *193*.

Cattle Passports

Mr. Todd: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the number of passports issued for cattle for each month since the start of the scheme which have required amendment as a result of error. [76219]

Mr. Rooker: Since the Cattle Tracing System was launched on 28 September 1998, the following number of cheque-book style passports have been re-issued by the British Cattle Movement Service in each month:

Date	
28 September—October 1998:	5,368
November 1998:	13,237
December 1998:	13,717
January 1999:	20,364
February 1999:	16,880

This figure includes both passports re-issued as a result of error and those re-issued because of loss.

Figures for passports re-issued under the Cattle Passports System between 1 July 1996 and 28 September 1998 are not readily available and could be gathered only at disproportionate cost.

Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received requesting a review of the Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966; and if he will make a statement. [76618]

Mr. Rooker: Both the British Equine Veterinary Association (BEVA) and the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS) have been seeking changes to the Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966 and Orders made under it. These representations, which deal with the scope of the work which should be reserved to veterinary surgeons or which might be entrusted to paraprofessionals, have raised a number of issues that require serious consideration.

US Dairy Imports

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what amount by value of US dairy products are imported into the United Kingdom; and if they benefit from the US Dairy Export Incentive Programme. [76207]

Mr. Rooker *[holding answer 16 March 1999]:* In 1998 the UK imported dairy products from the US to the value of £3,436,068. 90 per cent. of this figure consisted of imports of ice cream. In 1997–98 and 1998–99 the UK has not been a target market for the US Dairy Export Incentive Programme (which does not in any case cover ice cream), so UK imports of US dairy products have not benefited from this Programme.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of whether the Dairy Export Incentive Programme of the United States is consistent with World Trade Organisation agreements. [76206]

Mr. Rooker *[holding answer 16 March 1999]:* Export subsidies are permitted under the WTO Agreement on Agriculture, subject to commitments to reduce both the volume of and expenditure on subsidised exports over the period of the Agreement, and to notify these subsidies to the WTO.

The US Dairy Incentive Export Programme is a notified subsidy, and there is no evidence from the most recent figures submitted to suggest that the US is not reducing its agricultural export subsidies in line with the Agriculture Agreement. I therefore have no reason to believe that this measure is not in compliance with WTO rules. However, the compatibility with WTO rules of any trade measure can be definitively determined only under WTO dispute settlement procedures.

Genetically Modified Crops

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list those companies involved in genetically modified crops to which research grants have been awarded by his Department in the last three years. [75863]

Mr. Nick Brown *[holding answer 10 March 1999]:* The Ministry has awarded a research grant to Advanced Technologies (Cambridge) Ltd. together with Leeds University to develop nematode resistance in crops.

In addition, the Ministry co-funds research on a wide range of topics under the Government's LINK scheme. The following companies are 'co-funding' genetically modified crop research with the Ministry.

Zeneca, Nickerson Zwaan BV

PBI (now Monsanto)

Advanced Technologies (Cambridge) Ltd.

Agricultural Genetics Co.

Novartis

Agrevo

Nutting and Sons Ltd.

Elsoms Seeds Ltd.

A. L. Tozer Ltd.

Kentish Garden Marketing Ltd.

Horse Chestnut Disease

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what research his Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated into Horse Chestnut disease; [R] [75850]

(2) what publicity his Ministry has undertaken to ensure that the symptoms of Horse Chestnut disease can be recognised; and what estimate he has made of its prevalence in the United Kingdom; [R] [75832]

(3) what discussions he has had with ministers of European Union countries about the spread of Horse Chestnut disease; [R] [75833]

(4) what arrangements he has made for effective measures to be taken to combat Horse Chestnut disease. [R] [75834]

Mr. Morley: The horse chestnut leaf miner causes horse chestnut trees to lose their leaves; these symptoms are sometimes referred to as Horse Chestnut disease. The leaf miner has not been found in the United Kingdom; it prefers the warmer summers found in other parts of Europe.

The Forestry Commission has studied the problem and evaluated the risks it poses to trees in the United Kingdom, drawing on experience and research in continental Europe. The Commission concluded that the risk of the leaf miner becoming established in the United Kingdom is very small, and that there is therefore no need for further research in the United Kingdom at present. We shall, of course, continue to monitor the spread of the leaf miner elsewhere in Europe, in association with other European countries.

As the leaf miner is not present in the United Kingdom, we do not think that a publicity campaign to heighten awareness is necessary. We shall, however, continue to enforce our strict plant health regulations which should ensure that the leaf miner does not enter the country on imported plants or timber.

Neither my right hon. Friend the Minister nor I have discussed the problem with fellow Ministers in the European Union. Our officials in the Forestry Commission are, however, keeping in close contact with their colleagues in other Governments and research institutes throughout Europe.

Genetically Modified Organisms

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations Ministers in his Department have received on genetically modified organisms and the biotechnology industry from the US Government. [72760]

Mr. Rooker *[holding answer 1 March 1999]:* Genetically modified organisms and the biotechnology industry have been raised on three occasions by representatives of the US Government since May 1997. This took place during meetings between my right hon. Friend the previous Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and the US Ambassador to London on 26 November 1997; and between my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and (a) the US Trade Representative, Ambassador Barshefsky, on 23 October 1998 and (b) Mr. Dan Glickman, the US Agriculture Secretary, on 22 January 1999.

English Wine

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what are *(a)* the maximum permitted quota for English wine, *(b)* the current output of English vineyards and *(c)* the types of grapes which are allowed to be grown in England. [76159]

Mr. Morley: There is no quota for English wine. Because of the UK climate, vineyard output is variable: average production in England and Wales over the period 1993–97 was 16,344 hectolitres, while in 1997 (the last available year) it was 6,523 hectolitres. The vine varieties which may be used for table wine and quality wine in the UK are set out in the CAP (Wine) Regulations 1996, as amended.

Flood and Coastal Defences

Mr. Gummer: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he expects to publish his Department's revised Flood and Coastal Defence Project Appraisal Guidance Notes. [76372]

Mr. Morley: We plan to replace the Project Appraisal Guidance Notes with a series of six documents covering strategic planning and appraisal; economic appraisal; risk assessment; environmental appraisal; post project evaluation in addition to an introductory volume. The series will be published over the next eighteen months. The guidance on economic appraisal is nearing finalisation and publication is due by the summer.

Mr. Gummer: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list those who have been formally asked to comment on drafts of his Department's Flood and Coastal Defence Project Appraisal Guidance Notes; and if he will publish a list of consultees and their responses. [76380]

Mr. Morley: Prior to embarking on a review of the Project Appraisal Guidance Notes operating authorities—the Environment Agency, local authorities and Internal Drainage Bodies—the Ministry's Flood and Coastal Defence Policy and Review Group consultants and contractors were consulted on their effectiveness and provided the opportunity to contribute to a revision. We concluded that the current Notes should be replaced with a series which would continue to elaborate Treasury guidelines, but would update and present existing guidance in a single series. Preparation of these documents is being progressed under the guidance of specific steering groups with appropriate representation drawn from among operating authorities, English nature, and consultants.

Appointments

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list those people he has appointed to public bodies since 1 November 1998, indicating the positions to which they have been appointed and if they receive remuneration. [76413]

Mr. Morley: The following appointments or re-appointments have been made since 1 November 1998:

Agricultural Wages Committees
Members (£68 per day)
Ms Jeanette Firrell, and
Edward Kirby (Cambs, Beds, Essex and Herts
James Leishman (Norfolk and Suffolk)
Mrs. Edith Owen (Shropshire)

Apple and Pear Research Council
Member (£60 per day)
Mrs. Rebecca Upson

Environment Agency Board
Member (£266 per day)
Andrew Dare CBE

Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew
Trustees (unpaid)
Spencer de Grey
Hugh Gordon Dickinson
Ian Oag
Sir Jeffery Haverstock Bowman (Queen's Trustee)

Regional Flood Defence Committees
Members (unpaid)
Professor Roy Charles Ward (Yorkshire)
Mrs. Jean Christine Stidwell (Thames)

Advisory Committee on Pesticides
Member (£136 per meeting)
Colin Soutar

Agricultural Dwelling House Advisory Committees
Members (£86 per day)
Barry capon, and
Peter Scates (Norfolk and Suffolk)
Edward Kirby, and
Alan Felstead (Cambs, Beds, Essex and Herts)

Farm Animal Welfare Council
Chairman (£176 per meeting)
Mrs. Judy MacArthur Clark
Members (£111 per meeting)
John Peter McInerney
Gareth Lloyd

Food Advisory Committee
Members (£138 per meeting)
Charles McDonald
Christopher Llewelyn

Covent Garden Market Authority
Member (£7,475 per annum)
Alan J. Cole.

Electronic Red Boxes

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will name the Ministers in his Department who are regular users of electronic Red Boxes. [76180]

Mr. Nick Brown: I refer the right hon. Member to the reply given to him by my right hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, the Cabinet Office on 16 March 1999, *Official Report*, columns *651–52*.

No "laptop red boxes" are currently in use in my Department.

Wildlife Protection

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food for what measures he has put in place to improve protection for wildlife. [77187]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 16 March 1999]:* The Government are committed to a continuing expansion of areas under agreement under the major agri-environment schemes and are making an extra £40 million available over the next three years for these schemes in England.

Other measures include introducing stronger protection for internationally important wildlife sites from flooding and coastal erosion, persuading the European Commission to simplify the arrangements for voluntary set-aside to enable it to be of greater benefit for wildlife, encouraging the development of the flax protocol, and updating Codes of Practice for Pesticides and the Protection of Water, Soil and Air.

Multinational Food Companies

Mr. Baker: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on his Department's policy towards, and what assessment he has made of, the implications for food security of the increased role of multinational companies in the food chain. [76499]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 16 March 1999]:* My Department has every confidence in the security of food supplies due to the diverse make-up of the sector which ranges from a myriad of small domestic companies through to a small number of large multinational companies. Each has its own important role to play in the market place.

Written Answers to Questions

Friday 19 March 1999

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

EU Fraud

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what *(a)* discussions she has had and *(b)* proposals her Department has put forward at Council of Ministers' meetings in respect of EU fraud; and if she will make a statement. [77781]

Clare Short: The Development Council most recently discussed EU fraud on 30 November 1998 in the context of allegations about the European Community Humanitarian Office (ECHO). The Government seek to ensure that anti-fraud considerations are taken fully into account when new policies are being developed and new or revised Regulations are on the table.

Specific discussions on fighting EU fraud will be discussed at ECOFIN where the Treasury leads. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer will provide details in answer to the hon. Member's question.

Commonwealth Development Corporation

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list what her Department's budget for the Commonwealth Development Corporation was or is for *(a)* 1997–98, *(b)* 1998–99 and *(c)* 1999–2000. [77624]

Clare Short: The relevant figures are as follows:

Voted in estimates

£ million

	Payments to CDC	*Receipts from CDC*	*Net provision*
1997–98[1]	23.286	33.276	–9.900
1998–99[2]	35.919	35.919	0
1999–2000[3]	38.670	38.670	0

[1] outturn
[2] estimated outturn
[3] budget

Non-voted budget figures score as part of my Department's public expenditure figures. These reflect changes in CDC's cash deposits between year ends, not the absolute amount of cash balance which CDC holds. (A negative figure means an increase in cash deposits over the year). Relevant figures for the period in question are £12.5 million, –£15.2 million, and zero respectively.

British Council

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what is her Department's expenditure or budgeted expenditure through the British Council for *(a)* 1997–98, *(b)* 1998–99 and *(c)* 1999–2000. [77619]

Clare Short: In 1997–98 we provided a grant-in-aid of £29.8 million to support the British Council's development activities. In 1998–99 the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) assumed responsibility for the Council's grant-in-aid and the resources set aside in the Department for International Development's (DFID) budget—some £30.3 million—have been transferred to the FCO.

The Council also undertakes work for DFID under contract arrangements, typically project management. In 1997–98 the value of contracts which they won was £28.7 million.

Debt Relief

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much debt relief was granted by her Department in *(a)* 1997–98 and *(b)* 1998–99. [77622]

Clare Short: In 1997–98 the Department for International Development (DFID) approved new debt relief arrangements totalling £26.1 million. To date in 1998–99 a further £10.3 million of debt relief has been granted. In addition, over the past two years, we have foregone repayments of aid loans totalling £38.8 million under debt relief arrangements reached before April 1997.

As well as cancelling aid debts owed to my Department, we have provided assistance to countries to help them meet their debt service payments. We have provided £10 million to Mozambique in 1997–98 and £16 million in 1998–99 for this purpose. For Tanzania we have provided £16.6 million in 1997–98 and £25 million in 1998–99, and we contributed £5 million to the Multilateral Debt Trust Fund for Rwanda in January 1999. Most recently, in March 1999, we contributed £10 million to the Trust Fund set up following Hurricane Mitch, to assist Nicaragua and Honduras meet their international debt service payments.

DFID is also assisting the international financial institutions in providing debt relief under the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Initiative. In June 1998, we contributed £6.3 million to the HIPC Trust Fund to assist the African Development Bank (AfDB) with its costs in providing debt relief for Uganda. We have pledged a further £30 million for the AfDB, £11 million of which is earmarked for Mali and Mozambique, who are expected to receive HIPC debt relief later this year.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many people were directly employed by her Department on 1 March. [77620]

Clare Short: Statistics are produced on a quarterly basis. As at 1 January 1999, the Department for International Development directly employed 1,130 staff.

HOME DEPARTMENT

999 Calls

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many 999 calls were received by each police force in each of the last five years. [77287]

Mr. Boateng: The information requested is as follows:

AC2a total 999 calls received

	1993–94	1994–95	1995–96	1996–97	1997–98
Avon and Somerset	89,235	159,800	159,095	197,706	198,390
Bedfordshire	43,200	51,192	34,466	59,863	56,870
Cambridgeshire	53,504	58,805	73,923	79,332	82,541
Cheshire	75,094	80,035	90,243	94,953	102,2665
City of London[1]	0	0	0	0	0
Cleveland	67,398	84,346	87,253	89,061	86,318
Cumbria	33,985	34,729	37,047	37,749	36,206
Derbyshire[2]	49,457	n/a	94,632	96,746	103,413
Devon and Cornwall	102,391	121,798	148,381	165,013	175,942
Dorset	55,155	54,791	71,700	71,362	73,005
Durham	29,447	29,923	31,424	46,178	51,729
Dyfed-Powys	21,231	24,068	25,208	25,374	29,382
Essex	110,005	114,883	121,934	129,165	176,374
Gloucestershire	40,462	45,388	46,678	62,790	57,833
Greater Manchester	416,873	446,345	500,820	501,093	584663
Gwent	32,191	35,360	36,088	53,471	57,143
Hampshire	162,082	170,560	191,090	211,000	225,355
Hertfordshire	67,610	77,071	87,256	101,283	107,675
Humberside	85,632	88,402	87,653	95,238	106,042
Kent	130,015	141,769	161,149	170,908	168,849
Lancashire	71,986	102,984	156,349	132,194	177,088
Leicestershire	100,232	114,314	129,686	130,940	127,316
Lincolnshire	34,694	45,828	46,556	46,102	48,247
Merseyside	200,711	220,432	251,985	326,654	246,646
Metropolitan Police	1,347,207	1,538,385	1,681,620	1,772,871	1,875,381
Norfolk	37,143	48,984	56,261	63,684	69,852
Northamptonshire	25,027	32,256	55,994	60,028	69,581
Northumbria	213,369	224,569	222,835	229,478	227,129
North Wales	39,945	40,575	42,864	48,131	71,690
North Yorkshire	31,956	56,646	60,561	53,226	43,423
Nottinghamshire	119,489	115,695	129,831	147,739	156,239
South Wales	150,370	158,006	179,586	175,535	196,599
South Yorkshire	123,144	149,178	153,276	177,278	180,197
Staffordshire	58,935	65,266	74,900	76,400	87,737
Suffolk	27,521	30,253	56,112	60,951	61,961
Surrey	56,182	67,268	74,763	80,201	82,399
Sussex	94,251	138,265	151,652	162,452	172,250
Thames Valley	125,754	195,016	221,119	228,508	240,002
Warwickshire	43,468	48,870	54,921	60,861	63,503
West Mercia	80,894	98,539	99,012	110,688	111,924
West Midlands	358,009	412,211	455,056	462,052	479,112
West Yorkshire	267,786	323,081	348,120	342,199	353,125
Wiltshire	25,000	42,768	56,064	60,762	48,243
England and Wales Total[2]	5,297,040	[2]6,088,654	6,881,163	7,297,219	7,670,039

[1] Calls included in with the Metropolitan Police.
[2] Figures for Derbyshire are missing for 1994–95 due to the installation of a new call logging system.

Interception of Communications Act 1985

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many warrants under the Interception of Communications Act 1985 were *(a)* in force on 31 December 1998 and *(b)* issued during the course of 1998 for (i) the interception of telecommunications, (ii) the interception of letters and (iii) in total. [77276]

Mr. Straw: The Commissioner appointed under the Interception of Communications Act 1985 publishes figures on the number of interception warrants issued by the Home Secretary in his annual reports. In his report for 1998, (which will shortly be presented to the Prime Minister) the Commissioner will record the following numbers.

Numbers of interception warrants issued by the Home Secretary: 1998

	Number
Interception warrants in force on 31 December 1998:	
Telecommunications	385
Letters	48
Total	433
Interception warrants issued during the course of 1998:	
Telecommunications	1,646
Letters	117
Total	1,763

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applications for warrants under the Interception of Communications Act 1985 were refused in each of the last five years. [77278]

Mr. Straw: The information requested is not available. Each application for interception of communications is subject to careful scrutiny at a number of stages before a warrant is issued. The application is submitted by a very senior officer following scrutiny within the Agency concerned. Within my Department, it will normally be examined by officials at four successive levels of seniority before being presented to me for approval. I examine each application carefully before issuing the warrant.

At any stage in this process the case may be, and on occasion is, referred back to the applicant agency for clarification or further detail. This may, and occasionally does, result in a decision that the application should be withdrawn or that a warrant should not be issued. Records are not kept in a form which would enable the information requested to be extracted without disproportionate cost. But given the very careful scrutiny which I have described, it is seldom necessary for the Home Secretary to refuse to issue a warrant.

Surveillance

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the consequence of incorporation of the European Convention on Human Rights into United Kingdom law for the use of police and security service surveillance methods; and if he will make a statement. [77293]

Mr. Straw: Surveillance by the police and security service must be carried out in a way compatible with the European Convention on Human Rights to which the United Kingdom adheres, even before its incorporation into United Kingdom law. My Department is currently considering whether further changes are needed to the framework of controls on the use of surveillance.

Immigration and Nationality Directorate

Mr. Edward Davey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list, by date, the number of people who have been turned away after queuing at the Immigration and Nationality Directorate on each day after 1 February. [77809]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: From 1 February to 4 March, all callers attending the Immigration and Nationality Directorate Public Caller Unit (PCU) were seen by an officer. On Wednesday 4 March, following a disturbance by certain individuals in the queue, it proved necessary to close the doors to the public early. In the light of the incident it was decided that for Health and Safety reasons and for a temporary period, only the first 400 callers would be allowed in to the PCU each day. This restricted service was also in operation on 5, 8 and 9 March whilst managers considered how to provide better facilities for callers. I regret that figures were not kept of the number of callers turned away during those four days.

Since 10 March, additional temporary accommodation has been used and all callers to the PCU are again being seen on the day by a member of staff. I am informed that the PCU is now dealing with more people each day than it was in the second half of last year.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many complaints he has received about the operation of the Immigration and Nationality Directorate since 1 January. [76962]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: There has been an increase in complaints about the operation of the Immigration and Nationality Directorate (IND) following the introduction of the new caseworking arrangements in IND headquarters in Croydon and the disruption caused by the relocation of about 900 staff and 200,000 files. However, the numbers of complaints are not recorded.

Police Statistics

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police officers were in post in each constabulary in Wales *(a)* in April 1997 and *(b)* at the latest available date. [77554]

Mr. Boateng: The information requested is set out in the table:

Force	*31 March 1997*	*30 September 1998* [1]
Dyfed-Powys	1,005	1,013
Gwent	1,243	1,254
North Wales	1,369	1,395
South Wales	2,976	2,946
Total	6,593	6,608

[1] Latest date for which figures are available

Court Welfare Officers

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the cost of training court welfare officers in each of the last two years; and what training was made available to such officers. [77556]

Mr. George Howarth: The total spent on centrally supported training for family court welfare officers was £68,950 in 1997–98 and £65,710 in 1998–99. This training took the form of a modular learning programme for staff new to family court welfare work. Additional training has been provided by individual probation services, but figures for the amounts spent are not held centrally. There is also a training manual, "An introduction to the work of the family court welfare service", which was prepared in 1996 by the Association of Chief Officers of Probation, and a copy of which is in the Library.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what training is provided to *(a)* court welfare officers and *(b)* relevant members of the judiciary on parental alienation syndrome. [77558]

Mr. George Howarth: The training material provided for family court welfare officers covers the psychology of children in separating families. The training of members of the judiciary is a matter for the Lord Chancellor.

Animal Experiments

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) for what reasons Her Majesty's Government have not ratified the Council of Europe: Protocol of amendment to the European convention for

the protection of vertebrate animals used for experimental and other scientific purposes; and if he will make a statement; [77988]

(2) for what reasons Her Majesty's Government have not ratified the Council of Europe's European convention for the protection of vertebrate animals used for experimental and other scientific purposes; and if he will make a statement. [77285]

Mr. George Howarth: The United Kingdom signed, but postponed ratification of European Convention ETS 123 at the request of the European Commission. Through an agreement brokered during the United Kingdom's Presidency of the European Union in 1998, the way has been cleared for the Community and member states to accede to the Convention by 1 January 2000.

We intend to lay instruments of accession to meet this timetable. This will include ratification of the Amending Protocol. As part of our preparation, we are canvassing the Bailiwicks of Jersey and Guernsey, the Isle of Man and Northern Ireland about their wishes with regard to ratification.

Public Appointments

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list those people he has appointed to public bodies since 1 November 1998, indicating the positions to which they have been appointed and if they receive remuneration. [76417]

Mr. Straw: The information showing appointments to public bodies between 1 November 1998 and 28 February 1999 is shown in the tables.

I am unable to publish the names of those appointed to the Boards of Visitors in England and Wales because of concerns for their personal safety, but I can say that 100 new appointments were made between 1 November 1998 and 28 February 1999. These posts are not remunerated.

Table showing people appointed to Home Office public bodies between 1 November 1998 and 28 February 1999 who are remunerated

Name of body	*Name*	*Position*
Horserace Betting Levy Appeals Tribunal	Mr. Brian Waters[1]	Member
Police Discipline Appeals Tribunal	Mr. Michael Bennett	Member
	Mr. John Burrow	Member
	Mr. Martin John Wale	Member
Commission for Racial Equality	Ms Shushila Patel	Member
Police Complaints Authority	Mrs. Molly Meacher	Deputy Chair
	Ms Mehmuda Mian	Member
Criminal Injuries Compensation Board	Mrs. Suzan Matthews QC	Member
Parole Board	Mrs. Mollie Weatheritt	Member

[1] Re-appointment

Table showing people appointed to Home Office public bodies between 1 November 1998 and 28 February 1999 who are not remunerated

Name of body	*Name*	*Position*
Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs	Mrs. Joy Barlow[1]	Member
	Mr. Raj Boyjoonauth[1]	Member
	Mr. Alexander Cameron[1]	Member
	Dr. William Clee[1]	Member
	Dr. Michael Donmall[1]	Member
	Dr. Anthony John Duxbury[1]	Member
	Professor Griffith Edwards[1]	Member
	Dr. Laurance Gruer[1]	Member
	Ms Lorraine Hewitt[1]	Member
	Mr. Roger Howard[1]	Member
	Professor Ronald Jones[1]	Member
	Professor Malcolm Lader	Member
	Professor Otto Meth-Cohen[1]	Member
	Mr. Michael Narayn-Singh[1]	Member
	Dr. Diana Patterson[1]	Member
	Dr. Roy Robertson[1]	Member
	Dr. Sue Ruben[1]	Member
	Mr. Ian Sherwood[1]	Member
	Professor Gerald Stimson[1]	Member
	Professor John Strang[1]	Member
	Mr. Peter Walker[1]	Member
Animal Procedures Committee	Professor Ronald Anderson[1]	Member
	Professor Christopher Atterwill	Member
	Mr. Michael Baker	Member
	Professor Grahame Bulfield	Member
	Professor Stephen Clark	Member
	Professor Paul Flecknell[1]	Member
	Mr. Alan Holland	Member
	Professor Colin Johnston	Member
	Dr. Ian Purchase[1]	Member
	Professor Genrvra Richardson	Member
Alcohol Education and Research Council	Professor Donald Broom	Member
	Baroness Shreela Flather[1]	Chair

Table showing people appointed to Home Office public bodies between 1 November 1998 and 28 February 1999 who are not remunerated

Name of body	*Name*	*Position*
Firearms Consultative Committee	Deputy Chief Constable Graham Bennet	Member
	Chief Constable Anthony Thomas Burden	Member
	Mr. Brian George Carter	Member
	Dr. C. J. Robin Cooper	Member
	Mr. Jim Duncan	Member
	Mr. Charles Alexander Ewing	Member
	Mr. Joseph William Harriman	Member
	Mr. John Anthony Hill	Member
	Lt. Col. John David Hoare	Member
	Mr. Barry Michael Hughes	Member
	Mrs. Gillian Marshall-Andrews	Member
	Assistant Chief Constable David McCrone	Member
	Mr. David John Penn	Member
	Mr. Robert James Pitcher	Member
	Lord Charles Shrewsbury	Chair
	Dr. Stephen Murray Smith	Member
	Mr. Ian Sneddon	Ex officio member
	Mr. Thomas Alfred Warlow	Member
	Mr. Graham Widdecombe	Ex officio member
	Mr. James Arthur Winnington	Member
Parole Board	The Hon. Mr. Justice Scott Baker	Member

[1] Re-appointments

Fires

Mr. Fitzpatrick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many fires there were in domestic premises in *(a)* 1997 and *(b)* 1998; [77199]

(2) how many fires were started by arson in *(a)* 1997 and *(b)* 1998. [77198]

Mr. George Howarth: In 1997, the United Kingdom fire service attended a total number of 86,400 primary fires (those involving property or casualties) which were of malicious or suspected deliberate ignition. The number of arson offences recorded by the police in England and Wales for the same period was 31,500.

The total number of dwelling fires attended by the United Kingdom fire service was 72,200. Data for 1998 are not yet available.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many refugees who have been granted asylum are currently resident in Britain; and what percentage are known to be in receipt of means-tested benefits. [76605]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: I regret that information regarding the number of refugees currently resident in the United Kingdom is not available.

It is possible to say how many people are granted asylum in any one year, but not whether they have remained in the United Kingdom. Some refugees decide to go back to their country of origin when circumstances improve. Nor is it possible to determine the percentage of refugees in receipt of means-tested benefits.

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the numbers of refugees seeking asylum in the United Kingdom by *(a)* nationality and *(b)* country of origin in (i) 1996, (ii) 1997 and (iii) 1998. [R] [76751]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The requested information is given in the table. I regret that information on the country of origin is not held centrally and could be collated only at substantial cost.

Applications received for asylum in the United Kingdom, excluding dependants, by location of application, by nationality, 1996 to 1998

	1996	*1997*	*1998*
Europe			
Bulgaria	305	545	165
Cyprus	615	495	90
Poland	900	565	1,585
Romania	455	605	1,015
Former Soviet Union	1,400	2,015	2,820
Turkey	1,495	1,445	2,015
Former Yugoslavia	1,030	2,260	7,980
Others	275	1,220	2,075
Total	6,475	9,145	17,745
Americas			
Colombia	1,005	1,330	425
Others	765	1,495	550
Total	1,765	2,825	975
Africa			
Algeria	715	715	1,260
Angola	385	195	150
Cameroon	105	175	95
Democratic Republic of Congo	680	690	660
Ethiopia	205	145	345
Gambia	245	125	45
Ghana	780	350	225
Ivory Coast	125	70	95
Kenya	1,170	605	885
Liberia	330	205	70
Nigeria	2,900	1,480	1,380
Rwanda	80	90	280
Sierra Leone	395	815	565
Somalia	1,780	2,730	4,685
South Africa	40	50	65
Sudan	280	230	250
Tanzania	225	90	80
Togo	50	30	60
Uganda	215	220	210
Zimbabwe	130	60	80
Others	450	445	895
Total	11,290	9,515	12,380

Applications received for asylum in the United Kingdom, excluding dependants, by location of application, by nationality, 1996 to 1998

	1996	1997	1998
Middle East			
Iran	585	585	745
Iraq	965	1,075	1,295
Lebanon	145	160	155
Others	455	515	595
Total	2,150	2,335	2,785
Far East			
Afghanistan	675	1,085	2,395
Bangladesh	645	545	460
China	820	1,945	1,925
India	2,220	1,285	1,030
Pakistan	1,915	1,615	1,975
Sri Lanka	1,340	1,830	3,505
Others	275	265	650
Total	7,885	8,570	11,940
Other and Unknown Nationalities	80	105	190
Grand total	29,640	32,500	46,015

Notes:
1. Provisional and estimated figures rounded to the nearest 5 with * = 1 or 2
2. Includes relevant revisions to the number of in-country applications lodged in September-December 1996

Immigration and Asylum Appeals

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* appeals were lodged against deportation by overstayers and others not lawfully in the UK and *(b)* immigration/asylum appeals there were in total, in the last full year for which figures are available; and how many of those appeals were allowed in each case. [76579]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: In 1998, the Immigration Appellate Authority (IAA) received a total of 24,720 appeals to immigration adjudicators. Of these, 15,440 related to applications for asylum and 9,275 to other immigration cases.

In the same period, 25,320 adjudicator appeals, in asylum cases, were determined by the IAA. It is estimated that of these, 2,355 were allowed. I regret that information regarding the number of non-asylum appeals allowed is not available.

With regard to appeals lodged against deportation by overstayers and others not lawfully in the United Kingdom, information at this level of detail could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Immigration Detainees

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many immigration detainees there were at the latest date for which figures are available in (i) immigration detention centres and (ii) prison establishments who *(a)* had been convicted of a criminal offence in the UK, *(b)* were awaiting removal following a recommendation for deportation made by a court, *(c)* were awaiting removal having exhausted all appeal rights and *(d)* who were not within the above categories. [76614]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The available information, on all persons detained solely under Immigration Act powers in immigration detention centres and prisons in the United Kingdom as at 31 January 1999, is given in the table. The detailed information requested can be obtained only through the examination of individual case records and is, therefore, available only at disproportionate cost.

Persons recorded as being in detention[1] in the United Kingdom solely under Immigration Act powers as at 31 January 1999, by place of detention

Location	Total detainees
Immigration detention centres	
Campsfield	183
Dover Harbour	15
Harmondsworth	91
Heathrow's Queen's Building	15
Manchester Airport	16
Tinsley House	147
Prison establishments	
Bedford	2
Belmarsh	16
Blakenhurst	3
Brixton	8
Bullingdon	2
Canterbury	10
Dorchester	3
Edinburgh	5
Feltham	2
Hasiar	130
High Down	23
Holloway	15
Holme House	3
Leeds	2
Lewes	2
Longriggend	16
Maghabberry	2
Magilligan	7
Manchester	3
Norwich	3
Pentonville	6
Rochester	191
Swansea	2
Wandsworth	9
Woodhill	2
Wormwood Scrubs	16
Other prison establishments	12
Total	962

[1] Excluding persons detained in police cells (other than at Dover)

Working Time Directive

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many civil servants in his Department have been invited to waive the Working Time Directive requirement to work less than 48 hours a week on 17 consecutive weeks; how many civil servants in his Department have refused to waive the requirement; and what is the total cost of compliance with the Directive. [76806]

Mr. Straw: No figures of the kind sought by the hon. Member are currently available. The standard terms and conditions of service for staff employed by the Home Office are well within the limits set by the Working Time Regulations. The Regulations do not require employers to keep records of the number of workers who refuse to sign an opt-out agreement and no central records are kept by the Home Office. Compliance costs are not kept centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Immigration and Asylum Bill

Fiona Mactaggart: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will place in the Library the representations he received on which he based his statement under section 1g (1)(a) of the Human Rights Act 1998 with respect to the provisions of the Immigration and Asylum Bill. [76973]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: No. The statement was based on internal advice which is exempt from disclosure in accordance with the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Ministerial Meetings (US)

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 22 February 1999, *Official Report*, column *121*, if he will list the dates and locations of the meetings he has had with the US Attorney General since 1 June 1998. [77152]

Mr. Straw: In the period covered by the Question, I have not met personally with the United States Attorney-General. However, I have chaired one meeting of G8 counterparts on 16 December 1998, which was conducted by video conference, at the request of Janet Reno, and spoken with her by telephone from time to time.

West Yorkshire Police

Mr. Truswell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information was obtained by unauthorised persons gaining access to the West Yorkshire Police internal communications system; and what assessment he has made of the current security of the system. [76977]

Mr. Boateng: I understand that an individual gained access to the West Yorkshire Police voicemail system and was able to access messages left on voicemail boxes that had not been password protected. He also gained access to the Crimestoppers Line.

The security of the communications system is an operational matter for West Yorkshire Police. I understand they have implemented a number of security measures to prevent further breaches. Calls to the Crimestoppers line now go directly to a manned extension and are no longer on the internal voicemail system.

European Elections

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if votes will be published by constituencies as well as by regions in the European elections. [77758]

Mr. George Howarth: Votes will be counted at Westminster Parliamentary constituency level though the regulations will provide that where the same person is acting returning officer for two or more constituencies he or she will be able to combine them for counting purposes. Local results will be communicated to the regional returning officers who will perform the seat allocation calculation for each of the 11 regions.

The results of all local counts will be made public as well as the final regional result.

West Mercia Police Force

Miss Kirkbride: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many and what proportion of the West Mercia Police Force police officer posts for 1998–99 were vacant at the latest available date; and what was the average length of such vacancies. [77324]

Mr. Boateng *[holding answer 18 March 1999]:* It is for the Chief Constable to determine the number of police officers in the force, within the resources available. I understand from the Acting Chief Constable of West Mercia that there are 2,063 budgeted posts in the force. On 1 March the force had 52 full-time equivalent vacancies. The average number of vacancies in 1998–99 has been 45, which represents 2 per cent. of the budgeted posts available. It is not possible for the force to provide information on the average length of a vacancy during 1998–99.

Correspondence

Sir Brian Mawhinney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the right hon. Member for North-West Cambridgeshire can expect a reply to his letter of 19 January on behalf of his constituent, Sir Stephen Hastings. [77445]

Mr. Boateng *[holding answer 18 March 1999]:* I am sorry that the right hon. Member did not receive an earlier reply to his letter. A full reply was, however, sent on 16 March.

Electronic Red Boxes

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will name the Ministers in his Department who are regular users of electronic Red Boxes. [76175]

Mr. Straw: I refer the right hon. Member to the reply given by my hon. Friend, the Parliamentary Secretary for the Cabinet Office on 16 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *651*.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Pensioners (Minimum Income Guarantee)

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what discussions he held with pensioners' groups before increasing the minimum income guarantee for pensioners; and if he will make a statement. [77363]

Mr. Timms: We meet representatives of pensioners' organisation regularly to discuss a broad range of issues. We are determined that even the least well off of today's pensioners should share in rising national prosperity, and the proposed increase from next April in line with earnings will build further on the significant boost we are giving to the incomes of these pensioners this year.

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of the number of pensioners who will have an income below the minimum income guarantee level who will not qualify for the minimum income guarantee. [77552]

Mr. Timms: I refer the hon. Member to the Written Answer I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Sutton (Mrs. Gilroy) on 11 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *346*.

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many pensioners he estimates will be ineligible for the minimum income guarantee, following the Budget, due to the level of their savings; and if he will make a statement. [77362]

Mr. Timms: This information is not currently available. Estimates of the number of pensioners ineligible for the Minimum Income Guarantee due to the level of their savings are based on the data used to produce the published estimates of take-up of income-related benefits. These estimates are currently being revised following the discovery in December of an error, the effect of which was to understate income brought to account. The estimates will be republished in May. We will then be in a position to provide an answer to this question.

Mrs. Gilroy: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people are estimated to be eligible for benefits under the minimum income guarantee for pensioners aged *(a)* 60 to 74 years, *(b)* 75 to 79 and *(c)* over 80 years, (i) in total and (ii) by gender. [75858]

Mr. Timms: The information is not currently available in the form requested.

In total, we estimate there are approximately 1.5 million pensioners in receipt of Income Support who will be eligible for the Minimum Income Guarantee in 1999–2000. Additionally, we estimate there are between about 400,000 and 700,000 pensioners who are not claiming Income Support but who would be entitled to it if they claimed. The estimate is provisional, as revised estimates of the take-up of income-related benefits are currently being worked on.

We will in a position to provide final estimates and the breakdown requested in May, when revised estimates of the take-up of income-related benefits are due to be published.

Notes:

1. "Pensioners" for the purposes of the Minimum Income Guarantee, means single persons aged 60 or over, and couples where at least one partner is aged 60 or above.

2. The figure is rounded to the nearest quarter of a million and does not include pensioners living in residential care and nursing homes.

Minimum Funding Requirement

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security who will be undertaking the Minimum Funding Requirement review; and if he will list all those involved in the review. [77553]

Mr. Timms: The Pensions Board of the Faculty and Institute of Actuaries have been asked to carry out the review in partnership with this Department. The Department is also advised by the Government Actuary. The Pensions Board may decide to set up technical working groups to research particular aspects. The Confederation of British Industry, Trades Union Congress, National Association of Pension Funds and the Association of British Insurers have been invited to comment on the scope of the review.

Statutory Sick Pay

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many recruitment or contracting companies have been required to administer statutory sick pay to workers they contract to other companies since 1998; and what has been the consequent average additional annual (i) premiums for professional indemnity, public liability and employee's liability insurance and (ii) time which a company has had to spend administering the new rules. [77807]

Mr. Bayley: The legislation governing the payment of Statutory Sick Pay to employees engaged on short-term contracts has remained unchanged since 1982. Those provisions were clarified in a Court of Appeal judgment in October 1996 and further guidance to reflect that judgment was issued to employment agencies in 1998. Information on the effect, if any, on insurance premiums and the amount of time on which a company has to spend administering the scheme is not available.

Pensioners (Income Support)

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of the percentage of those pensioners who are entitled to claim income support who actually do so. [77364]

Mr. Timms: The latest available figures suggest that between 68 per cent. and 79 per cent. of pensioners entitled to Income Support actually claim it. These figures are, however, a provisional estimate following the discovery of an inaccuracy in the published estimates of take-up of income-related benefits. Work continues towards a fully revised set of figures to be published in May.

Note:

"Pensioners" in the context of Income Support, means pensioner benefit units—a single person aged 60 or over, or a couple (counted as one "benefit unit") where one or both members is aged 60 or over.

Bereavement Benefits

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate the *(a)* number and *(b)* proportion of widows in each region and nation who are in receipt of occupational pension payments. [76106]

Angela Eagle: The information is in the table.

Number and proportion of widows in receipt of occupational pension by Government Office Region/Home Nation (1996–97)

Government Office Regions (excluding NI)	*Number of widows (000s) in receipt of occupational pension*	*Percentage of widows in receipt of occupational pension*
All widows	1,760	50
North East	100	53
North West and Merseyside	210	46
Yorkshire and the Humber	190	54
East Midlands	120	48
West Midlands	170	50
Eastern	150	48
London	170	42

Number and proportion of widows in receipt of occupational pension by Government Office Region/Home Nation (1996–97)

Government Office Regions (excluding NI)	*Number of widows (000s) in receipt of occupational pension*	*Percentage of widows in receipt of occupational pension*
South East	240	55
South West	160	53
England	1,490	50
Wales	110	52
Scotland	160	48

Notes:
1. The estimates are for all widows including those over pension age.
2. All figures are estimates and are taken from the Households Below Average Income (HBAI) data set based on the Family Resources Survey (FRS). The FRS does not include Northern Ireland. 1996–97 is the latest year for which information is available.
3. Numbers are given in thousands and are rounded to the nearest 10,000.
4. Due to rounding, components may not sum to totals.

Housing Benefit

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate the cost of including entitlement to extended payments of housing benefit to those moving into work who had been in receipt of incapacity benefit alone. [77239]

Angela Eagle: The cost of including entitlement to extended payments of Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit to all those moving into work who had been receiving Incapacity Benefit is estimated at £3.4 million. Of this £2.3 million is in respect of claimants on Income Support and Incapacity Benefit and £1.1 million in respect of those on Incapacity Benefit without Income Support.

Private Pensions

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what interest rate has been paid to persons who opted out of SERPS and who normally receive a lump sum for investment in their private pension scheme, during the delay in issuing payments by his Department's computer systems. [77658]

Mr. Timms: I refer the hon. Member to the written answer I gave to the hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr. Duncan Smith) on 2 March 1999, *Official Report*, columns *710–11*.

Select Committee Reports

Mr. Duncan Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) pursuant to his answer of 10 March 1999, *Official Report*, columns *250–51*, on Select Committee reports, if he will list the occasions on which Ministers discussed the contents of Social Security Committee reports or draft reports of the deliberations of the Committee with members of the Social Security Committee prior to their publications; [77810]

(2) pursuant to his answer of 10 March 1999, *Official Report*, columns *250–51*, on Select Committee reports, if he will conduct an investigation into whether special advisers or civil servants reviewed or discussed Social Security Committee reports, drafts or parts of reports or their conclusions, prior to their publication. [77811]

Mr. Darling: There have been no occasions on which I, or my ministerial colleagues, have discussed reports or draft reports with members of the Social Security Committee prior to their publication.

Also, other than embargoed copies of Social Security Committee reports, issued under House of Commons Standing Orders, neither civil servants nor the special adviser have discussed reports or draft reports prior to their publication. I see no reason or basis for an investigation.

SCOTLAND

Meat Imports

Mr. Alan Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to stop the import of meat grown abroad in conditions not allowed in the UK. [76737]

Mr. Macdonald: All consignments of fresh meat imported into the UK, whether from other EU member States or third countries, must have been produced in accordance with the harmonised Community rules laid down in Council Directive 64/433/EEC. Products not subject to Community rules may be imported only if they comply with our national rules. Food which fails to meet food safety requirements can be refused entry into the UK or it can be seized under the Food Safety Act 1990.

Trade implications of any suspension of imports are a matter for the EU Commission. Any action taken or imposed must be in accordance with the sanitary and phytosanitary agreement of the World Trade organisation.

From 1 July 1999, this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

Local Government Employees (Pay)

Mr. Gorrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the average full time pay without overtime of *(a)* teachers, *(b)* local authority manual workers, *(c)* council APT and C staff and *(d)* council chief officers in (i) 1998–99, (ii) 1993–94, (iii) 1988–89, (iv) 1983–84 and (v) 1978–79, in 1998–99 prices. [76620]

Mr. McLeish: The information requested is not available centrally, nor is it readily available from the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities.

From 1 July 1999, this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

Mr. Gorrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what resources he is providing to enable councils to fund pay increases for *(a)* teachers and *(b)* other local government employees. [76750]

Mr. McLeish: Over the next three years the Government are to provide an extra £530 million in support of Scottish local authorities' revenue expenditure. This represents real terms increases in each of the next three years. It is the responsibility of local authorities to decide how to allocate the money available to them and to meet the cost of pay increases from within their overall resources.

From 1 July 1999, this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

Mr. Gorrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what were the percentage pay increases agreed in Scotland for *(a)* teachers, *(b)* local authority manual workers, *(c)* council APT and C staff and *(d)* council chief officers in each year since 1993–94. [76624]

Mr. McLeish: The information requested is as follows:

percentage

Year	*Teachers*	*Local authority manual workers*	*APT and C*	*Chief officers*
1993	1.5	1.5	1.5	1.5
1994	2.3	2.3	2.3	2.0
1995	2.0	2.2	2.2	2.3
1996	3.0	2.9	2.9	2.9
1997	2.5	[1]2.5	[1]2.5	2.5
1998	3.0	3.0	3.0	3.0

[1] Or £4 per hour minimum if greater

From 1 July 1999, this will be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

Sentencing Policy

Ms Osborne: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the members of the committee established under Lord MacLean to review the sentencing and treatment of serious violent and sexual offenders. [78296]

Mr. McLeish: The following have accepted my invitation to serve on Lord MacLean's Committee:

Mr. Andrew Brown, Chief Constable, Grampian Police

Mr. David Burns QC, Advocate

Dr. Derek Chiswick, Consultant Psychiatrist, Edinburgh Healthcare NHS Trust

Professor David Cooke, Professor of Forensic Psychology, Glasgow Caledonian University

Mr. Douglas Crawford, Depute Director of Social Work, Renfrewshire Council

Ms Jeane Freeman, Parole Board member, Chief Executive, APEX

Professor Christopher Gane, Professor of Scots Law, University of Aberdeen

Mr. William Gilchrist, Regional Procurator Fiscal, North Strathclyde

Mr. Roger Houchin, Governor, Barlinnie Prison

Mr. Murray Macara, Solicitor Advocate, Beltrami and Co.

Mr. Jamie Malcolm, Nursing Officer, Mental Welfare Commission for Scotland

Dr. Linda Treliving, Consultant Psychotherapist, Dundee Healthcare NHS Trust

Sheriff Charles Stoddart, Director of Judicial Studies.

Arrangements for taking evidence will be announced later.

PRIME MINISTER

Select Committee Reports

Sir Brian Mawhinney: To ask the Prime Minister (1) if he will issue instructions to Ministers on the actions to be taken following unauthorised receipt of *(a)* drafts and *(b)* final unpublished versions of Select Committee reports; [77846]

(2) pursuant to the answer to the right hon. Member for Penrith and The Border, 16 March 1999, *Official Report*, columns *641–42*, if he will require the Chancellor to return the leaked Select Committee report to the Chairman of the Social Security Committee; [77844]

(3) if he will make a statement on the Government's policy when Ministers receive leaked copies of a Select Committee report in *(a)* draft and *(b)* unpublished form. [77845]

The Prime Minister: I refer the right hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire) on 1 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *531*.

EU Political Committee

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Prime Minister if he will publish the agenda for the forthcoming EU Political Committee meeting of 22 March. [77161]

The Prime Minister: The agenda for the 22 March Political Committee has not yet been decided. As has been the case since 1970, draft agendas for Political Committees are not usually circulated until a few days before the meeting takes place, and are often amended up to the last minute.

EU Special European Council

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Prime Minister if he will publish the agenda for the forthcoming EU Special European Council of 24 to 25 March. [77159]

The Prime Minister: The timetable for the Agenda 2000 negotiations was agreed at the end of the UK Presidency when the Cardiff European Council concluded that there should be political agreement on the package no later than March 1999. The purpose of the Special European Council is to meet that timetable. The negotiations are being conducted on the basis of a Presidency paper which sets out the issues for discussion. The Presidency regularly updates this document as negotiations progress. A copy of the latest version was placed in the Libraries of both Houses today.

Genetically Modified Organisms

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Prime Minister how many representations he has received from the United States Government on genetically modified organisms since 1 May 1997; on what dates each representation was received; in what form each representation was made; and from which United States department each originated. [77113]

The Prime Minister: None.

Commission for Racial Equality

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Prime Minister what steps he has taken to meet the CRE's leadership challenge. [76963]

The Prime Minister: I accepted the CRE's Leadership Challenge on 12 May 1998.

I have made clear my commitment to Britain being a beacon to the world on race equality. This Government are taking a clear lead in improving race equality.

The Lawrence inquiry has done much to identify the problems to which we must all face. With my full support, my right hon. Friend, the Home Secretary is developing a comprehensive response to the report. He announced to the House on 24 February 1999, *Official Report*, columns 389–93, his intention to extend the Race Relations Act 1976 to cover all public services. A wider action plan is also being developed.

In my role as Minister for the Civil Service, I am committed to ensuring that the Civil Service reflects at all levels the diversity of our society. I also commend the Charter for Action recently launched by the Minister for the Cabinet Office, the head of the Home Civil Service and the Council of Civil Service Unions, to redress the under-representation of the ethnic minorities in the Civil Service.

Iraq

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 20 January 1999, *Official Report*, column *484*, when he expects to issue an updated report on the results of military action against Iraq. [77589]

The Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence sent an updated report on the results of Operation Desert Fox to all Members of the House on 18 January 1999.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will place in the Library his reply to the letter from K. M. Kirk of Paphos, Cyprus, of 20 December 1998, about Iraq. [77355]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 18 March 1999]:* As far as I am aware, the most recent correspondence I have had from Mr. J. M. Kirk was a letter from him dated 3 March 1998.

Correspondence

Mr. Howard: To ask the Prime Minister when he expects to reply to the letters sent to him by the right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe on 14 January and 3 March. [77662]

The Prime Minister: I refer the right hon. and learned Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Windsor (Mr. Trend) on 17 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *706*.

Patten Commission

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make it his policy that no information from the Patten Commission on policing which is not in the public domain will be shared with *(a)* any other Government and *(b)* any private group. [77583]

The Prime Minister: The Commission on Policing is independent. Its terms of reference, set out in the Good Friday Agreement, require it to "consult widely and to report no later than Summer 1999". It is not for the Government to say what the Commission should discuss or with whom. The Commission's report will be made public in its entirety and implementation of its recommendations will be discussed with the political parties and the Irish Government.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when she expects the Patten report on policing in Northern Ireland to be published. [76739]

Mr. Ingram: The Belfast Agreement states that the Independent Commission on Policing should report no later than the Summer of 1999. The Government look forward to receiving the report, which is expected within the timescale established by the Agreement.

Oil Payments

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list those Governments with whom the United Kingdom Government to Government service and contract agreements allow for payments in oil; and for what dates such agreements were made. [71811]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 16 February 1999]:* Payments in oil to the UK Government for supplying goods or services are not precluded under existing rules provided they represent the most cost effective and practical method. It is a matter for individual Government Departments to negotiate appropriate contracts after considering each case on its merits. Because of this, no centralised records are kept of the agreements reached.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Northern Ireland Electricity Report

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what discussions she plans to hold with the Chairman of the Northern Ireland Consumer Committee on Electricity and the Regulator concerning the report published by Northern Ireland Electricity into the storm on 26 December 1998; and the implementation of the recommendations. [76642]

Mr. Ingram: None at present. Consumers' interest are being pursued vigorously by the Director General of Electricity Supply who is considering the Northern Ireland Electricity report on the storms. He will be discussing his conclusions with both the company and the Chairman of the Consumer Committee for Electricity and then publishing a consultation paper seeking the views of consumers on the action programme proposed by Northern Ireland Electricity. Ministers have requested a further report from and discussion with the company later in the year on progress with the action programme.

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment she has made of the report from Northern Ireland Electricity published on Thursday 4 February into the storm of 26 December 1998. [76643]

Mr. Ingram: Protection of consumers' interests is primarily a matter for the independent Director General of Electricity Supply for Northern Ireland. He is considering the report by Northern Ireland Electricity on the recent storms; will meet with the company and the Chairman of the Consumer Committee for Electricity; and then publish a consultation paper.

Birth Defects

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many children have been born with *(a)* Downs Syndrome and *(b)* other abnormalities in each health and social services board in each of the last 10 years. [76641]

Mr. McFall: The table provides figures for the number of births of babies with Downs Syndrome and other selected congenital malformations notified in Northern Ireland and each Health and Social Services Board area for the years 1986 to 1996 (the latest year for which figures are available).

Northern Ireland

Year	*Anencephalus*	*Hydrocephalus*	*Spina Bifida*	*Downs Syndrome*
1986	17	8	37	41
1987	20	11	43	39
1988	9	8	27	27
1989	5	[1]13	20	[1]51
1990	5	12	21	[1]32
1991	5	14	22	52
1992	2	11	20	29
1993	2	10	11	31
1994	3	6	19	29
1995	3	10	12	25
1996	6	5	8	38

[1] For 1989 and 1990 individual figures for health and Social Services Board areas do not sum to Northern Ireland figures due to additions to the Northern Ireland total being made by the Department of Medical Genetics. These amendments are not available at Board level.

Health Care

Mr. Pound: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what impact the Chancellor's Budget statement will have on health care provision in Northern Ireland. [76744]

Mr. McFall: The Chancellor's Budget statement confirmed the Government's continuing commitment to modernise the NHS. I am equally determined that health services in Northern Ireland are equipped to provide a first class service, and am considering how this can best be achieved.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is her estimate of the cost of *(a)* the Northern Ireland Assembly, *(b)* each of the 10 departments of Government and *(c)* the offices of the First and Deputy Ministers in the first full year of their operation. [76837]

Mr. Paul Murphy: This is a matter for the Northern Ireland Assembly. The Assembly Commission recently estimated the operating costs of the Assembly at £36 million in 1999–2000.

Biological Scientists

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many biological scientists are employed in each hospital in Northern Ireland; what are the qualifications required for such work; and what are the salary scales for such posts. [76884]

Mr. McFall: Clinical Scientists are employed in pathology laboratories in the following Northern Ireland Health and Social Services Trusts:

	Number
Belfast City Hospital	35
Green Park	1
Mater Infirmorum Hospital	2
Royal Group of Hospitals	26
Ulster Community and Hospitals	1
United Hospitals	2

The basic entry qualifications to the grade of Clinical Scientist is a First or Second Class Honours degree.

There are three grades of Clinical Scientist, the salary scales of which are set out in the following table.

Clinical scientists: Grades and spine points, effective 1 December 1998

Grade	*Spine points*	*Salary £*
A	01	13,290
	02	13,822
	03	14,375
	04	14,949
	05	15,546
	06	16,169
	07	16,817
	08	17,486
B[1]	09	18,188
	10	18,915
	11	19,671
	12	20,458
	13	21,276
	14	22,127
	15	23,013
	16	23,931
	17	24,891
	18	25,885
	19	26,919
	20	27,998
	21	29,118
	22	30,283
	23	31,494
	24	32,753
	25	34,065
C	26	35,426
	27	36,844
	28	38,318
	29	39,851
	30	41,443
	31	43,102
	32	44,825
	33	46,620
	34	48,485
	35	50,424
	36	52,443
	37	54,539

[1] Individual posts will be assigned a payscale of three consecutive points within the range 09 to 25 on the spine

Working Time Directive

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many civil servants in her Department have been invited to waive the Working Time Directive requirement to work less than 48 hours a week on 17 consecutive weeks; how many civil

servants in her Department have refused to waive the requirement; and what is the total cost of compliance with the Directive. [76803]

Mr. Paul Murphy: To date members of the Northern Ireland Office and Northern Ireland Departments and agencies have not systematically been invited to waive the 48 hour limit. However, a small number of staff who have been identified as working regularly in excess of the 48 hour average limit have signed the waiver. There have not been any refusals.

The cost of the introduction of some minor modifications to existing administrative procedures, particularly record keeping, cannot readily be identified. No additional staffing requirements have been identified.

HEALTH

NHS Appointments

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his written answer of 16 February 1999, *Official Report*, column *730*, (1) if he will give the total amount of annual fees which is payable to *(a)* Labour, *(b)* Liberal Democrat, *(c)* Conservative and *(d)* independent councillors appointed to NHS trusts or health authorities since 1 May 1997; [72623]

(2) if he will list the numbers of councillors of each political party appointed to each NHS trust or health authority since 1 May 1997; [72624]

(3) if he will list the health authorities and NHS trusts to which each named individual has been appointed, indicating in each case whether the appointment is as *(a)* chairman and *(b)* board member. [73898]

Mr. Denham *[holding answers 22 February and 1 March 1999]:* Copies of the following information have been placed in the Library.

A list of all individuals appointed to chairman and non-executive positions on National Health Service trust or health authority boards since 1 May 1997 and who were known to be councillors at the time of their appointment. The listing shows their appointment by name, NHS trust or health authority, political party and whether they were appointed as chairman or non-executive member; and a list of the same information but grouped according to the trust or health authority concerned.

These listings include the names of 12 individuals who were not discovered by the database search of 15 February and reported in my answer of 16 February.

Chairmen receive remuneration in one of three bands according to the turnover of their NHS trust or the allocation made to their health authority.

Band 1: £19,285

Band 2: £17,145

Band 3: £15,125.

All non-executive members or directors receive £5,000.

In a full year, the councillors listed (excluding those whose terms of office have ended) would receive remuneration as follows:

£

	Chairmen	*Non-executives*	*Total*
Labour	390,895	990,000	1,380,895
Conservative	51,555	45,000	96,555
Liberal Democrat	62,520	125,000	187,520
Other (including independents)	0	40,000	40,000

Local councillors account for 9.9 per cent. of those serving on NHS boards and receive 8.4 per cent. of the total amount of remuneration payable. They bring to the NHS invaluable experience and commitment to the service of their communities.

All appointments are made on merit in accordance with Nolan principles. Information was not collected on the political activity of all non-executives appointed by the last Government, so full comparisons are not possible.

Free Eye Prescriptions

Mr. Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many pensioners will be eligible for free eye prescriptions in *(a)* the Medway towns and *(b)* Chatham and Aylesford in April. [75553]

Mr. Denham: From 1 April 1999, everyone aged 60 and over will be eligible for free National Health Service sight tests. We cannot make population estimates for areas within local authority boundaries. We estimate that there are some 40,000 people aged 60 and over resident in the area of the Medway Unitary Authority.

Medical School Places

Mr. Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what weighting he will give to regional needs when deciding which universities will benefit from the proposed allocation of an additional 1,000 medical school places; [75924]

(2) in deciding where to allocate the proposed additional 1,000 medical school places, he will conduct an impact assessment on the consequences for *(a)* public health and *(b)* community regeneration of approving a new medical school at Hull University. [75935]

Mr. Denham: The responsibility for allocating medical student places in England lies with the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE).

A joint implementation group has been established to take forward this work. The objectives, which were approved by Ministers, have been placed in the Library. The group wrote to all universities in England on 8 January 1999, inviting them to submit bids for a share of the extra medical student places by 12 March 1999. The group will consider all proposals received, and make recommendations to the HEFCE, which will announce the allocations later in the year.

Elderly People (Care)

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement about the future of private sector care homes for the elderly. [75920]

Mr. Hutton: The Government's policy in this area was set out in the White Paper "Modernising social services".

The commissioning of long-term residential care is a matter for local authorities. The Government have no ideological view as to the choice of private or public ownership. What is important is that the arrangements made by authorities should be based on judgments about best value and optimum outcomes for individual users.

Tobacco

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to raise in the EU Health Council the health effect of EU policy in relation to tobacco growers. [76935]

Mr. Hutton: We expect the German Presidency to include an item on tobacco on the agenda of the Health Council meeting on 8 June 1999. The Commission will report on progress made in implementing the recommendations of its 1996 report on the Community's role in combating tobacco consumption, which includes the issue of tobacco production in the European Union. We intend to indicate our support for co-ordinated action.

CS Gas

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many times since 1 January 1996 UK chief medical officers have discussed the issue of CS sprays at meetings of their group. [77115]

Mr. Hutton: The United Kingdom Chief Medical Officers meet on an informal ad hoc basis and there is no record of any discussion of CS spray at any of their meetings which have taken place since 1 January 1996.

Termination Payments

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list by NHS region the termination payments made by *(a)* NHS trusts and *(b)* health authorities to *(a)* chief executives, *(b)* other board members and *(c)* senior managers, for each of the last five years. [76476]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 15 March 1999]:* The information available is shown in the tables.

The only data collected centrally for National Health Service trusts relate to the total 'Compensations for loss of office' within the category of 'Executive Director's Remuneration'.

The only data collected centrally for health authorities and family health service authorities relate to the total 'Compensations for loss of office' within the category of 'Non-Executive Director's Remuneration', and to 'Compensations for loss of office' for 'Chief Executive'. The figure for chief executive will be included within the overall total for non-executive directors.

Information was not collected for health authorities and family health service authorities in 1993–94.

Separate data are available for 'senior managers' however it is included here in those figures relating to NHS trusts.

Family health service authorities—FAA10 1994–95

£000

Compensations for loss of office	*Executive*	*Chief executive*
Northern and Yorkshire Region total	0	0
Trent Region total	54	54
Anglia and Oxford Region total	0	0
North Thames Region total	0	0
South Thames Region total	0	0
South and West Region total	0	0
Anglia and Oxford Region total	0	0
South and West Region total	8	8
West Midlands Region total	32	32
North West Region total	0	0
Grand total	94	94

Source:
Family Health Services Authorities Annual Accounts 1994–95.

Family health service authorities—FAA10 1995–96

£000

Compensations for loss of office	*Executive*	*Chief executive*
Northern and Yorkshire Region total	0	0
Trent Region total	58	0
Anglia and Oxford Region total	0	0
North Thames Region total	56	56
South Thames Region total	95	95
South and West Region total	17	17
Anglia and Oxford Region total	8	8
South and West Region total	51	51
West Midlands Region total	40	40
North West Region total	206	206
Grand total	529	465

Source:
Family Health Services Authorities Annual Accounts 1995–96.

NHS Trust—TAC07 1993–94

Board members—compensation for loss of office	*Sub code £000*
Northern total	0
Yorkshire total	0
Trent total	0
East Anglian total	30
North West Thames total	132
North East Thames total	197
South East Thames total	166
South West Thames total	31
Wessex total	19
Oxford total	5
South Western total	144
West Midlands total	157
Mersey total	104
North Western total	0
Grand total	985

Source:
NHS Trusts summarisation schedules 1993–94.

NHS Trust—TAC07 1994–95

Board Members—compensation for loss of office	*Sub code £000*
Northern and Yorkshire total	130
Trent total	86
Anglian and Oxford total	233
North Thames total	516
South Thames total	386
South & West total	97

NHS Trust—TAC07 1994–95

Board Members—compensation for loss of office	*Sub code £000*
West Midlands total	271
North West total	411
Grand total	2,130

Source:
NHS Trusts summarisation schedules 1994–95

NHS Trusts—TAC07 1995–96

Executive Directors—compensation for loss of office	*Sub code £000*
Northern and Yorkshire total	302
Trent total	123
Anglia and Oxford total	74
North Thames total	432
South Thames total	372
South and West total	203
West Midlands total	400
North West total	166
Grand total	2,072

Source:
NHS Trusts summarisation schedules 1995–96.

NHS Trust—TAC07 1996–97

Executive Directors—compensation for loss of office	*Sub code £000*
Northern and Yorkshire total	221
Trent total	38
South Thames total	737
North Thames total	426
Anglia and Oxford total	229
South and West total	574
West Midlands total	195
North West total	321
Grand total	2,741

Source:
NHS Trusts summarisation schedules 1996–97.

NHS Trust—TAC07 1997–98

Executive Directors—compensation for loss of office	*Sub code £000*
Northern and Yorkshire total	236
Trent total	97
Anglia and Oxford total	423
North Thames total	479
South Thames total	875
South and West total	221
West Midlands total	366
North West total	129
Grand total	2,826

Source:
NHS Trusts summarisation schedules 1997–98.

Health Authorities—HAA5 1994–95

£000

Compensations for loss of office	*Executive*	*Chief executive*
Northern and Yorkshire Region total	19	0
Trent Region total	186	0
Anglian and Oxford Region total	56	37
North Thames Region total	136	112
South Thames Region total	211	69
South and West Region total	0	0
Anglian and Oxford Region total	26	0

Health Authorities—HAA5 1994–95

£000

Compensations for loss of office	*Executive*	*Chief executive*
South and West Region total	93	93
West Midlands Region total	138	52
North West Region total	0	0
Grand total	865	363

Source:
Health Authority Accounts 1994–95

Health Authorities—HAA5 1995–96

£000

Compensations for loss of office	*Executive*	*Chief executive*
Northern and Yorkshire total	67	0
Trent total	200	0
Anglian and Oxford total	228	0
North Thames total	132	91
South Thames total	322	72
South and West total	0	0
Anglian and Oxford total	74	0
South and West total	97	0
West Midlands total	388	336
North West total	0	0
Grand total	1,508	499

Source:
Health Authority Accounts 1995–96.

Health Authorities—HAA05 1996–97

£000

Compensations for loss of office	*Executive*	*Chief executive*
Northern and Yorkshire total	281	180
Trent total	238	225
Anglian and Oxford total	32	0
North Thames total	0	0
South Thames total	11	0
South and West total	79	79
West Midlands total	30	0
North West total	0	0
Grand total	671	484

Source:
Health Authority Accounts 1996–97

Health Authorities—HAA05 1997–98

£000

Compensations for loss of office	*Executive*	*Chief executive*
Northern and Yorkshire total	1	0
Trent total	0	0
Anglian and Oxford total	0	0
North Thames total	285	0
South Thames total	106	84
South and West total	0	0
West Midlands total	30	30
North West total	0	0
Grand total	422	114

Source:
Health Authority Accounts 1997–98.

Advertising Expenditure

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list, by region, expenditure by the NHS on advertising in each of the last five years. [76485]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 15 March 1999]:* Information about national Health Service expenditure on advertising is given in the following table. It includes expenditure in a number of different areas including recruitment advertising, health promotion initiatives and measures to improve local accountability such as the production of annual reports and information about services.

Advertising expenditure 1993–94 to 1997–98 trusts and health authorities

£

Region	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1996–97*	*1997–98*
Northern/Yorkshire	3,222,848	3,612,511	5,108,073	4,634,783	4,694,683
Trent	2,704,686	3,327,513	3,654,782	3,473,188	4,212,484
Anglia and Oxford	2,860,525	4,263,608	5,207,245	5,288,974	5,302,599
North Thames	5,383,073	8,301,039	10,787,87	10,743,83	11,084,23
South Thames	4,354,905	6,448,038	8,664,092	7,935,490	8,428,801
South and West	2,944,936	4,121,499	4,971,958	4,450,681	5,739,418
West Midlands	2,110,235	3,655,466	5,001,479	4,618,611	4,789,712
North West	2,485,535	3,295,971	4,453,542	3,916,934	4,558,358

Sources:

1. Financial returns of trusts and health authorities 1996–97 to 1997–98
2. Financial returns of trusts, district health authorities, regional health authorities and special health authorities of the London postgraduate teaching hospitals 1993–94 to 1995–96 (this is not audited data)
3. Regional aggregates as in 1997–98 have been used rather than the 14 regions in existence prior to 1 April 1996
4. Regional data differs from information previously supplied because of *(a)* movement of NHS trusts and health authorities between regions, and *(b)* inclusion of special health authorities within the Thames regions. National totals remain consistent.

Opencast Mining

Ms Kelly: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to publish the results of his investigation into the effects of opencast mining on health; and if he will make a statement. [77196]

Mr. Hutton: The study being undertaken at the University of Newcastle is funded jointly by the Department and the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions. The findings of the study will be reviewed at the Institute for Environment and Health at the end of March as part of an annual review of air pollution research contracts. The results will be made available as soon as the staff undertaking the work are happy that this should be done and publication in a peer reviewed scientific journal is likely. This work will form a part of a wider review of the effects on health of emissions of dust and other substances from opencast coal mining sites which is being prepared by the Department's Committee on the Medical Effects of Air Pollutants. The Committee hopes to consider this subject at its meeting in October.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Residence Applications

Mrs. May: To ask the Minister of State, Lord Chancellor's Department how many fathers had their application for residence awarded in each of the last two years. [77555]

Mr. Hoon: This information is not collected.

Contact Orders

Mrs. May: To ask the Minister of State, Lord Chancellor's Department how many contact orders were not kept in 1998 resulting in applications to the courts; and how many penalties were awarded by the courts where contact orders were broken. [77559]

Mr. Hoon: This information is not collected.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Osborne House

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, (1) pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Hastings and Rye (Mr. Foster) of 4 February 1999, *Official Report*, column *694*, when he will bring forward legislation to repeal the Osborne Estate Act 1902. [77215]

(2) pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Hastings and Rye (Mr. Foster) of 4 February 1999, *Official Report*, column *694*, if the King Edward VII Convalescence Home at Osborne House remains open for new convalescents, [77216]

(3) how many members of *(a)* the Armed Forces and *(b)* the Civil Service used the facilities of the King Edward VII Convalescent Home at Osborne House on the Isle of Wight in each of the last five years. [77210]

Mr. Alan Howarth: We plan to introduce the necessary legislation at the earliest opportunity. In the meantime, I can confirm that the King Edward VII Convalescent House at Osborne House remains open for new convalescents.

The figures for use of the facilities offered by the home in each of the last five years are:

	1994	*1995*	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*
The Armed Forces					
Residents	[1]11	11	[1]14	[1]13	[1]10
Convalescents	231	267	313	274	238

	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998
Average number of convalescents per week	4	5	6	5	5
The Civil Service					
Residents	5	'6	'6	'5	'4
Convalescents	62	96	86	88	94
Average number of convalescents per week	1	2	2	2	2

[1] These figures represent the total number of residents at one time or another during a year including admissions, deaths and departures to other accommodation.

TREASURY

Select Committee Reports

Mr. Duncan Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 16 March 1999, *Official Report*, columns *641–42*, (1) if *(a)* special advisers and *(b)* officials (i) saw the draft report and (ii) discussed the preliminary draft of the report with (A) the Parliamentary Private Secretary and (B) members of the Social Security Committee; [77852]

(2) if *(a)* he and *(b)* his Ministers discussed the Social Security Committee's Draft report with (i) his Parliamentary Private Secretary, (ii) members of the Social Security Committee, (iii) special advisers and (iv) officials. [77886]

Mr. Gordon Brown: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 16 March 1999, *Official Report*, columns *641–42*.

Working Families Tax Credit

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what estimate he has made for *(a)* small and medium enterprises and *(b)* larger companies of the number of man hours that a company will be required to spend to establish and administer the working families tax credit in (i) its first year and (ii) subsequent years; [76672]

(2) what estimate he has made of the (i) first year and (ii) subsequent year compliance costs for *(a)* small and medium enterprises and *(b)* larger companies of their role in administering the working families tax credit system. [76869]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 16 March 1999]:* I refer the right hon. Gentleman to the draft Regulatory Impact Assessment which was published on 3 February 1999.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the impact of the change from the Family Credit programme to the Working Families Tax Credit programme on the number of claimants in Portsmouth. [69935]

Dawn Primarolo: The Working Families Tax Credit, which will replace Family Credit on 5 October, will have a higher threshold and an increased taper. These improvements will result in an increase in take-up nationally.

The introduction of Working Families Tax Credit will ease the poverty trap by allowing people to keep more of what they earn as they increase their earnings, thereby increasing the incentive to move from welfare to work.

Tax Burden

Mr. Evans: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what is the average net change in the tax burden on individuals since May 1997 in Scotland; [77005]

(2) what is the average net change in the tax burden on individuals since May 1997 in Lancashire; [77004]

(3) what is the average net change in the tax burden on individuals since May 1997 in Wales. [77006]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 16 March 1999]:* Figures for tax receipts are not available by region. Financial year figures for UK tax receipts and social security contributions, net of tax credits, as a proportion of gross domestic product were published in table B27 of the March 1999 Financial Statement and Budget Report.

Stamp Duty (Shares)

Mr. Loughton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the revenue from stamp duty on shares if the rate was *(a)* increased to 1 per cent. and *(b)* lowered to $\frac{1}{4}$ per cent. [R] [74066]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 2 March 1999]:* As set out in Table B10 of the Financial Statement and Budget Report, the revenue from duty on transactions in shares and other securities is forecast to be £3.1 billion in 1999–2000. If the rate of duty was raised from the current 0.5 per cent. to 1 per cent., then it is estimated that revenue would be £5.4 billion in 1999–2000 whereas, if it was reduced to $\frac{1}{4}$ per cent., then revenue would be £1.7 billion. These estimates take account of the impact the relevant changes would be expected to have on the value of share transactions.

EU Fraud

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what *(a)* discussions he has had and *(b)* proposals his Department has put forward at Council of Ministers' meetings in respect of EU fraud; and if he will make a statement. [77778]

Ms Hewitt: Fraud against the Community budget is something which the Government take very seriously and I can confirm that this informs our discussions with other member states at Council meetings. The Government aim to ensure that anti-fraud considerations are taken fully into account when new policies are being developed and new or revised regulations are on the table.

Regular discussions on fighting EU fraud take place and specific proposals are considered at the ECOFIN Council where the Treasury is the lead UK Department. The Commission's annual "Fight against Fraud" report and work programme was discussed at the May 1998 ECOFIN which, under the UK Presidency, was devoted to fraud, financial management and budget issues. The Court of Auditors' Report for 1997 focused on improving financial management and fighting fraud and waste and was discussed at the March 1999 ECOFIN.

The November 1998 ECOFIN discussed the European Court of Auditors' Special Report 8/98 concerning the Commission's services engaged in the fight against fraud. The Council concluded that there must be a policy of zero tolerance towards fraud and called for substantial improvements to be made without delay with fraud inside

the Community Institutions as the first target. It called on the Commission to consider all of the options for strengthening the fight against fraud.

At the January 1999 ECOFIN the Chancellor called for a strong independent head of fraud investigations who would have wide ranging powers and rights matched by responsibility and accountability including reporting to the European Parliament and the Council. The March 1999 ECOFIN discussed the Commission's proposal of December 1998 for an independent fraud investigation office, and the 1997 European Court of Auditor's Report. The Council called on the Commission to bring forward amended proposals for a strengthened fraud investigation office, indicating the key elements it would wish the amended proposal to incorporate, which were in line with the Chancellor's January initiative.

There may also be discussions of specific frauds against particular EC programmes in the relevant Council meeting, for instance on allegations of fraud against the EU humanitarian aid programme which were discussed at the November 1998 Development Council.

Budget Publications

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what departmental guidelines govern the content of the Treasury publication, "Budget 99, Building a Stronger Economic Future for Britain"; and if he will make a statement. [77301]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 18 March 1999]:* "Budget 99, Building a Stronger Economic Future for Britain" complies with the Cabinet Office guidance on the work of the Government Information Service.

Capital Gains Tax

Mr. Loughton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people paid CGT in financial years *(a)* 1995–96, *(b)* 1996–97, *(c)* 1997–98; and what is his estimate for *(d)* 1998–99. [R] [74063]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 2 March 1999]:* The number of taxpayers with a Capital Gains Tax liability arising in the years 1995–96 to 1998–99 is as follows:

Capital Gains Tax: Number of taxpayers [1]

Thousand

Year	*Number*
1995–96	100
1996–97[2]	110
1997–98[2]	160
1998–99[2]	190

[1] Excludes companies as their capital gains are charged to Corporation Tax.

[2] Provisional. These figures were previously published in Table 1.6 of Inland Revenue Statistics 1998 (IRS 1998) and have been revised in line with outturn and the March 1999 Budget forecast.

Business Taxes

Mr. Jack: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish for each tax levied on businesses *(a)* the amounts paid in 1996–97 and 1997–98 and *(b)* his estimate for 1998–99. [75293]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 8 March 1999]:* Detailed historical data on receipts from individual taxes can be found in Chapter 2 of "Financial Statistics".

Estimates of tax receipts in 1998–99 can be found in Table B10 of the March 1999 Financial Statement and Budget Report.

Duty Free

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the increased revenue to his Department as a result of the abolition of duty-free shopping in financial year 1999–2000. [77441]

Dawn Primarolo: Such estimates are sensitive to a whole range of assumptions about the nature of the successor regime and the post abolition marketing strategies of the duty-free operators. There is insufficient certainty on either of these points to make meaningful predictions at this stage.

RAF Airfields (Exports)

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer on how many occasions permission has been given by HM Customs and Excise for private companies to export goods from RAF airfields in each of the last five years. [77246]

Dawn Primarolo: HM Customs and Excise does not keep records of such information.

Military Cargo

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if HM Customs' permission was given for a military cargo to be exported from RAF Manston in Kent in May 1998, which subsequently went missing en route to South Africa. [77251]

Dawn Primarolo: HM Customs and Excise did give authority for the loading of a shipment of goods to South Africa, which moved via the UK having been released for export from the Community by Customs in another Member State. Information available at the time of shipment did not indicate that the cargo included any controlled military goods.

VAT Liability

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on changes to United Kingdom determination of VAT liability, pursuant to *(a)* COM (98) 660 and *(b)* COM (98) 663; what legislation will be required; and what effect this will have on income to the Exchequer. [74444]

Dawn Primarolo: Explanatory memoranda were placed in the Library of the House in respect of draft Directive Com (98) 660.

Petroleum

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much extra revenue will be raised in excise duty on petroleum due to changes made since 1 May 1997 in 1997–98 and each of the following four years. [76575]

Dawn Primarolo: HM Customs and Excise estimate the extra revenue raised in excise duty on petrol due to the changes made since 1 May 1997 to be:

£ million

Financial year	*Extra revenue*
1997–98	350
1998–99	740
1999–2000	600
2000–01	820
2001–02	1,000

The figures have been calculated by comparing estimated revenue streams under the current Government's duty commitments (as shown in table C.1 of the 1998 FSBR and table IB.2 of the 1999 ESBR/FSBR) with an estimate of what revenue streams would have been under the previous Government's 5 per cent. escalator.

Diesel

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much extra revenue will be raised in excise duty on *(a)* diesel and *(b)* ultra-low sulphur diesel due to changes made since 1 May 1997 in 1997–98 and each of the following four years. [76574]

Dawn Primarolo: HM Customs and Excise estimate the extra revenue raised in excise duty on *(a)* diesel and *(b)* ultra-low sulphur diesel due to the changes made since 1 May 1997 to be:

Financial year	*Diesel*	*Ultra-low sulphur diesel*
1997–98	220	–5
1998–99	570	10
1999–2000	120	430
2000–01	0	900
2001–02	0	1,040

The figures have been calculated by comparing estimated revenue streams under the current Government's duty commitments (as shown in table C.1 of the 1998 FSBR and table IB.2 of the 1999 ESBR/FSBR) with an estimate of what revenue streams would have been under the previous Government's 5 per cent. escalator. It has been assumed that after 1999–2000 all diesel will have been replaced with ultra-low sulphur diesel.

Although it was legislated for under the previous Government, the separate rate for ultra-low sulphur diesel did not come into effect until after 1 May 1997 and has therefore been treated as a change since that date.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Toddington Primary School

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment on what date he received the Statement of Case from Gloucestershire County Council on its proposals to close Toddington Primary School. [77365]

Ms Estelle Morris: The statement of case was received on 12 March 1999.

Under-fives

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what discussions he had with *(a)* teachers, *(b)* playgroup staff and *(c)* parents before proposing guidelines for the teaching of the under-fives; what extra provision he is making in terms of (i) teachers and (ii) buildings for implementing the guidelines; and if he will make a statement. [77367]

Ms Hodge: The Qualification and Curriculum Authority held eight consultative conferences with representatives of Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships, which include providers of early education and parents, before issuing its consultation document on the review of the desirable learning outcomes on 22 February. The consultation document has been sent to EYDC Partnerships, Local Education Authorities, teachers associations and to a sample of schools. Alongside this, the Secretary of State is considering responses to the consultation on the regulation of early education and day care which covered issues including adult:child ratios, qualifications and premises requirements.

DEFENCE

Military Exercises

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the cost of the airborne exercise in France carried out between 1 April 1997 and 31 March 1998. [72925]

Mr. Doug Henderson: This exercise was a reciprocal exchange exercise between the Parachute Regiment and the French 1 Regiment de Chasseurs Parachutistes, involving 80 personnel from the Parachute Regiment, which took place in France in September 1997. The only additional cost for this exercise was for personnel to travel to and from France at a cost of £3,100 as exercises conducted under a reciprocal agreement are at no cost to the visiting force because personnel exchange places and use the supporting assets that are already in place.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the cost of, which countries had armed forces involved in, what assessment he has made of the value of and how many personnel were deployed on the air exercises in the USA carried out between 1 April 1997 and 31 March 1998. [76597]

Mr. Doug Henderson: The UK was involved in a number of air exercises in the USA in the specified time period, all of which provided excellent and valuable training opportunities for the participating forces. Holland, Brazil, Singapore and Spain also participated in the exercises, with the UK and the US. For fast jet exercises, the total additional cost to the UK was some £1.85 million, with a total of 1,600 UK personnel being deployed in the specified time period, although no more than 500 personnel were deployed for a single exercise. For Maritime Patrol Aircraft (MPA) exercises, the total additional cost to the UK was some £600K, with a total of 550 UK personnel being deployed in the specified time period, although no more than 200 personnel were deployed for a single exercise.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the cost of, which countries had armed forces involved in, and how many personnel were deployed on the jungle training exercise in Singapore carried out between 1 April 1997 and 31 March 1998. [76590]

Mr. Doug Henderson: 835 personnel from the Royal Marine Command deployed, via Singapore, for a jungle training exercise in Malaysia. The exercise formed part of the Ocean Wave Far East deployment and the additional cost incurred was £51K. The exercises involved personnel of the UK and Royal Malaysian Armed Forces.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many personnel were deployed on the jungle training exercise in Thailand carried out between 1 April 1997 and 31 March 1998. [76593]

Mr. Doug Henderson: 136 personnel of the Royal Marine Command participated in this exercise.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the cost of the three infantry battalion exercises in Kenya carried out between 1 April 1997 and 31 March 1998. [72971]

Mr. Doug Henderson *[holding answer 1 March 1999]:* The cost of the three infantry battalion exercises in Kenya carried out between 1 April 1997 and 31 March 1998 was as follows:

£ million

Exercise	*Cost*
Grand Prix 1/97	0.063
Grand Prix 2/97	0.622
Grand Prix 3/97	0.672
Total	1.357

The cost of Grand Prix 1/97 excludes the costs of movement by RAF transport aircraft and from Kenya, as these figures are no longer available. The costs of ammunition and of spares consumed during the exercise are also excluded as these costs are not separately identified.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the cost of the combined maritime and air exercise in Malaysia carried out between 1 April 1997 and 31 March 1998. [76611]

Mr. Doug Henderson: As I advised the hon. Member on 4 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *866*, the RN participated in Exercise "Flying Fish" as part of their "Ocean Wave" deployment, the total additional cost of which was approximately £9.8M. The additional cost to the RAF of Exercise "Flying Fish" was some £800K.

EU Directives and Regulations

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what EU directives and regulations affect compensation and pension arrangements for those for whom he and his Department are responsible, both military and civilian. [76960]

Mr. Spellar: MOD military and civilian personnel are entitled to membership of the relevant occupational pension schemes, Armed Forces Pension Scheme (AFPS) and the Principal Civil Service Pension Scheme (PCSPS) respectively. There are no EU directives or regulations which specifically govern public service pension schemes. However, more general EU directives and regulations governing employment and pay may in some cases have an impact on occupational pension schemes, including the AFPS and PCSPS.

Service Personnel (Homosexuality)

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many *(a)* male and *(b)* female service personnel were discharged or dismissed on grounds of homosexuality in each of the past 10 years; how many of these, in each year, have challenged the decision at the European Court of Human Rights and at what cost to public funds, under the European Convention's (i) Article 3 (inhuman or degrading treatment), (ii) Article 8 (right to privacy), (iii) Article 10 (freedom of expression), (iv) Article 14 (freedom from discrimination) and (v) other Articles. [76955]

Mr. Doug Henderson: Based on the latest available figures, the numbers of those discharged or dismissed since 1989 are:

Year	*Army*			*RN*			*RAF*			
	Male	*Female*	*Total*	*Male*	*Female*	*Total*	*Male*	*Female*	*Total*	*Total*
Officers										
1989	Not available			0	0	0	1	0	1	1
1990	2	1	3	3	0	3	1	0	1	7
1991	2	0	2	0	0	0	1	1	2	4
1992	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	2	4
1993	2	0	2	0	0	0	2	1	3	5
1994	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
1995	0	0	0	4	1	5	4	0	4	9
1996	0	0	0	1	0	1	3	0	3	4
1997	0	0	0	1	0	1	2	0	2	3
1998	Not available			0	0	0	1	0	1	1
Other ranks										
1989	—	—	[1]32	8	1	9	—	—	[1]19	60
1990	20	19	39	11	1	12	14	5	19	70
1991	21	16	37	5	1	6	4	1	5	48
1992	13	15	28	12	3	15	6	4	10	53
1993	18	15	33	12	1	13	9	3	12	58
1994	17	12	29	7	6	13	5	3	8	50
1995	21	6	27	13	1	14	11	1	12	53
1996	28	11	[1]39	10	7	17	3	4	7	63
1997	18	13	[1]31	8	5	13	5	[1]0	5	49
1998	26	16	[1]42	11	6	17	3	2	5	64

[1] These figures represent administrative discharges only. They do not include figures for dismissals

Six personnel are currently challenging their dismissals at the European Court of Human Rights. To the best of our knowledge, there have been no other cases in the last 10 years.

All six of the applicants have claimed violation of their rights under:

Article 8—right to respect for private and family life.

Article 14—discrimination on any ground "such as sex, race, colour, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, association with a national minority, property, birth or other status.", of the Convention.

Two of the applicants have also claimed violations of their rights under:

Article 3—torture or inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

Article 5—liberty and security of person.

Article 10—freedom of expression.

The Court, however, declared their complaint under Article 5 alone, and in conjunction with Article 14, inadmissible.

The costs to public funds which can be separately identified are, to date, approximately £11,000, including VAT. There are also internal staff costs associated with defending these cases: these could not be separately identified.

Depleted Uranium

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to review the hazards of exposure to depleted uranium. [74714]

Mr. Doug Henderson: None. The hazards from depleted uranium are well documented in the scientific literature and are reviewed as new information becomes available. I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given by my noble Friend the Minister for Defence Procurement on 17 February 1998, *Official Report, House of Lords*, column 21 and that given by the Under-Secretary of State for Defence on 13 May 1998, *Official Report*, columns *128–29*. I have today placed a copy of the Ministry of Defence's Report on Depleted Uranium in the Libraries of the House.

Naval Bases and Supply Agency

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many people are currently employed by the Naval Bases and Supply Agency; what was the figure at its inception; on what date the Naval Bases and Supply Agency published its report for 1997–98; and what was the cost of production of the report. [76894]

Mr. Doug Henderson: This is a matter for the Chief Executive of the Naval Bases and Supply Agency. I have asked the Chief Executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from J. A. Trewby to Mr. Mike Hancock, dated 19 March 1999:

The Secretary of State for Defence has asked me to reply to your Question about the number of people employed by the Naval Bases and Supply Agency and about the Agency's Annual Report as this falls within my area of responsibility.

The Agency is currently complemented to employ 11,232 staff, including 2,954 military staff, compared to 13,350 on launch on 11 December 1996. This number will increase to 11,923 on 1 April this year with the creation of the new tri-service explosives organisation within the Agency. Our 1997/98 Annual Report and Statement of Accounts was published on 27 July 1998 at a cost of £2,930.

Ships Support Agency

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many people are currently employed by the Ships Support Agency; what was the figure at its inception; on what date the Ships Support Agency published its report for 1997–98; and what was the cost of production of the report. [76876]

Mr. Doug Henderson: This is a matter for the Chief Executive of the Ships Support Agency. I have asked the Chief Executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from J. D. Coles to Mr. Mike Hancock, dated 19 March 1999:

I am replying to your question to the Secretary of State about the number of people currently employed by the Ships Support Agency, and at its inception; and about the date on which the Agency's report for 1997–98 was published and the cost of its production, as this matter falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of the Agency.

On 31 January 1999, the number of people employed by the Ships Support Agency was 2,903 (2,460 civilian and 443 military). When the Agency launched in December 1996 its strength was 2,810 (2,450 civilian and 360 military).

The Agency's Annual Report for 1997–98 was placed in the Library of the House on 29 July 1998. External printing of the Report cost £3,393. All production work was undertaken by Agency internal resources.

Pay and Personnel Agency

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many people are currently employed by the Pay and Personnel Agency; what was the figure at its inception; on what date the Pay and Personnel Agency published its report for 1997–98; and what was the cost of production of the report. [76897]

Mr. Doug Henderson: This is a matter for the Chief Executive of the Pay and Personnel Agency. I have asked the Chief Executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from M. A. Rowe to Mr. Mike Hancock, dated 19 March 1999:

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about the number of people employed by the Pay & Personnel Agency, and its annual report for 1997/98; as these matters fall within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of the agency.

There are 739 people currently employed by the PPA, and the comparable number was 956 at 1 February 1996, the date of the agency's inception. All staff in the agency are civilians. The agency's report for 1997/98 was published on 23 July 1998 and the cost of production was £19,922.

Medical Supply Agency

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many people are currently employed by the Medical Supply Agency; what was the figure at its inception; on what date the Medical Supply Agency published its report for 1997–98; and what was the cost of production of the report. [76889]

Mr. Doug Henderson: This is a matter for the Chief Executive of the Medical Supplies Agency. I have asked the Chief Executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from B. E. Nimick to Mr. Mike Hancock, dated 19 March 1999:

I am replying to your question to the Secretary of State for Defence about the Medical Supplies Agency's manning and Annual Report as these matters fall within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of the Medical Supplies Agency.

As at 12 March 1999 there were 354 employees funded by the Medical Supplies Agency. This Agency was formed in March 1996 and the total number of persons in post at 1 April 1996 was 301. Prior to its launch, the combined establishments of organisations that later formed the Medical Supplies Agency totalled 403. The reduction from 403 to 301 was achieved by means such as the removal of much of the military management, the closure of units in Germany and Hong Kong and the loss of a blood collection team. A Military/Civilian breakdown of these figures is shown below:

Period	*Military*	*Civilian*	*Total*
Pre-Agency	138	265	403
1 April 96	61	240	301
12 March 99	40	314	354

A draft copy of the Medical Supplies Agency's Annual Report and Accounts for 1997/98 was circulated to members of the Surgeon General Owners' Review Board on 23 June 1998 and the final version was published on 19 January 1999. The report was written in-house by existing staff. It was designed using Ministry of Defence facilities, without incurring hard charges, and was printed at a cost of £1,204.

Joint Air Reconnaissance Intelligence Centre

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many people are currently employed by the Joint Air Reconnaissance Intelligence Centre; and what was the figure at its inception. [76893]

Mr. Spellar: This is a matter for the Chief Executive of the Joint Air Reconnaissance Intelligence Centre. I have asked the Chief Executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from S. J. Lloyd to Mr. Mike Hancock, dated 19 March 1999:

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about the number of people currently employed at the Joint Air Reconnaissance Intelligence Centre Defence Agency as this falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive.

A total of 458 people are currently employed by the Joint Air Reconnaissance Intelligence Centre as at 11 March 1999. The figure at its inception in April 1996 was 485.

I hope that you find that this answer gives you the information that you are seeking.

Defence Dental Agency

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which targets the Defence Dental Agency did not meet in 1997–98; and what monitoring he has undertaken for those targets in 1998–99. [72838]

Mr. Doug Henderson *[holding answer 1 March 1999]:* This is a matter for the Chief Executive of the Defence Dental Agency. I have asked the Chief Executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from I. G. McIntyre to Mr. Mike Hancock, dated 19 March 1999:

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence concerning the 1997/98 achievement against targets and the monitoring of these targets in 1998/99, as this matter falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive for the Defence Dental Agency.

The Defence Dental Agency had six key targets for 1997/98 two of which were only partially met. Target number 6 which was to complete all Service Level Agreements with major customers. This target was specific to 1997/98, and although not met within the year due to delays in obtaining signatures from two of our customers, has now been achieved.

Target number 2 which was, for each Service, to achieve a dental fitness target of 75% for all Service personnel, was not achieved in respect of Army personnel. It was recognised when the target was set that the Agency was not resourced to meet it for the Army. It was therefore set as an "aspirational" target in that respect. This target remains the same for 1998/99.

Key targets are monitored continuously and reviewed quarterly. Quarterly results are published and submitted to the Owners Review Board, and the meetings of relevant Customer Advisory Group. Additionally end of year results will be published in the Next Steps Report.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on what date the Defence Dental Agency published its report for the year 1997–98; and what was the cost of production of the report. [72841]

Mr. Doug Henderson *[holding answer 1 March 1999]:* This is a matter for the Chief Executive of the Defence Dental Agency. I have asked the Chief Executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from I. G. McIntyre to Mr. Mike Hancock, dated 19 March 1999:

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about publication of the report for the Defence Dental Agency for the year 1997/98, as this matter falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of the Defence Dental Agency.

The Defence Dental Agency did not publish a report for 1997/98.

Gulf Veterans

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the basis for the statement of 15 February by Mr. Alan Casson of his Department's Gulf Veterans' Illnesses Unit that it is highly unlikely that local populations would have been exposed to any significant amount of respirable dust. [77257]

Mr. Doug Henderson *[holding answer 18 March 1999]:* I believe that the statement to which the hon. Member refers was made in a letter dated 15 February from Mr. Alan Casson, an official in my Department's Gulf Veterans' Illnesses Unit, to a member of the public. The basis for that statement was fully explained in that letter, the text of which is repeated in its entirety as follows:

Letter from Mr. Alan Casson, Gulf Veterans' Illnesses Unit to a member of the public, dated 15 February 1999:

Thank you for your letter of 19 October to the Secretary of State for Defence, Mr. Robertson, which enclosed a copy of an article from the Independent concerning ill-health in southern Iraq and an alleged link to the use of depleted uranium (DU) based ammunition by UK and US forces during the 1990/91 Gulf. I have been asked to reply and apologise for not doing so sooner.

Both US and UK forces did indeed use DU-based ammunition during the Gulf War. UK forces used a new 120mm tank round which contained a solid DU penetrator core with a protective (non-DU) coating in its Challenger 1 tanks. US forces used 20mm, 25mm, 30mm, 105mm and 120mm ammunition rounds in its tanks, aircraft and ships. The MOD's current assessment is that UK tanks fired fewer than one hundred 120mm rounds against Iraq's military forces during hostilities (which equates to less than 1 metric tonne of DU), although additional rounds were fired during earlier work-up training to establish the round's Mean Point of Impact (MPI). In a paper published in August last year, the US Government reported that US forces in the Gulf had fired ammunition rounds containing some 290 metric tonnes of DU.

It might be helpful if I explained the properties of DU and how the metal used in the manufacture of UK DU-based ammunition is produced. Uranium exists in three forms, known as isotopes. These isotopes are uranium-238, uranium-235 and uranium-234 and, in naturally occurring uranium, are found in the ratio 99.3% ^{238}U:0.7% ^{235}U:0.006% ^{234}U. Uranium in an 'enriched' form is used in nuclear reactors and nuclear weapons. The term enriched is used because the concentration of ^{234}U has been artificially enhanced from that found in naturally occurring uranium. The by-product of this enrichment process is the production of DU, which involved the removal of virtually all ^{234}U and a reduction of the proportion of ^{235}U to a low level. Typically, by weight, DU contains 99.7% ^{238}U, 0.2% ^{235}U and 0.00007% ^{234}U.

It might also be helpful if I explained the potential health hazards posed by the use of DU. Depleted uranium is defined by the International Atomic Energy Agency as a Low Specific Activity material; this means that its level of radioactivity is considerably lower than that of most man-made radionuclides such as plutonium and americium. DU-based ammunition rounds can produce a small amount of radioactive and toxic particulate material when they impact with a hard surface, which could present a health risk if inhaled or ingested. However, this material is fairly rapidly diluted and dispersed into the environment by the weather, to the point where it becomes difficult to detect, usually within a few hundred metres of impact, even with the most sophisticated radiation monitoring equipment. Thus, it is unlikely that anyone other than those in an armoured vehicle hit by a DU projectile or those spending prolonged periods within a few tens of metres of the point at which a DU-based round had impacted with a hard target would be exposed to large enough quantities of the material for their health to be a risk.

Solid DU fragments present only a localised external radiation hazard to anyone handling them as only a very small fraction of the radiation emitted is able to penetrate the (dead) outer layer of the skin and because these fragments are too large to be inhaled or ingested. It would be necessary for a DU fragment to be in direct contact with the skin for tens of hours before any statutory UK dose limit for members of the public would be exceeded and even then would not give rise to any observable medical effects or a significant increase in the long term cancer risk.

Another potential health hazard from DU is posed by its level of chemical toxicity, which is similar to that of other heavy metals such as lead. This could give risk to health problems if soluble DU were to be ingested or inhaled but this is very unlikely as the DU residues found on the battlefield are generally in the form of solid DU fragments or relatively insoluble oxides. Should any of these insoluble oxides be ingested, most would pass straight through the body and the risk of any health effects arising from this exposure route is therefore negligible. The inhalation of insoluble oxides gives rise to effects which result from the radioactive rather than toxic properties of DU. This is because insoluble particles are retained in the lung for prolonged periods and are excreted very slowly and at concentrations unlikely to affect the kidneys which are the organ at most risk from any toxic effects.

The Independent article referred to a paper written by the UK Atomic Energy Authority (UKAEA) in April 1991 entitled "Kuwait—Depleted Uranium Contamination", which was produced for Royal Ordnance plc (rather than the Ministry of Defence) on a commercial basis. (A copy of this paper is attached for your information.) The paper calculated 500,000 potential deaths if 50 tonnes of DU dust was left in the area.

However, a number of assumptions made in this paper are very far from realistic. Indeed, the paper itself makes clear that it is *not* a rigorous scientific analysis of the actual situation, but a theoretical appraisal of the possible worst-case effects of firing DU-based ammunition in Kuwait. In particular, the paper assumes that all the DU fired in Kuwait was converted into respirable dust and that all of this dust was inhaled by a very large number of people.

However, as I have already explained above, a DU penetrator core needs to hit a very hard target to cause the burning which produces radioactive and toxic dust. In practice, this only occurs when a DU penetrator hits extremely hard armour such as is found on only the most modern Main Battle Tanks. Such burning does not occur if the penetrator hits other, softer, types of armoured vehicles or if it misses its target and hits the ground. Of the DU-based rounds fired in Kuwait and Iraq, only a relatively small percentage would have hit a target hard enough to cause the DU penetrator to burn. Furthermore, our assessment, based on a large number of trials carried out in the UK and US, is that only about 20% of the DU in a DU-based round that has hit such a target is converted into respirable dust. Since the DU-based rounds were fired in the desert, many kilometres from the nearest village, it is highly unlikely that the local population would have been exposed to any significant amount of respirable dust.

The Government does not have any information concerning the levels of DU currently present in the Gulf and cannot, therefore, comment on this matter. However, the UK tanks which were equipped with DU-based rounds during the Gulf conflict did not operate in the areas in southern Iraq in which it has been suggested that there is an elevated level of ill-health compared to that in other areas in Iraq (see next paragraph). After crossing the Saudi Arabian/Iraqi border north of Hafr al Batin, these tanks, which were part of 1 (UK) Armoured Division, turned east, entered Kuwait and pushed towards Kuwait City. We assess that 1 (UK) Armoured Division came no closer than about 75 kilometres from Az Zubayr and about 40 kilometres from Um Qasr. The maximum range of a DU-based round fired from UK tanks is less than 15 kilometres.

The article attached to your letter and a number of other articles by Robert Fisk have suggested that the use of DU-based ammunition during the Gulf War is affecting the health of some of the Iraqi population. The Government is aware that there have been suggestions, particularly in the Independent, that the use of DU-based ammunition during the Gulf conflict has caused an increase in ill-health, including deformities, cancers and birth defects, in southern Iraq (particularly around Basra, Az Zubayr and Um Qasr). However, the Government has not seen any peer-reviewed epidemiological research data on this population to support these claims and it would, therefore, be premature to comment on this matter. Furthermore, there is no evidence that the illnesses of the types highlighted in the article attached to your letter (or in other Independent articles) are uniquely associated with exposure to DU. The Government would, of course, consider carefully any medical or scientific data which was presented on this subject.

Finally, it might be helpful if I set out the role that the Government has taken to alleviate the suffering of the Iraqi people under Saddam Hussein's regime. Since 1991, the UK has donated around £100 million bilaterally and via the European Union for use in projects throughout Iraq (many of which have specifically targeted the needs of children and widow-headed families), making the UK one of the largest donors. The UK also co-sponsored UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 986 which set up the original 'oil-for-food' programme under which Iraq can sell oil to fund the purchase of humanitarian supplies. More recently, we drafted Resolutions improving and expanding the programme so that Iraq can sell US$5.3 billion of oil every 6 months (more than double the original amount).

I hope this is helpful.

A copy of the paper by the UK Atomic Energy Authority, which is mentioned in the letter, has already been placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will place in the Library a copy of the response of Mr. Alan Casson of the Gulf Veterans Illness Unit to the letter of Mr. Bill Griffin of Templevisce, Glanmire (reference D/GVIV/a/I), 2 of 23 February, regarding depleted uranium. [77326]

Mr. Doug Henderson *[holding answer 18 March 1999]:* I am advised that Mr. Griffin telephoned a member of my Department's Gulf Veterans' Illnesses Unit (GVIU) on 22 January and discussed a number of depleted uranium (DU) related issues. During this telephone conversation, Mr. Griffin offered to provide the Ministry of Defence with copies of research papers which he suggested showed that the use of DU-based ammunition by UK and US forces during the 1990–91 Gulf conflict has caused a significantly higher incidence of ill-health—including cancers and birth defects—in southern Iraq. So far, however, my officials have not received any further communication from Mr. Griffin. The Government would, of course, consider carefully any medical or scientific data which was presented on this subject.

Lorna Fitzsimons: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 3 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *776*, when he expects to publish the paper setting out his Department's position concerning the testing of UK Gulf veterans for the presence of depleted uranium. [78299]

Mr. Doug Henderson: I am today publishing a detailed paper entitled "Testing for the presence of depleted uranium in UK veterans of the Gulf conflict: The Current Position". Copies have been placed in the Library of the House.

Macedonia

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about arrangements for the sending and receipt of personal mail by Her Majesty's forces deployed in Macedonia. [77494]

Mr. Doug Henderson: Mail to and from Macedonia and the UK is conveyed six days a week Monday to Friday and Sunday from London Heathrow to Skopje via Vienna and return.

Mail to and from Macedonia and British Forces in Germany is conveyed five days a week Tuesday to Friday and Sunday outbound and Monday to Friday inbound from Dusseldorf to Skopje via Vienna.

On both routes the mail is moved by commercial airline as this provides a quick, sustainable and reliable service. This core service is supplemented by RAF flights whenever they are flying to Macedonia and have space available for mail. Additional civilian routings are also being investigated.

The current transmission time to Macedonia is four to five days from the UK and two to three days from Germany. Once the mail has arrived at Skopje, individual units collect and distribute the mail to their service personnel.

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Territorial Army personnel are *(a)* currently deployed in Macedonia and *(b)* planned to be deployed in Macedonia; and whether notice has been given to TA units and personnel of intention to deploy them. [77491]

Mr. Doug Henderson: Ten personnel from the Territorial Army are currently deployed in Macedonia, and it is planned to deploy a further six on 22 March. At this stage general notice has not been given to TA units of an intention to deploy them to Macedonia. Individual members are being identified for particular posts as the requirement arises. If there is a requirement for further TA personnel a general trawl will be conducted, as was the case for Bosnia.

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what units of the Defence Medical Services will be deployed in support of operations in Macedonia. [77492]

Mr. Doug Henderson: In addition to medical personnel deployed as part of formed units, a number of specialist medical elements have been deployed to Macedonia on Operation "Agricola" with the main contribution being from 2 Armoured Field Ambulance which is supported by a surgical team and a small detachment of RAF medical personnel. Other specialist medical personnel from the three Services fill a variety of posts as part of the existing NATO Extraction Force, Kosovo Verification Co-ordination Centre, the Kosovo Verification Mission and UK headquarters staff.

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether Internet and e-mail facilities will be available for the personal and welfare use of British forces deployed in Macedonia. [77493]

Mr. Doug Henderson: Internet facilities are not normally provided for personal and welfare purposes on operations. The main means of communication from theatre to home are letter and telephone, both of which are funded or subsidised by the MOD. In other operational theatres, where there is a demand, units have installed and maintained Internet terminals on their own initiative from non-public unit funds.

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the *(a)* current and *(b)* planned entitlement for welfare telephone calls for personnel deployed in Macedonia; and whether such calls will be available through his Department's satellite links or commercial contractors. [77495]

Mr. Doug Henderson: Service personnel, where operationally feasible, are permitted a weekly 10-minute private call home at public expense while on operations. This concession currently applies to all ground forces in Macedonia (and also supporting elements in Greece). Where possible, calls are made using the Macedonian commercial PTT system. In some locations, where this is not available, arrangements are in hand for civilian contractors to provide a service. In cases where neither option exists, troops are permitted to use the military communications network to make weekly private calls home.

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his policy on the supply of bottled mineral water to British troops in Macedonia; and if he will make a statement. [77496]

Mr. Doug Henderson: The majority of our forces deployed in Macedonia obtain their drinking water from local sources which have been assessed as safe to drink either by local Government laboratories or the in-theatre Royal Army Medical Corps Environmental Health

Officer. For those personnel in specific locations where local water sources are suspect, bottled water is provided. The bottled water supplied to British troops is either potable drinking water or still bottled water. It is not classed as "mineral" water.

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what proportion of British troops in Macedonia are currently accommodated *(a)* under canvas and *(b)* in CORIMEC 20 foot equivalent units and *(c)* in other shelters; and if he will make a statement. [77497]

Mr. Doug Henderson: Approximately 20 per cent. of the British troops currently deployed in Macedonia are accommodated under canvas, less than 1 per cent. in CORIMEC-type units and the remainder in other accommodation.

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many 20 foot equivalent CORIMEC accommodation units are *(a)* in place in Macedonia, *(b)* in transit to Macedonia and *(c)* on order for use by (i) the Allied Rapid Reaction Corps and (ii) other British forces. [77498]

Mr. Doug Henderson: No such accommodation units are currently in place, in transit or on order for use by the Allied Rapid Reaction Corps or other British Forces in Macedonia. However, accommodation will be provided, as necessary, in relation to the size of any force and the timing of its deployment.

"Just in Time"

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps he plans to take to ensure that "Just in Time" supply chain logistics support for military operations works effectively. [74661]

Mr. Doug Henderson *[holding answer 4 March 1999]:* "Just in Time" logistics is one of a range of supply management techniques which are being examined by a study team reporting to the Chief of Defence Logistics. Whilst there may be some scope for broadening the existing selective application of "Just in Time" logistics in the defence sector, the degree to which this is achievable would be dependent on the nature of military operations which need to be supported.

Territorial Army

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which of the following Territorial Army units are classified as infantry units *(a)* Bn HQ RRW, *(b)* RHQ Tpt Regiment, *(c)* RHQ 104 Regt RA and *(d)* Bn HQ, Wales. [77535]

Mr. Doug Henderson *[holding answer 18 March 1999]:* Of the units listed, only the Battalion headquarters, Royal Regiment of Wales (Bn HQ RRW) is an infantry unit. This will be replaced by the Battalion headquarters for the new TA infantry battalion for Wales (Bn HQ Wales) in the new structure.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the *(a)* current and *(b)* planned future locations, including counties, of the following TA headquarters *(a)* Bn HQ RRW, *(b)* RHQ Tpt Regiment, *(c)* RHQ 104 Regt RA and *(d)* Bn HQ, Wales. [77534]

Mr. Doug Henderson *[holding answer 18 March 1999]:* The Battalion headquarters, Royal Regiment of Wales (Bn HQ RRW) is currently located in Cardiff, Glamorgan. It will not exist in the new TA structure, but will be replaced int he same location by the Battalion headquarters of the new TA infantry battalion for Wales (Bn HQ Wales). The Regimental headquarters of 155 Transport Regiment (RHQ Tpt Regt) is currently located in Cardiff, Glamorgan, and will remain there in the new structure. The Regimental headquarters of 104 Regiment Royal Artillery (RHQ 104 Regt) is currently located in Newport, Gwent, and will also remain there in the new structure.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many questions he has answered from the hon. Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Hancock) since 1 January; and at what cost to his Department's budget. [77483]

Mr. Doug Henderson: Since 1 January 1999, our records show that 287 questions have been tabled to my Department by the hon. Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Hancock) of which 240 have been answered to date. The cost to my Department's budget of answering individual Parliamentary Questions is not held centrally, however, the advisory cost limit of answering a Parliamentary Question is £500; therefore answering this number of questions may have cost some £120,000.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Sierra Leone

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if Mr. Peter Penfold sent any message during 1997 to London from any German or US diplomatic premises in Africa. [75801]

Mr. Tony Lloyd *[holding answer 9 March 1999]:* Mr. Penfold was consulted about the answer to a previous question from my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay), 26 January 1999, *Official Report*, column *149*, and had said it was not necessary for him to use the communication facilities at the German Embassy to communicate with London. A commercial fax facility was available at his hotel and allowed him to communicate with London directly. This answer was incomplete.

Mr. Penfold has been consulted again, and has again confirmed that he did not use classified communication facilities at the German Embassy to send messages to London. He has added that some of his and the other British High Commission staff's messages were, however, sent by fax from the commercial fax machine in the German Embassy in Conakry. Mr. Penfold believes he did on occasion also use the telephone at the German Embassy to communicate with London.

Other than the unclassified messages sent on commercial channels from the German Embassy in Conakry, Mr. Penfold has said he did not, to his best recollection, use German or US diplomatic premises in Africa in 1997 for sending messages to London.

Dubai

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will meet with the UAE Ambassador to request an explanation for the failure of the Government of Dubai to respond to his note verbale of 10 November 1998. [76945]

Mr. Fatchett *[holding answer 16 March 1999]:* Our Embassy in Dubai asked the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Dubai on 11 March when we might expect a reply to the Note Verbale of 10 November 1998.

Human Rights

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what his policy is on Protocol number 4 to the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly convention for the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms; and if he will make a statement. [77001]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The fourth Protocol raises difficult issues, including the need for legislation. We will keep them under consideration.

Firearms

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what his policy is on the resolution of the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly on control of the acquisition and possession of firearms by individuals; and if he will make a statement. [77000]

Mr. Boateng: I have been asked to reply.

The European Convention on the Control of the Acquisition and Possession of Firearms by Individuals was agreed in 1978. It has been signed by the United Kingdom but not ratified.

The Convention has effectively been superseded for European Community (EC) member states by the adoption of an EC Directive on the Control of the Acquisition and Possession of Weapons. This was incorporated into domestic law by virtue of the Firearms Acts (Amendment) Regulations 1992. The Directive contains many similarities to the Convention in that it established procedures for the notification of movement of firearms between member states.

WALES

Airports and Air Services

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what progress has been made on the study of the economic impact of regional airports and regional air services announced in A New Deal for Transport; when these studies will be completed in Wales; and if he will make a statement; [76989]

(2) what plans he has *(a)* to approve and *(b)* to initiate developments relating to airports before the completion of the economic impact studies covering airports and air services announced in A New Deal for Transport; and if he will make a statement. [76990]

Mr. Hain: Work is currently under way on an air services study for Wales, in line with the commitment given in the White Paper, "A New Deal For Transport", and the Welsh transport policy statement "Transporting Wales into the Future". The study, which is focusing on the scope for new and enhanced services as well as the role of airports in economic development, is expected to be completed in the summer. I have no plans to initiate or approve developments relating to airports before that time, although I am continuing to consider improved surface access to Cardiff International Airport.

It will be for the National Assembly, in collaboration with the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, to decide how to take forward the findings of the study in the context of the national airports policy which is being developed.

Links Magazine

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the cost of producing *(a)* the November edition and *(b)* the September edition of *Links* magazine. [77487]

Mr. Hain: The first edition of *Links* was issued in November 1997 and cost £8,184.

The sixth edition of *Links* was issued in November 1998 and cost £7,459.

The first edition of *Links* cost slightly more than subsequent issues because of additional origination costs.

In neither year has there been a September edition.

Following the transfer of functions, this issue will be a matter for the National Assembly.

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what has been the average cost of producing each edition of *Links* magazine in the current financial year. [77488]

Mr. Hain: The average cost of producing each edition of *Links* in the current financial year is £7,577.50.

Printing costs in this financial year for the supplement of *Links* extra have been £710.00.

Following the transfer of functions, this issue will be a matter for the National Assembly.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Science Budget

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will publish the allocation of the science budget to each research council and other funded bodies, at cash and constant terms for (i) 1995–96, (ii) 1996–97, (iii) 1997–98 and (iv) 1998–99 and the planned figures for *(a)* 1999–2000, *(b)* 2000–01 and *(c)* 2001–02; and the proportion of this money allocated to Scotland. [76860]

Mr. Battle *[holding answer 16 March 1999]:* Details of Science Budget spend and allocations in cash and at 1998–99 prices are set out in the following tables.

Science budget spend and allocations 1995–96 to 2001–02

£ million

Council etc.	1995–96	1996–97	1997–98	1998–99	1999–2000	2000–01	2001–02
Cash							
BBSRC	180.0	179.6	183.0	190.8	198.3	203.0	208.2
EPSRC	368.9	378.0	386.3	389.4	397.6	410.9	427.2
ESRC	61.5	63.7	65.2	67.5	69.8	71.2	72.9
MRC	278.1	282.1	289.1	294.0	304.5	319.2	334.1
NERC	167.8	157.3	166.2	175.0	178.5	181.8	187.5
PPARC	202.7	213.5	197.9	207.4	186.8	200.7	204.2
CCLRC	2.4	1.5	1.2	1.5	2.0	2.0	2.0
Royal Society	21.1	22.1	22.3	22.6	23.9	24.6	25.7
Royal Academy of Engineering	2.6	3.1	3.4	3.4	3.7	4.0	4.3
OST Initiatives	1.8	1.6	1.8	2.3	2.8	2.8	2.9
Superannuation Supplement	8.2	9.9	14.7	13.3	12.0	14.4	14.8
LINK/Foresight	—	—	—	—	1.0	3.0	4.0
University Challenge	—	—	—	15.0	10.0	10.0	—
Synchrotron Radiation Source	—	—	—	—	—	15.0	20.0
Joint Research Equipment Initiative	—	—	—	—	7.0	10.0	10.0
Joint Infrastructure Fund	—	—	—	—	75.0	100.0	125.0
Science Enterprise Challenge	—	—	—	—	25.0	—	—
International/Contingency Reserve	—	—	—	—	—	15.0	15.0
Total	1,295.1	1,312.4	1,331.0	1,382.3	1,497.8	1,587.5	1,657.6

£ million

Council etc.	1995–96	1996–97	1997–98	1998–99	1999–2000	2000–01	2001–02
1998–99 prices							
BBSRC	195.0	188.6	187.6	190.8	193.5	193.2	193.3
EPSRC	399.5	397.1	395.9	389.4	387.9	391.1	396.7
ESRC	66.6	67.0	66.9	67.5	68.1	67.7	67.7
MRC	301.2	296.4	296.3	294.0	297.1	303.8	310.2
NERC	181.8	165.3	170.3	175.0	174.2	173.0	174.1
PPARC	219.5	224.3	202.8	207.4	182.2	191.0	189.6
CCLRC	2.6	1.5	1.2	1.5	2.0	1.9	1.9
Royal Society	22.8	23.2	22.8	22.6	23.3	23.4	23.9
Royal Academy of Engineering	2.8	3.3	3.5	3.4	3.6	3.8	4.0
OST Initiatives	1.9	1.7	1.9	2.3	2.7	2.7	2.6
Superannuation Supplement	8.9	10.4	15.0	13.3	11.7	13.7	13.7
LINK/Foresight	—	—	—	—	1.0	2.9	3.7
University Challenge	—	—	—	15.0	9.8	9.5	—
Synchrotron Radiation Source	—	—	—	—	—	14.3	18.6
Joint Research Equipment Initiative	—	—	—	—	6.8	9.5	9.3
Joint Infrastructure Fund	—	—	—	—	73.2	95.2	116.1
Science Enterprise Challenge	—	—	—	—	24.4	—	—
International/Contingency Reserve	—	—	—	—	—	14.3	13.9
Total	1,402.6	1,378.8	1,364.3	1,382.3	1,461.2	1,511.0	1,539.3

Notes:
Figures for 1995–96 to 1997–98 are taken from the Appropriation Accounts
1998–99 data are the amounts voted in Supplementary Estimates
Figures for 1999–2000 to 2001–02 are the allocations announced on 27 October 1998 but PPARC's 1999–2000 figure includes the International/Contingency Reserve of £3 million.

Allocations of resources by OST, the Research Councils and other bodies funded from the Science Budget are made on a scientific not a regional basis. Decisions are based on the quality of the science or the project involved.

In the years 1995–96 to 1996–97, the latest years for which complete data are available, Research Councils' expenditure in Scotland totalled £121 million and £140 million respectively, 8.9 per cent. and 10.1 per cent. of the Councils' total expenditure (including non-science budget funds). Scottish institutions also benefit from access to UK and international facilities supported by the Research Councils.

University Science Projects

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what projects in university science, supported by his Department's funding, will lead to the ownership of intellectual property by *(a)* the Wellcome Trust or *(b)* the Gatsby Foundation. [76071]

Mr. Battle *[holding answer 11 March 1999]:* None.

Longbridge

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions he has had within the EU on the subject of grant aid to BMW at Longbridge; and what responses he has received. [76256]

Mr. Byers: In line with the practice of successive Administrations, should an aid package be forthcoming, it will be notified to the Commission and clearance sought in accordance with the Community framework for State aid to the motor vehicle industry.

ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND THE REGIONS

Genetically Modified Crops

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list consents he has given, specifying under what legal authority, for cultivation of genetically modified crops for *(a)* research and *(b)* sale; and for each consent the name of (i) applicant, (ii) company and (iii) owner, if different, (1) the area of (A) enclosed and (B) open tillage of the crop, and (2) its location; the purpose of (x) research and (y) sale, together with any purchaser if known, and the period of permission. [72562]

Mr. Meacher: The legal authority for giving consent for the cultivation of genetically modified crops for research purposes or for sale (placing on the market) arises from the Environmental Protection Act 1990 and associated regulations covering the deliberate release of genetically modified organisms. To date 153 consents for research purposes have been issued. The information in the form requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost. However, it is available on the statutory public register held in the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions. With respect to the placing on the market of genetically modified crops, I would refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) on 5 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *960*.

Mr. Moss: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) if he will list the *(a)* number, *(b)* type and *(c)* locations of genetically modified crops grown in (i) North East Cambridgeshire, (ii) Cambridgeshire and (iii) East Anglia; [73943]

(2) if he will list the *(a)* number, *(b)* type and *(c)* location of genetically modified crop testing sites in (i) North East Cambridgeshire, (ii) Cambridgeshire and (iii) East Anglia. [73944]

Mr. Meacher: The information in the form requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost. However, it is already available to the public, as information on all consents given for the cultivation of genetically modified crops is contained in the statutory public register held in the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) if he has discussed with representatives of the biotechnology industry the introduction of a voluntary three-year halt in the planting of herbicide-tolerant genetically modified crops; [77679]

(2) what steps his Department has taken to delay the commercial release of herbicide-tolerant genetically modified crops through voluntary agreements with the biotechnology industry. [77680]

Mr. Meacher: My officials have been discussing with representatives of the biotechnology industry their proposals for the introduction of genetically modified crops for commercial growing by farmers once all relevant approvals have been granted. My officials have also been seeking to obtain assurances from the biotechnology industry that the commercial introduction should be restrained until results from the farm scale evaluations indicate that commercial activity may take place in accordance with the concept of managed development as set out in my statement to the House of Lords on 21 October 1998.

Advisory Committee on Releases to the Environment

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions for what reason employees of environmental non-Governmental organisations are not eligible for membership of the Advisory Committee on Releases to the Environment; and if he will make a statement. [76271]

Mr. Meacher: There is no such barrier to employees of environmental non-governmental organisations becoming members of ACRE. The present ACRE includes one member who is employed by Green Alliance, although she serves in her individual capacity and not as a representative of that organisation.

Driving Tests

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many people passed their driving test examination in the United Kingdom in 1998. [76818]

Ms Glenda Jackson: In 1998, 690,745 people passed the theoretical part of their driving test and 581,728 passed the practical part in Great Britain. These figures are inclusive of car, motorcycle and vocational tests.

The corresponding figures for Northern Ireland are 26,360 theoretical driving test passes, and 24,817 practical test passes. These figures also include car, motorcycle and vocational tests.

Car Ownership

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what is the number of registered car owners in the United Kingdom. [76817]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The record maintained by the Driver and Licensing Agency is a register of vehicle keepers. On 31 December 1998, there were records for 24,840,942 cars and light vans.

R. J. B. Mining Ltd.

Ms Kelly: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what is the status of the application by R. J. B. Mining Ltd. to mine the

Cutacre and Wharton Hall spoil tips and land between Over Hulton and Little Hulton (planning application 48800/96); and when he expects it to be determined. [77197]

Mr. Raynsford: The appeal has been referred back to the parties who appeared at the local inquiry to see if they wish to make further representations or fresh submissions in the light of the emerging policies in the draft revised guidance on Coal Mining and Colliery Spoil Disposal published for consultation in October last year. In the light of those representations my Department will consider how best to proceed to determine the appeal and will issue a decision on the appeal as soon as it is possible to do so.

Fast-growing Hedges

Mr. Rowe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many representations he has received on the issue of fast-growing hedges; how many responses have been received from local authorities to the recent circular issued by his Department; whom he has consulted other than local authorities on this issue; and if he will make a statement. [77459]

Mr. Meale: This Department has received around 2,500 letters on the issue of fast-growing hedges in 1998 and 1999. The number of telephone calls received has not been recorded.

114 local authorities have so far responded to the circular issued by the Local Government Association on 11 February 1999.

The Department is working with the members of the Leylandii Working Group to draw up a voluntary code of practice on the information to be provided on the sale of hedging plants. The members of the Leylandii Working Group are the Local Government Association, the Horticultural Trades Association, the Arboricultural Association, The British Association of Landscape Industries and the Consumers Association. My Department has contacted a number of other bodies, including the Garden Centre Association, the House Builders Federation, the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health, the Planning Officers' Society, the National Association of Tree Officers, Mediation UK and the Hedgeline campaign group.

We are considering whether there is anything further the Government should do to address the problems caused by high hedges. We will announce our conclusions in due course.

Planning Inspectorate

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what proposals he has to improve the efficiency of the Planning Inspectorate. [77312]

Mr. Raynsford: I have asked the Chief Executive of the Planning Inspectorate, Mr. Chris Shepley, to write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from C. J. Shepley to Mr. Keith Vaz, dated 19 March 1999:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your Question about the efficiency of the Planning Inspectorate.

Our track record on efficiency is already excellent. Indeed we have achieved our Ministerial target for efficiency gains every year since we became an Agency in 1992.

We have also improved our performance in our main business area, the processing of planning appeals, dramatically in recent years:

Handling times (for 80 per cent. of caseload)

	1996–97	*1998–99 (year to date)*
Cases by:		
Written Representation	25	17
Hearing	47	27
Inquiry	58	41

Note:

All times expressed in weeks from receipt to decision.

But that is not to say that further improvements cannot be made, and we expect our new targets for the coming three year period following the Comprehensive Spending Review to be even more demanding. We have a number of measures in hand to ensure that we rise to the challenge.

Tyres

Mr. Gorrie: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to prevent the sale in Scotland of part-worn tyres which are below United Kingdom safety standards. [77421]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The Motor Vehicle Tyres (Safety) Regulations 1994 seek to control the safety and supply of part-worn tyres throughout the United Kingdom. The Regulations stipulate that, before being offered for sale, part-worn tyres must have been properly examined internally and externally to ensure suitability for their intended use and must be marked "PART WORN" adjacent to their European or British Standards approval markings. They must also have a minimum tread depth of 2mm across the whole breadth of the tyre. The priority afforded to enforcement of these requirements is a matter for Local Authority Trading Standards bodies.

Airports (Passenger Service Charges)

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list for each airport in the United Kingdom, in rank order, the schedule of passenger service charges for passengers (i) arriving and (ii) departing from and to destinations within *(a)* the United Kingdom, *(b)* the EU and *(c)* elsewhere. [77297]

Ms Glenda Jackson *[holding answer 18 March 1999]:* Passenger charges are levied on the airlines by airports for services and facilities provided by the airport operator. A schedule of passenger charges at UK airports subject to economic regulation by the CAA under the Airports Act 1968 are set out in the table. As the structure of charges varies widely between airports, it is not possible to rank them. Charges are generally shown for domestic and international passengers, and distinctions between EU and other international destinations are not made. Airport levy charges on either departing passengers or arriving passengers, but not both.

Passenger charges at UK airports 1998–99

Airport	*Charged on arriving or departing passengers*	*Charge £*	
Aberdeen	Departing	9.22	Domestic-Peak
		8.18	Domestic-Off peak
		13.50	International
Barra, Campeltown, Islay, Tiree, Wick	Arriving	6.28	Domestic
		16.18	International
Benbecula, Inverness, Kirkwall, Stornoway, Sumburgh	Arriving	6.36	Domestic
		16.26	International
Belfast City	Arriving	8.10	Domestic
		11.55	International
Belfast International	Arriving	9.60	Domestic
		12.20	International
Birmingham	Departing	6.44	Domestic
		10.71	International
Blackpool	Arriving	8.00	Domestic
		11.25	International
Bournemouth	Arriving	3.00	Domestic
		7.50	International
Bristol	Arriving	4.20	Domestic
		9.50	International
Cardiff	Arriving	5.25	Domestic
		11.85	International
East Midlands	Departing	3.86	Domestic-Peak
		3.36	Domestic-Off peak
		8.80	International-Peak
		7.83	International-Off peak
Edinburgh	Departing	7.96	Domestic-Peak
		7.41	Domestic-Off peak
		12.20	International-Peak
		10.70	International-Off Peak
Exeter	Departing	3.25	Domestic
		9.45	International
Gatwick	Departing	3.40	Domestic
		6.10	International-Peak
		4.85	International-Off peak
		4.85	Ireland-Peak
		3.60	Ireland-Off peak
Glasgow	Departing	8.00	Domestic-peak
		7.45	Domestic-Off peak
		13.55	International-Peak
		10.70	International-Off peak
Heathrow	Departing	3.50	Domestic
		6.50	International
		5.25	Ireland
Humberside	Arriving	5.05	Domestic-Small aircraft
		7.65	Domestic-Large aircraft
		12.30	International
Leeds-Bradford	Departing	6.46	Domestic
		11.92	International
Liverpool	not known	1.80	Domestic-Small aircraft
		7.25	Domestic-Large aircraft
		3.50	International-Small aircraft
		12.50	International-Large aircraft

Passenger charges at UK airports 1998–99

Airport	*Charged on arriving or departing passengers*	*Charge £*	
London City	Arriving	6.40	Domestic-Peak
		5.75	Domestic-Off peak
		12.10	International-Peak
		10.90	International-Off peak
Luton	Departing	3.50	Domestic
		7.90	International-peak-Long flights
		3.50	International-Peak-Short flights
		3.50	International-Off Peak
Manchester	Departing	1.34	Domestic-Peak-Small aircraft
		1.08	Domestic-Off Peak-Small aircraft
		5.59	Domestic-Peak-Large aircraft
		5.05	Domestic-Off Peak-Large aircraft
		8.52	International-Peak
		5.05	International-Off Peak
		5.74	International-Early Morning-Summer
		2.38	International-Early Morning-Winter
Newcastle	Arriving	6.80	Domestic
		11.82	International
Norwich	Arriving	6.76	Domestic
		12.17	International
Plymouth	Departing	4.35	Domestic
		8.71	International
Prestwick	Departing	8.00	Domestic-Peak
		7.45	Domestic-Off Peak
		13.60	International-Peak
		10.65	International-Off Peak
Southampton	Departing	6.34	Small aircraft
		8.18	Large aircraft
Southend	Arriving	9.00	—
Stansted	Departing	3.35	Domestic
		6.00	International-Peak
		4.75	Internation-Off Peak
		4.75	Ireland-Peak
		3.50	Ireland-Off peak
Teesside	Arriving	7.80	Domestic
		11.90	International-Peak
		8.50	International-Off Peak

Carbon Dioxide Emissions

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if it is his target to reduce carbon dioxide emissions in the United Kingdom by 20 per cent. of the 1997 level by 2010; and if he will make a statement. [77623]

Mr. Meale: At Kyoto, the EU agreed to a legally binding target to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases by 8 per cent. below 1990 levels over the period 2008–12: under the UK Presidency this target was shared out between the member states, with the UK agreeing to a 12.5 per cent. reduction. Achieving this target must be our priority. But the Government are committed to moving beyond that towards our domestic goal of reducing carbon dioxide emissions by 20 per cent. below 1990 levels by 2010.

Birth Defects

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what research he has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated into a link between contaminated waste sites and birth defects in the local area. [77800]

Mr. Meale: *(a)* Following the publication of the EUROHAZCON study on congenital anomalies near hazardous landfill sites, the following research has been commissioned:

The Small Area Health Statistics Unit (SAHSU) (Imperial College) has been commissioned to carry out a study of health effects around landfill sites, including congenital malformations.

(b) The following research has been evaluated.

A one day meeting of experts was held on 26 January 1999 by the MRC Institute of Environment and Health, at the request of this Department, to discuss the links between health effects, especially congenital anomalies, and landfill sites. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss recent research findings, to identify gaps in the knowledge base, and to agree and prioritise further research requirements. The meeting made a number of recommendations for further research work. We are currently considering the best way to take forward these recommendations.

Regional Development Agencies

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what discussions he has had with the members of regional development agencies regarding their environmental role; what plans he has to monitor the environmental impact of RDAs; what plans he has to assess the implementation of the regional strategy of the RDAs; and if he will make a statement. [77366]

Mr. Meale: Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) have a statutory purpose to contribute to sustainable development, and a statutory duty to formulate a regional strategy in relation to all their purposes. The statutory guidance we will be giving to RDAs in relation to their strategies, which will be supplemented with more detailed advice from my Department, will emphasise the fact that sustainable development is integral to the RDAs' work. An RDA's strategy will be expected to include an appraisal of the contribution the strategy will make to sustainable development, and how it will foster the four key principles of sustainable development: high and stable levels of economic growth and employment; social progress which recognises the needs of everyone; effective protection of the environment and prudent use of natural resources; and integration of economic, social and environmental objectives. RDAs are aiming to submit their first strategies by October 1999.

We are working with RDAs to develop an effective monitoring and evaluation framework. This will take some time, and we have therefore produced an interim framework which includes a number of core indicators which RDAs should use in developing their strategies. The indicators cover each of the five statutory purposes of RDAs, including sustainable development, and provide both a regional context and a measure of key aspects of RDA activity. Further indicators which reflect the particular features of each region will be developed by the RDAs themselves.

My right hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment discussed with the Chairmen of RDAs on 19 February their sustainable development role. Officials, from my Department and from the Government Offices for the Regions regularly discuss with RDAs the work they are doing in preparation for their strategies.

Trading Credit Approvals

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 15 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *469*, if he will list the local authorities that made trading credit approval applications in 1997–98, indicating *(a)* the value of each application, *(b)* the purpose for which the trading credit approval was sought, *(c)* the political control of the local authority concerned and *(d)* whether the application was successful. [77618]

Ms Armstrong: My reply to the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough on 15 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *469*, listed Trading Credit Approval applications by local authorities considered in 1998. In each case the applications were received in late 1997 or early 1998. Records show a further application, received in January 1997, which is also listed.

Authority	*Purpose*	*Value (£ million)*	*Political control*
Woking	Town centre regeneration	4.1	Liberal Democrat
Sheffield	Waste incinerator	17.0	Labour
Plymouth	TCAs for self-financing schemes	n/a	Labour
Harrogate	Harrogate International Centre	6.6	Liberal Democrat

Note:
None of the applications was successful.

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 15 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *469*, if he will list the applications for trading credit approvals which were successful in 1998–99, and the political control of each local authority concerned with the applications. [77616]

Ms Armstrong: None was successful.

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 15 March 1999, *Official Report*, column *469*, what effect granting the trading credit approval applied for by Harrogate Borough Council would have had on the PSBR for 1999–2000. [77617]

Ms Armstrong: If the Trading Credit Approval of £4.3 million applied for by Harrogate Borough Council for next year had been approved it would have been expected to increase the PSBR for 1999–2000 by that amount.

Countryside Agency

Mr. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when the appointment of members of the Countryside Agency will be announced. [78297]

Mr. Meacher: I am very pleased to announce that the following people have accepted my invitation to become members of the Board of the Countryside Agency.

Kate Ashbrook

Janet Bradbury

Bishop Alan Chesters

Martin Doughty

Dr. Victoria Edwards

Prof. Philip Lowe

Catherine Mack

Miles Middleton

Frances Rowe

David Woodhall.

Direct Labour Organisations

Liz Blackman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what further action he proposes to take against those local authorities whose direct labour and direct service organisations failed to meet their statutory financial objectives in 1997–98. [78347]

Ms Armstrong: On 18 December 1998, 26 statutory notices were served on 18 local authorities concerning the failure of their direct labour and service organisations (DLOs/DSOs) to meet the required financial objectives in 1997/98. My right hon. Friend has now considered the responses to those notices, and has decided to give nine directions to seven local authorities.

The Directions require authorities to retender the work by 13 December 1999 if they fail to meet the financial objective in 1998/99, and to seek the Secretary of State's consent where the work has to be retendered and where the authority subsequently wish to award the work in-house.

The directions take the following form:

Coventry City MBC (vehicle maintenance)

London Borough of Croydon (building maintenance)

London Borough of Redbridge (building maintenance)

London Borough of Richmond upon Thames (refuse collection, other cleaning, other catering)

South Tyneside MBC (grounds maintenance)

London Borough of Tower Hamlets (construction and maintenance of sewers)

West Wiltshire District Council (refuse collection).

The Secretary of State has also decided to take no further statutory action in respect of financial failure in 1997–98 by:

Colchester Borough Council (grounds maintenance)

London Borough of Hackney (supervision of parking and legal services

Harborough District Council (building and grounds maintenance

London Borough of Hillingdon (finance)

London Borough of Merton (refuse collection)

North Somerset Unitary Council (grounds maintenance)

Northumberland County Council (vehicle maintenance)

Oadby and Wigston District Council (management of sports and leisure facilities and grounds maintenance)

London Borough of Redbridge (building cleaning)

London Borough of Richmond upon Thames (building maintenance)

Stafford Borough Council (highway maintenance)

London Borough of Waltham Forest (building maintenance).

Reviews of the financial operations of other councils' activities are ongoing.

Compulsory Competitive Tendering is due to be replaced in 2000 with a duty for councils to achieve Best Value for their local taxpayers. In the run up to Best Value the Government remains committed to ensuring that local authorities' accounts for the delivery of goods and services remain in good financial health and that pressure to minimise costs to council taxpayers is maintained.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Genetically Modified Organisms

Mr. Baker: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the occasions since 29 July 1998 when *(a)* he, *(b)* his colleagues and *(c)* his officials have met representatives of biotechnology or seed companies, stating in each case (i) what matters were discussed, (ii) what the outcome of the meeting was and (iii) the names of those at the meeting. [70555]

Mr. Rooker *[holding answer 11 February 1999]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to my hon. Friend the Member for South Swindon (Ms Drown) on 19 November 1998, *Official Report*, column *285*, in which dates of ministerial meetings with companies about genetically modified organisms are provided. No further meetings of this type have taken place since the answer was provided.

I can also confirm that the following meetings between officials and biotechnology/seed companies have taken place since 29 July 1998:

Meetings with biotechnology/seed companies and officials since 29 July 1998

Meetings to discuss pesticide regulatory matters

Company	*Date of meeting*	*Company*	*Date of meeting*
Novartis	3 August 1998	Monsanto	18 November 1998
Zeneca	6 August 1998	Zeneca	28 January 1999
Novartis	22 September 1998	Zeneca	5 February 1999
AgrEvo	23 September 1998	Novartis	11 February 1999
AgrEvo	14 October 1998	Novartis	16 February 1999
Novartis	5 November 1998	AgrEvo and Rhone-Poulenc	22 February 1999
Novartis	9 November 1998	Zeneca	8 March 1999
Cyanamid	11 November 1998	Cyanamid	9 March 1999
Zeneca	12 November 1998	Zeneca	10 March 1999
Cyanamid	17 November 1998	Cyanamid	11 March 1999
AgrEvo	18 November 1998	—	—

Meetings with the Supply Chain Initiative on Modified Agricultural Crops (SCIMAC)

Meetings with SCIMAC to discuss the industry's progress towards establishing guidelines for the growing of new types of herbicide tolerant crops took place on the following dates: 2 October 1998, 9 October 1998, 13 November 1998, 9 December 1998, 11 December 1998, 29 January 1999 and 3 February 1999.

Meetings to discuss research projects

Meetings to discuss various research projects, including those under the BRIGHT (Botanical and Rotational Implications of GM Herbicide Tolerance) project, SAPPIO (Sustainable Arable Production through Precision and Input optimisation) project and environmental management and wildlife conservation projects, took place with companies listed below on the dates given.

Company	*Date of meeting*	*Company*	*Date of meeting*
Monsanto, AgrEvo and Cyanamid	28 July 1998	Dow Agrosciences and Monsanto	14 December 1998
Monsanto	30 July 1998	Dow Agrosciences	5 January 1999
Zeneca and AgrEvo	3 August 1998	CPB Twyford and PGS	8 January 1999
Zeneca	5 August 1998	Zeneca	11 January 1999
Advanta	19 October 1998	Cyanamid, Monsanto and AgrEvo	27 January 1999
Advanta Seeds	2 December 1998	—	—

Meetings related to administration of plant breeders' rights and related matters

The administration of plant breeders' rights, national listing and seed certification call for frequent meetings and other contacts between officials and representatives of plant breeding and seed companies. Since 29 July 1998 officials of the Plant Variety Rights & Seeds Division have had meetings with members of Sharpes International Seeds Ltd., Midland Shires Farmers, J. E. & V. M. Doultons Ltd., M. Hancocks & Son Ltd., Monsanto, Pioneer Hibred, Novartis, English Sugar Beet Co., AgrEvo, Advanta Seeds, CPB Twyfords, and the British Agro Chemical Association. The Plant Health & Seeds Inspectorate also made numerous visits to seed companies and held discussions with them in pursuance of the Inspectorate's duties.

Other meetings

A meeting took place with Monsanto on 20 January 1999 to discuss their GM cotton seed application under EC Regulation 90/220.

Overseas Visits
(Right hon. Member for Copeland)

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will publish a list of the overseas visits made by the right hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) during his period as Minister of Agriculture Fisheries and Food giving details for each visit of *(a)* dates, *(b)* destinations, *(c)* methods of travel and *(d)* cost of hotels. [68087]

Mr. Nick Brown: During his period as Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, the right hon. Member for Copeland made the overseas visits listed.

Where hotel stays were involved these were judged to fall within the guidelines on travel in the Ministerial Code.

Date	*Destinations*	*Methods of travel*
12–13 May 1997	Brussels and The Hague	Scheduled flight and train
20–21 May 1997	Brussels	Scheduled flight
25–27 May 1997	Domburg	Scheduled flight
15–16 June 1997	Stockholm	Scheduled flight
23–25 June 1997	Luxembourg	Chartered flight
15–16 July 1997	Strasbourg and Bonn	Scheduled flight
22–23 July 1997	Brussels	Scheduled flight
7 September 1997	Luxembourg	Scheduled flight
22–23 September 1997	Brussels	Scheduled flight
10–12 October 1997	Rome	Scheduled flight
13–14 October 1997	Dusseldorf	Scheduled flight
20–21 October 1997	Luxembourg	Scheduled flight
6–12 November 1997	South Africa	Scheduled flight
16–19 November 1997	Brussels	Scheduled flight
15–16 December 1997	Brussels	Scheduled flight
9–12 January 1998	St. Lucia	Scheduled flight
19–20 January 1998	Brussels	Scheduled flight
2–3 February 1998	Brussels	Scheduled flight
16–17 February 1998	Brussels	Scheduled flight
4–6 March 1998	Paris	Scheduled flight
10–11 March 1998	Madrid	Scheduled flight
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20–21 April 1998	Luxembourg	Chartered flight
22–28 April 1998	Beijing and Hong Kong	Scheduled flight
25–26 May 1998	Brussels	Scheduled flight
3 June 1998	Brussels	Scheduled flight
7–9 June 1998	Luxembourg	Chartered flight
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22–26 June 1998	Luxembourg	Chartered flight
20 July 1998	Brussels	Scheduled flight

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Sir Brian Mawhinney: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when the right hon. Member for North-West Cambridgeshire can expect a reply to his letter of 19 October 1998 on behalf of his constituent, Mr. Moston. [77444]

Mr. Nick Brown *[holding answer 18 March 1999]:* I replied to the right hon. Member on 4 November 1998.

Artificial Insemination

Lorna Fitzsimons: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when work will resume on the revision of the regulations controlling artificial insemination of cattle and pigs. [78298]

Mr. Rooker: The exercise was suspended last April to re-deploy staff to work on lifting the beef export ban. I am pleased to announce that we are now able to resume this work. One of our first jobs will be to write to interested parties inviting them to send in comments on outstanding issues. We aim to progress the work as quickly as possible thereafter.

Crustacea

Mr. Todd: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Scarborough and Whitby (Mr. Quinn) of 12 March 1999, *Official Report*, columns *428–29*, on shellfish, what further representations he has received from shellfish interests about measures to protect lobsters and crawfish. [78300]

Mr. Morley: Some shellfishermen have urged very strongly that stocks need protection through a national UK ban on the landing of V-notched lobsters being introduced at as early a date as possible. I have, therefore, decided that legislation to extend the ban to the whole of the UK should be brought forward as soon as practicable. It already exists in Northern Ireland. The opportunity will also be taken to regulate the landing of V-notched crawfish.

The other measures referred to in my answer to the hon. Member for Scarborough and Whitby are linked to changes in EU rules which will be coming into effect on 1 January 2000 and as already announced it is preferable for them to take place at the same time.

Ministerial Travel

Mr. Terry Lewis: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) when he expects to answer questions tabled by the hon. Member for Worsley on 25 January and 9 February 1999 concerning ministerial flights; [73804]

(2) when he expects to answer the questions tabled by the hon. Member for Worsley on 25 January, 9 February and 1 March, concerning ministerial flights. [77853]

Mr. Nick Brown: I replied to my hon. Friend on 17 March 1999, *Official Report,* column *653.*

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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

SIXTH SERIES **VOLUME 327**

SESSION 1998–99

8th March—19th March 1999

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